

ORDAINED SERVANT



Administrator, Teachers and Students
Who were present for the Intensive Training Week of
The 2004-5 Ministerial Training Institute

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ORDAINED SERVANT

Statement of Purpose

Ordained Servant exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal *Ordained Servant* will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

Editorial Policy

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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Please send all materials intended for possible publication in *Ordained Servant* to the Editor, G. I. Williamson, 406 Normal College Ave., Sheldon, IA 51201. (Or you can send a text file, by Email to: williamson.1@opc.org).

EDITORIAL NOTES

At the 2004 fall meeting of the Committee on Christian Education it was decided to reduce the number of annual issues of this publication from four to two. But at the same time it was determined that each issue may be slightly larger than before (up to 28 pages instead of 24). It is my hope that more can be packed into each issue and that this change will enhance the quality of *Ordained Servant*.

The cover of this issue shows the administrator, teachers and students participating in the 2004-5 Ministerial Training Institute (MTI) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church which was held, this year, in the Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in Westminster, California. The MTI was launched in 1999 and over 100 men have taken one or more of the following courses: The Westminster Standards, Ecclesiology, Presbyterian Polity, Homiletics, Pastoral Theology, Covenant Nurture, Reformed Worship, Presuppositional Apologetics, and The OPC: History, Character, Distinguishing Characteristics. The courses to be offered this Spring are Homiletics, Ecclesiology, and The OPC: History, Character, Distinguishing Characteristics. The Intensive Training week, for these courses, will be held this spring in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. A Catalogue with full information can be obtained from Mr. James Thomas, 112 Evergreen Dr., Aliquippa, PA 15001 or (thomas.2@opc.org).

Two of the articles in this issue of *Ordained Servant* deal with concerns about the proper administration of the Lord's Supper. I suppose we are all aware of the fact that no less than John Calvin believed that we ought to observe the Lord's

Supper each Lord's Day. Some of the reasons for this conviction are presented in a cogent way by Larry Wilson. It is presented here, not as the last word on the subject, but as a worth-while defense of Calvin's view. The other article, by Nathan Trice, is concerned with what he sees as weaknesses in our traditional way of observing this sacrament, arguing that we've become too sombre and that we ought to be much more festive. My thanks to both of these men for some serious thought about this important subject.

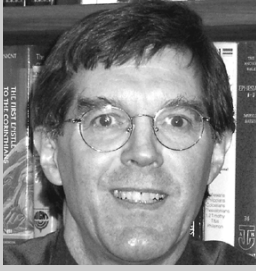
One of the snares of Satan in our day and age is the easy access to pornographic materia on the Internet. Things of this kind were not unknown a half-century ago (in my high-school days it was common knowledge that such *could* be had at one Des Moines bookstore. But it took a bit of brazen "courage" to go in there and ask for that sort of material). Today it is possible for anyone almost anywhere to get it. (During my recent visit to Cyprus and Kuwait, they told me that many young men spend money and time to rent the use of computers for this very purpose). I'm very grateful, therefore, to Pastor 'Bill' Shishko for his no nonsense articles confronting this growing issue. The first article, in this issue, will be followed by an even longer one in the next issue.

I again remind readers of *Ordained Servant* that a CD containing the entire archive of the first 13 years of this publication is available for \$5 (postage paid). If you want one of these, you need to send \$5 to the editor to cover the cost of the CD, the label, the sturdy mailer *and* the postage. Be sure to include your full return address.

"Everyone agrees... that Scripture does not speak the language of science but that of daily experience... But when Scripture, from its own perspective precisely as the book of religion comes in contact with other sciences and also sheds its light on them, it does not all at once cease to be the Word of God but remains that Word. Even when it speaks about the genesis of heaven and earth, it does not present saga or myth or poetic fantasy but offers, in accordance with its own clear intent, history, the history that deserves credence and trust. And for that reason Christian theology, with only a few exceptions, continued to hold onto the literal historical view of the creation story.

The first chapter of Genesis...clearly bears a historical character and forms the introduction to a book that presents itself from beginning to end as history."

— from pages 494 and 499 of Volume II (God and Creation) of the new English Translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*.



ABOUT GOOD PREACHING

by

Andrew H. Selle, D.Min.

Note to the reader: This article is a response to Mark Larson’s piece, “*About Preaching*,” in a recent issue of *Ordained Servant* (Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 31). Mark’s article was presented in the form of a letter from a fictitious minister named “Calvin Turretini, Pastor at Geneva OPC” to a “Mr. Salutes,” from “Redemptive-Historical OPC.” Following the same literary device, the article below is Mr. Salutes’s response to Mr. Turretini.

Dear Mr. Turretini,

Thank you for your letter of gentle rebuke to us at Redemptive-Historical OPC. We appreciate your concern. About our view of preaching, you charge us with being “narrowly committed to a fairly contemporary redemptive-historical approach largely arising out of the perspectives of certain twentieth-century biblical theologians....” In contrast, you claim to stand “in the mainstream of such theological giants as Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and John Calvin.” We make no such grand claims. However, we do wish to clarify our views and encourage full-orbed Reformed, effective, and Christ-honoring preaching in our churches. This letter gives no exhaustive treatment about the subject but will touch on three crucial matters expressed as propositions below. We hope and trust you agree with them.

Let’s set the stage by imagining a sermon about Samuel’s birth narrative¹ summarized as, “Hannah stands as a timeless example for us of earnest prayer and sacrificial faithfulness. Hannah prayed; so should you. Hannah kept her vows; so should you.

¹ 1 Sam. 1 & 2

Amen” and closing prayer. Who would dare argue against prayer and vow-keeping? What is lacking in such a message? The answer can be found by discerning the contours of sanctification in the messianic topography of scripture.

First of all, ask yourself, Could I preach this message down the street at Temple Beth Israel? “Pray. Keep your word. Don’t lie. Do this. Don’t do that.” This is moralistic preaching in the sense that it expounds the morality of the Law without a Gospel context—without a Christ context! But just as the Law has no power to justify, neither has it power to sanctify.

I. The Law has no power to sanctify, but sanctification occurs only in union with Christ; therefore, good preaching uses the Law only in connection with the Gospel of Christ and faith in that Gospel.

You wrote, “The necessity of topological preaching rests in the necessity of instructing the people of God in the doctrine of sanctification.” You have rightly raised the stakes at this point. When we discuss the ministry of the Word, we are not concerned merely with preference or style, but with the

issue, How are God’s people made holy in progressive sanctification? The scriptures resound with the answer, summarized in our standards. Sanctification comes entirely by the grace of the Triune God, as the Spirit applies the work of Christ to the Father’s elect. In this regenerative/renewal process, he employs the means of the Word; the three “uses of the law” are not “contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.”²

The Reformed emphasis upon union with Christ, both federal and vital, cannot be overstated with respect to sanctification. Paul stamps his trademark, “in Christ,” onto every facet of the Christian life. He praises the Father who “has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”³ Every blessing of the Gospel—in fact the entire

² WCF, XIX.7; cf. WLC, Q. 75

³ Eph. 1:3ff.; cf. 2:6,7; 4:32; Rom. 6:11; 8:1,39; 1 Cor. 1:4,30; 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:17,19; Gal. 3:28; Phil. 4:19; Col. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:1, and many others.

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ordo salutis—is rooted in our union with Christ. If “sanctification is the work of God’s free grace”⁴ from what source comes this grace? It springs from a living communion with the Savior, rooted in believers’ “communion in grace...with Christ” along with justification, adoption, and “whatever else...manifests their union with him.”⁵ In the Christian walk and in preaching, the imperatives of moral obedience must flow out of the indicative of our faith-union with Christ.⁶

What about the role of faith in sanctification? Faith is the man-ward side of spiritual union, the human expression (itself a gift) of the Spirit’s inward power. We believe “into Christ” at regeneration, and then continually receive the gifts of God’s grace through the instrument of faith.⁷

The only way of receiving supplies of spiritual strength and grace from Jesus Christ, on our part, is by faith. Hereby we come unto him, are implanted in him, abide with him, so as to bring forth fruit. He dwells in our hearts by faith, and he acts in us by faith, and we live by faith in or on the Son of God.⁸

Our Lord commissions Paul to preach Christ, and to open Gentile

⁴ WSC, Q. 35.

⁵ WLC, Q. 69; cf. 1 Cor 1:30.

⁶ Rom. 6:1ff.

⁷ Cf. WCF, XIV.2: “But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.” Note the use of Galatians 2:20 as one of the proof texts.

⁸ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, ed. William H. Goold, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 459.

eyes darkened by Satan’s power, so that they will “receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith.”⁹ He rebukes the confused Galatian church with the rhetorical question, “By works of the Law did you receive the Spirit, or by hearing of faith? Are you that foolish! Having begun in the Spirit, now by flesh are you being perfected?”¹⁰ Paul knew what we lesser preachers sometimes forget: sanctification is a “fruit,” not a work, and God’s people will bear the fruit of the Spirit, the Christ-like image of holiness, only through “faith working by love.”¹¹

Does Christocentric preaching of grace, then, exclude explicit instruction for the Christian walk? Of course not! God’s grace in Christ, far from precluding the third use of the law, establishes and energizes it because Christ by his Spirit writes that law upon the hearts of God’s people.

II. The moral law “doth forever bind all...to the obedience thereof...,”¹² an obedience internalized by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit; therefore, good preaching encourages specific and experiential obedience in the life of faith.

The preacher trusts the Holy Spirit to direct the flock into those “good works which God prepared in advance for us to do”—through wisdom received by faith and exercised in faith.¹³ The Holy Spirit uses the

⁹ Acts 26:18

¹⁰ Gal 3:3 (author’s trans.) *Epi tel eisqe* is understood as passive voice (‘being perfected’) rather than middle (‘achieve your goal’), placing emphasis upon the Spirit’s work. Nowhere else in the NT does this verb appear in the middle voice.

¹¹ Gal. 5:6, 22:23

¹² WCF, XIX.5; WLC, Q. 97 is an outstanding summary.

means of the ministry of the Word, both public and private, to urge specific acts of obedience. When faced with a vexing food-distribution problem, the apostles’ practical solution is firmly rooted in biblical mandates (care for the poor, guarding the ministry of the Word and prayer, godly character of leaders) and biblical precedent (Moses’ appointment of Joshua).¹⁴ Even a cursory look at the epistles reveals the same “principle” and “implementation” pattern. Paul commands church members to stop judging one another because God alone is the Judge before whom “every knee will bow” and “every tongue confess.”¹⁵ Euodia and Syntyche must “agree in the Lord,” and Syzygus must assist them as a conciliator because the church is “united in Christ,” and its members must be “like-minded,” and “one in spirit and purpose.”¹⁶

Even with OT narratives, we know that “...everything that was written in the past was written to teach us...”¹⁷ We do not have to contrive “practical applications” of a text; God already has applied his Word to all believers in every era of history.¹⁸ However, the particular manner in which believers “walk out” their faith—the

¹³ Eph. 2:10; James 1:5,6; Rom. 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:3,4; Titus 1:15.

¹⁴ Acts 6:1-7; Num. 27:16ff.

¹⁵ Rom. 14:11-14; cf. Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:10. See also the multiple and specific admonishments given to the Corinthian church.

¹⁶ Phil. 2:1,2; 4:3. Post-apostolic undershepherds likewise know and love the flock under their care, and labor in the Word to give instruction geared to its needs, a task particularly implied in words like ‘admonish’ (*noutheteo*), 1 Thess. 5:12.

¹⁷ Rom. 15:4

¹⁸ OT saints lived by faith in God’s redemptive promises and longed for Christ’s advent; now we rejoice in the fulfillment of God’s redemptive promises in Christ and long for his return.

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implementation of the Word—is always shaped by their life context. The Lord’s people must obey where they live, in a real world in a real time, and they need real help. Within the boundaries of Christian freedom¹⁹ and confidentiality, the preacher explicates the text, presenting immediate implications of it for moral conduct.

What is the goal of Christian service? It is both corporate and covenantal: for God’s glory “...that we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.”²⁰ A church being restored into the image of its Savior, its covenant Head, requires preaching that leads us to him.

III. God’s saving work in Jesus Christ is the focus and center of all biblical revelation; therefore, good preaching must be Christocentric. A sermon without Christ is no sermon at all.

In your admonishment to us, brother, you declare that “historical narratives do not have a Christ-centric (sic.) focus exclusively.” Isn’t this a contradiction in terms? A circle can have only one center, a lens one focal point. That clear center point of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Israel’s sordid history reveals it as the rebellious servant who receives the Lord’s just curse upon covenant breakers. Throughout the history of

¹⁹ We must be careful not to elevate legalistically the suggested implementations of the Law to the level of the Law itself. The preacher’s authority is declarative not legislative: e.g., we must proclaim the Ninth Commandment to Christian attorneys and bind their consciences with the Word of God. “You must be honest and truthful.” However, we do not direct them about exactly what to say in court, as they deal with the complexities of civil judicial systems.

²⁰ Eph. 4:15; cf. 1 Cor. 10:13; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11.

redemption, its failure drove God’s people to look for the true Son, the faithful Servant, by whose suffering he would atone for “the many.”²¹ After his suffering, Jesus meets two despairing disciples on the road, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself,” and “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”²² In the apostolic preaching after Pentecost, now fixed in the NT canon, we hear those same divine Bible lessons. Jesus Christ is at the heart of both OT promise and NT fulfillment.²³

You are zealous, brother, that the preacher not jettison the rich OT illustrations of moral conduct (righteous and unrighteous) given to us for example and admonition. We are equally zealous that he not portray OT history as “a detached chronicle of moral tales having as their one point of comparison the analogy of some behavioral situation.”²⁴ With such a view, contemporary preachers might just as well find illustrations more relevant to church members’ current needs in the newspaper or *The Lord of the Rings*.

Rather, we approach every text with a firm conviction that it is not first of all about us, but about God and his great salvation accomplished in his Son and applied by his Spirit, from our effectual calling to the day we see our Lord face to face in glory and become like him. Until the preacher beholds Christ in the text, he has not grasped the true *telos* of that portion of Scripture. We preach

²¹ Isa. 53:10-12.

²² Luke 24:27,45.

²³ Heb. 1:1,2.

²⁴ Edmund P. Clowney, “Preaching Christ: Lecture delivered at Calvin Theological Seminary, October 29, 1964,” (unpublished paper), p. 13.

“Jesus Christ and him crucified....”²⁵ Every sermon must be about Him. If you were to say, “This Sunday I will tell you what the Law says (what to do and what to eschew) and next week I will tell you about Christ,” you just as well could say, Today there will be no preaching. You have to wait another week for a sermon. Why? Because a sermon without Christ is no sermon at all. Why? Because the Gospel is not just for the pagans out there but for me! I must believe it, with all its thrilling and pervasive implications for my life, every day—and I must hear it every Lord’s Day.²⁶

How, then, does the minister preach Christ, particularly from an OT historical narrative? Does he speak of Jesus’ work as an afterthought, with the same obligatory conclusion tacked-on to the end of every message—a safe alternative to an altar call, properly toned-down and tamed to protect our Reformed sensibilities? No, to do it right, there is no shortcut to careful study of the text, within its immediate and redemptive-historical context, as we seek wisdom about how the Spirit intends those OT characters to speak to God’s people today. That study must be done, and done with the sure expectation that the text, to its very core, speaks of Christ²⁷ who dwells

²⁵ 1 Cor. 2:2.

²⁶ According to the Westminster divines, the preacher’s goal toward his flock is to “draw their souls to Christ, the fountain of light, holiness and comfort.” From *Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1644), in Bard Thompson, ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 365.

²⁷ Edmund P. Clowney, *Ibid.*, p. 16: “This preaching hems you in to Christ’s fullness, limits you to all the riches of the wisdom of God, narrows your thought to the mind of Christ, and restricts your vision to one light of the eye, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ... Determine with Paul to preach Christ. No more, no less.”

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in the church to “equip (it) with everything good for doing his will.”²⁸

Back to Hannah: The barren woman prays for a child, and the Lord of Heavenly Armies answers with a son. Then in a song of praise Hannah celebrates that great reversal theme—the Lord will bring down the wicked and proud and lift up the righteous and humble. In the same breath she praises him for victory in battle and for overcoming barrenness. With an eye upon Genesis 3:15, she sees the Mighty Warrior crush his enemies and rescue his people—and in a jarring juxtaposition, childbirth becomes central to this great deliverance. Clearly, the passage is not primarily about Hannah. The immediate context is Samuel and God’s work through him. Samuel comes at a time when “Israel had no king, and every man did what was right in his own eyes.”²⁹ He becomes the last and greatest of the judges, the king-maker who will anoint David and initiate his eternal

²⁸ Heb. 13:21.

²⁹ Judges 21:25.

dynasty. Hannah’s worship rises in a great crescendo to the climactic prophesy, “He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed”—his Messiah! How fitting that Mary makes Hannah’s song her own, “...My spirit rejoices in God my Savior....He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.” Yet, as Hannah declared, “It is not by strength that one prevails,” but by weakness. Who became weaker than Christ? For the weakness he experienced was the weakness of the cross. There he conquers sinful rebels his way, by giving them new hearts and a new life.

Pray like Hannah! May her song direct you to the Lord of Hosts. Worship him. His name is Jesus. You have failed to keep fully the massive and sweeping demands of the Ninth Commandment, but in Jesus is forgiveness and cleansing power. At every point you fail, Christ succeeded, and he dwells in you. In him, you are blessed with “every spiritual blessing” by the Father who “graciously gives us all

things.” You pray, “Thy Kingdom come” to the King himself. Pray with full confidence that he hears you and answers your prayers. And be faithful like Hannah. Hannah presented her son to the Lord. You give everything—all you have and all you are—for “You are not your own, you were bought at a price.” Honor him with your life, in his resurrection power.

Many blessings to you, Mr. Turretini, as you study his Word.

Sincerely,

Geerhardus Edwards Salutes

Andrew Selle is a Christian counselor and conciliator serving in Essex Jct., Vermont, and a Teacher at Covenant OPC, Barre, Vermont.

THE WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM

Q. 158. By whom is the Word of God to be preached?

Ans: The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.

Q. 159. How is the Word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?

Ans: They that are called to labour in the ministry of the Word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.



PASTOR TO PASTOR: The Peril of Pornography - Part 1

by
William Shishko

We cannot escape the fact that we live in a culture that is increasingly fueled with sensuality. Advertisers have realized for scores of years that an attractive female connected with products ranging from shaving cream to cars will enhance sales. I buy the product, I get the girl – so twisted reasoning goes. Today sexuality has overrun and almost completely destroyed all barriers that have been put up against it in the media. It is impossible to scan the range of cable channels without, in seconds, seeing immodesty and sensual conduct, if not explicit acts of fornication and adultery. Even some movies that are rated PG-13 are noted as having “nudity” and “adult situations.” (One wonders what R rated movies contain!). To make a trip to your local Blockbuster is to put yourself just one step away from disreputable “Adult Shops.” Catalogues that come into our homes (even if they are not Victoria’s Secret catalogues) contain explicit pictures of women in immodest and sensual attire; so also do the advertisements for tanning spas, athletic clubs, and travel agencies in weekly “Shopper’s Guides” that are sent freely to our homes. Daily newspapers contain the same, especially on the sports pages. And, increasingly, pop-up ads on computers or cleverly tagged “spam” come before our eyes as we make use of email or the Internet. All of this may fall short of *Playboy* or *Hustler* magazine, but any one of these things can become a mental halfway-house to men as they struggle with the problem of sexual lust.

My plea to pastors in this article is that you get your head out of the sand! The ostrich knows that an adversary is present, but avoids the problem by looking away instead of bravely facing it. My fear is that too many pastors have their heads in the sand because they:

- a. Are not aware that the problem is really as bad as it is.
- b. Do not think that we should be so alarmed by it.
- c. Think that their only responsibility is to go about their ministerial duties of generally preaching and teaching in hope that the problem will take care of itself in the people to whom they minister.

Brothers, I have news for you:

- a. The problem is worse than you can imagine.
- b. Unless you want to deal with a lot of spiritual wreckage in yourself and others, you better be alarmed by it.
- c. If you don’t get beyond “preaching the word” and “preaching Christ” in broad generalities you will not be addressing the problem, and it will not take care of itself.

It’s a temptation to think that the problem of sexual lust that leads to the viewing of and eventual addiction to pornography (and worse!) is something that is so modern because of the mass media and technology that it is not addressed in Holy Scripture. That mindset can easily create a “hand’s off” attitude when we think of our ministerial duties: “I will minister good doctrine, and the Holy Spirit will make the necessary applications in individual lives.”

Such an “ostrich view” is not countenanced by the Word of God for a moment. It is a view that is dangerous!

It is helpful to keep in mind that the first century Roman Empire into which Christ and the Gospel of the Kingdom came was no less riddled with unbridled sensuality than is ours. In Romans 1:26ff. the apostle Paul describes homosexual and heterosexual fornication as the primary fruits of a culture that is “given up” to false worship – particularly the worship of self. Yet it is to this culture that Paul says that “*the Gospel is God’s power unto salvation.*” (Rom. 1:16). In first century Corinth, hundreds of male and female temple prostitutes were available at all hours of day or night for “worshippers” to gratify their lusts in acts of pagan “devotion” (Is this really much different than the problem of Internet porn?). It is to that city that Paul speaks of the grace of God in Christ coming with power such that some were no longer “*fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites...*” By the Gospel they “*were washed... sanctified... (and) justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*” (1 Cor. 6:9,11). Let’s not be ostriches, brothers! Face the enemy with the always powerful gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ!

It is also important to keep in mind that Christ and the apostles were not backward about dealing specifically with destructive sins like sensual lust. I fear that too many ministers today are shy when their inspired patterns were quite bold:

THE PERIL OF PORNOGRAPHY - Part 1

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (Matt. 5:27-30). (Brothers, does this have no application to radical measures for today’s eyes and the lusts that are prompted by pictures on the Internet, television, and in magazines?)

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them” (Eph. 5:3-7). (Brothers, do you really believe that “not even a hint” of such uncleanness should mark God’s people?)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also fore-

warned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:3-8). (Brothers, have you gotten beyond the interpretative debate over whether “his own vessel” is one’s wife or one’s body and then have you dealt honestly and practically with what it is to live in holiness rather than uncleanness?)

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). (Brothers, are you keeping your hearts pure, are you teaching others to do the same, and are you fleeing “youthful lusts” as a model to help others do the same?)

My fellow pastors, I urge you to be aware of the challenge that lust and pornography pose to men and women (yes, women have their battles in this area, too!) in our increasingly sexually charged society. Don’t be ostriches. Be honest in realizing that the congregation you pastor is simply not immune to the problem facing our culture at large. Then consider and implement practical strategies for teaching your people, helping them individually and as couples, and providing the accountability necessary for long-term victory in the battle for purity of mind and body.

I recommend the following resources to help increase your awareness of “the peril of pornography.” These all provide practical suggestions to help you make our younger and older men and women better soldiers on this bloody field of our modern culture wars.

• **Addictions, A Banquet In The Grave** by Ed Welch. This is, by far, the best treatment of addictions of any type and the way to confront

them by the gospel. This is a must read for pastors.

• **Every Man’s Battle, Every Young Man’s Battle, Every Young Woman’s Battle**, by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoker. (Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn for the Young Womans’s volume). The theology of these books leaves a lot to be desired, but their frank, down-to-earth treatment of the subject of the battle with lust and pornography is engaging and practical.

• **The Purity Principle** by Randy Alcorn. Someone can read this book in an hour and be changed by it. It hits you between the eyes, it is rich with memorable statements, and it continually goes back to the riches of Christ that enable believers to face the demand for purity and be successful.

• **Not Even A Hint** by Joshua Harris. This 175 page book is my favorite. It is theologically “right on,” it is realistic, and it clearly comes from a pastor’s heart. The book is designed for single men and women, but it is also most useful for couples and for older men and women whom we train to help others in the work of guarding ourselves against lust. I particularly recommend this as a book parents should give to their teenage children and discuss with them.

In the next issue I will focus particularly on the growing problem of Internet porn.

**For the past 23 years
William Shishko has
served as the pastor of
the Orthodox Presbyterian
Church in
Franklin Square, NY.**

Addendum (added by the Editor):

Steve is an associate pastor at a growing, nondenominational Ohio church. He established a number of new ministry programs and is often asked to speak at young adult retreats. When he started watching football with some non-Christian neighbors last fall, they joked about hiding their *Playboy* magazines and the Victoria's Secret catalogues they had swiped from their wives, so as not to offend the "holy" man in their midst.

Little did they know Steve had his own collection...and then some. Not only pornographic magazines, but a number of adult videos, a selection of carefully selected Web sites and a membership with a phone sex club.

He is not alone. Focus on the Family says one out of seven pastors who call its toll-free help line say they are addicted to pornography. Promise Keepers reports that one-third of the men who attended PK rallies in 1996 admitted to a personal struggle with pornography.

Pastor Ted Roberts knows what it's like. Since overcoming his own addiction to pornography, he has spoken to thousands of people about similar problems, and he has reached an inescapable conclusion: "Hell is using sexual bondage to tear the Church apart."

Roberts is senior pastor of East Hill Foursquare Church in Gresham, Ore. He has become a leader in pioneering sexual recovery ministries, and recently trained more than 200 pastors and lay leaders to set up ministries like the "Pure Desire" program he launched eight years ago. In both the program and the book by the same name, Roberts provides a biblical answer to overcoming sexual sin

and addiction. Pure Desire offers a lifeline to those struggling with sexual bondage and teaches others to establish sexual addiction recovery ministry at their churches.

"Sexual addiction in the Church is more prevalent than most people have ever thought," says Dr. John Townsend, co-founder of Cloud-Townsend Communications. "Ted Roberts' uniquely biblical approach to healing and hope makes this book a great asset to both the struggler and the helper."

According to Enough is Enough, an organization devoted to protecting children and families from the dangers of pornography, illicit sexual material is just about everywhere. This country now has over 20,000 outlets selling prosecutable, hard-core pornography that would be found illegal by educated citizens in most American communities. In fact, there are now more outlets for hard-core pornography in the United States than McDonalds' restaurants, says Enough is Enough.

The introduction of pornography to the information highway has made home computers the fastest growing and primary mode of distribution of illegal pornography, says Enough is Enough. Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, calls porn a "ravenous cancer" that is destroying modern society. Land noted in Baptist Press that 1999 revenues of porn Web sites alone were estimated at nearly \$1.2 billion. In addition, some 25 million Americans visit cyber-sex sites—and sex is the No. 1 searched-for topic on the Internet.

Land also outlined the painful trail left by pornography—increased inci-

dents of child molestation, rape and sexual violence, transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, and societal values and attitudes that condone and encourage dissemination of soft-core pornography.

Dr. David Smith, president of Christians United and a family practitioner, says: "I see a lot of people that come into the office who have had their families disrupted, in some cases [by] divorce or child molestation [or] cases of rape. In almost all instances it starts with someone's addiction to pornography," Smith says. "It's such a detriment to the communities around here, I don't know why anybody would want to have that type of material available."

Several Christian ministries have joined the fight and established faith-based sexual recovery programs. "RSA—Renewal from Sexual Addictions" is run by a Laguna Hills, Calif., psychologist and has a program at Saddleback Valley Community Church. Another program called "Faithful and True Ministries" is based in Minneapolis and operates in churches in the southeastern United States. "Avenue: Resources for Healthy Sexuality" drew 500 participants last year.

Meanwhile, Steve is being helped by the Pure Freedom program on the Setting Captives Free Web site. According to Mike*, who along with his wife operates Setting Captives Free, "Our heart's desire is to reclaim those who are captive, to recover those who are enslaved; not merely to inform, but to help release."

Mike says he was exposed to pornography at the age of 10. "It excited

(Continued on bottom of page 20)



TEACHING MEMBERSHIP CLASSES

Originally a lecture given to URCNA interns at Westminster Seminary in California

by

Daniel R. Hyde

Of the myriad tasks a minister performs, one in which he is usually not trained is that of teaching membership classes. But unlike the tasks which painfully awaken a new pastor out of his dream world, teaching membership classes is a wonderful joy. Because most things joyful to the individual ought to be shared with the community, what follows is my philosophy of ministry in relation to church membership classes. My desire in stating a philosophy of membership classes is to stimulate your thinking and give you guidance on this topic so that you do not have to “re-invent the wheel.”

PURPOSE

Let us first answer the question, why have a membership class? The purpose of the membership class at the Oceanside United Reformed Church is to introduce and initiate converts, visitors, and transferees into the confessional, liturgical, and communal life of the church (cf. Acts 2:42).

First, because the church exists to be a *confessional institution and organism* (“the apostles’ doctrine”), those joining the church must be introduced to the church’s theology. As confessionally Reformed churches we teach and defend the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). This faith, we be-

lieve, is “contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and [is] taught in this Christian church.”¹ And, therefore, as ministers called to teach and defend this faith, “We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writing.”²

Second, because the church exists to be a *liturgical institution and organism* (“the prayers, the breaking of the bread”), those joining the church must be introduced to the church’s liturgy. Our purpose as a church is to “ador[e] the depths of His mercies” (Canons of Dort, I, 13) when we “come together as a church” (1 Cor. 11:18), receiving God’s service to us in the means of grace. We must explain the beauty and purpose of Reformed worship, explain our liturgies line by line, and show people that worship is a cosmic and historical experience, especially with young people who are taught to think in post-modern ways that we have no real past nor future, just a meaningless present. Worship links us to our past and brings us into contact with the glories of our future now!

Third, because the church exists to be a *communal institution and organism* (“the fellowship”), those

joining the church must be introduced to the church’s community. If we do not have a community, then our theology and liturgy are meaningless. The church is not a gathering of isolated individuals, but a family gathering, a covenantal assembly. We must confront a culture of detachment and nihilism, as typified by the Beatles’ song “Nowhere Man”: “He’s a real nowhere man sitting in a nowhere land, making all his nowhere plans for nobody.” We must also confront a culture of narcissism, which bombards our people with slogans such as, “Just Do It,” “Have It Your Way,” “You’re the Man!” The doctrine and life of the church are so desperately needed today, and must be applied in practical terms. What is a “member?” How are we to live as a church in unity? What is the practical function of pastors, elders, and deacons in caring for us? What are members to contribute to the community in service?

Curriculum

Moving from the theoretical to the practical, let us answer the question of what we teach. Very simply, we teach the Word of God as faithfully summarized and explained in the catholic creeds and Reformed confessions. Since the first part of our purpose is to introduce people to the confessional

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life of our church, the membership class is no place to pass out a spiritual gifts inventory to find out what these new people are good at; it is not a place to simply say, Here are all our ministries, do we have what you need? Instead, teach people the faith and how to live it in a “crooked generation” (Acts 2:40).

I have organized my particular class into a book called “The Good Confession” (1 Tim. 6:12). The “Introduction” explains why we are who we are. “Part 1” is the heart of the class where we discuss what we believe, utilizing the Belgic Confession as the baseline with the Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort, and selections from the Westminster Standards supplementing. “Part 2” explores Reformed worship and our congregation’s liturgy in particular. “Part 3” explores the application of doctrine and worship to our lives. Finally, the “Conclusion” is a survey of our “Form for Public Profession of

Faith.” (See the chart below for an outline of this program).³

Know Your Audience

Let us now get really practical, moving from the *why* and the *what* to the *how* of teaching membership classes. In doing so I reminded you that any philosophy, whether of membership classes or of life itself, is only as good as it is played out in real life.

The first part of the *how* is to know your audience. One of the most basic, oftentimes overlooked, questions is, who am I teaching? This is a question that has been a part of pastoral care and the art of sacred rhetoric from early in the church through the Reformation. For example, Gregory the Great, in his monumental work, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, says

Since, then, we have shown what manner of man the pastor ought

to be, let us now set forth after what manner he should teach. For, as long before us Gregory Nazianzen of reverend memory has taught, one and the same exhortation does not suit all, inasmuch as neither are all bound together by similarity of character. For the things that profit some often hurt others; seeing that also for the most part herbs which nourish some animals are fatal to others; and the gentle hissing that quiets horses incites whelps; and the medicine which abates one disease aggravates another; and the bread which invigorates the life of the strong kills little children. Therefore according to the quality of the hearers ought the discourse of teachers to be fashioned, so as to suit all and each for their several needs, and yet never deviate from the art of common edification. For what are the intent minds of hearers but, so to speak, a kind of tight tensions of strings in a harp, which the

Introduction	The Identity of Our Church	Chapter 9	What Do We Believe About Sanctification?
		Chapter 10	What Do We Believe About the Church?
Chapter 1	The History & Background of Our Church	Chapter 11	What Do We Believe About the Sacra-
Chapter 2	The Mission of Our Church		ments?
Chapter 3	A Short Explanation of Our Creeds and Confessions	Chapter 12	What Do We Believe About Christ’s Return?
		Part 2	The Liturgy of Our Church
Part 1	The Theology of Our Church	Chapter 13	Understanding & Enjoying Our Liturgy
Chapter 4	What Do We Believe About the Bible?	Part 3	The Community of Our Church
Chapter 5	What Do We Believe About God?	Chapter 14	Living the Reformed Life
Chapter 6	What Do We Believe About Man?		
Chapter 7	What Do We Believe About Jesus Christ?		
Chapter 8	What Do We Believe About Justification?		

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skillful player, that he may produce a tune not at variance with itself, strikes variously? And for this reason the strings render back a consonant modulation, that they are struck indeed with one quill, but not with one kind of stroke. Whence every teacher also, that he may edify all in the one virtue of charity, ought to touch the hearts of his hearers out of one doctrine, but not with one and the same exhortation.⁴

Before Gregory, Augustine said “So the interpreter and teacher of the divine scriptures, the defender of the true faith and vanquisher of error, must communicate what is good and eradicate what is bad, and in this process of speaking must win over the antagonistic, rouse the apathetic, and make clear to those who are not conversant with the matter under discussion what they should expect.”⁵

Augustine then gave an example of how to adapt one’s teaching to his hearers. When speaking Latin, he says that a preacher should use the plural *ossum* and not the singular *os*, because Africans, who are not apt in distinguishing long and short vowels, may mistakenly think *os* is the singular of *ora* instead of the correct word, *ossa*. He then says “What is the use of correct speech if it does not meet with the listener’s understanding? There is no point in speaking at all if our words are not understood by the people to whose understanding our words are directed. The teacher, then, will avoid all words that do not communicate.”⁶

Also consult William Perkins’ *The Art of Prophesying*, chapter 7, where he discusses the various “categories of hearers.”⁷

Our forefathers knew that it was necessary to know their audiences in order to teach them. The way it is now stated is that “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Know your class intimately as much as possible as this will help you in preparing how to communicate what you are teaching. In preparation you ought to answer some basic questions:

First, *are you teaching covenant children preparing for public profession of faith?* Your class may be entirely or partially made up of children who have grown up in the church and have been catechized. These children usually know the “stuff” of the faith, but may not understand all the implications of that knowledge. They’ve heard Reformed doctrine a thousand times. Your job is to show them why these doctrines are important – why we believe what we believe.

Second, *are you dealing with new members by transfer?* If so and know what kind of church they are coming from, what that church’s confession of faith was (if any), how they worshipped, etc. You need to know where these people are coming from and how that tradition intersects with yours. This goes a long way in knowing if these people need more instruction on the basics of the Reformation.

Third, *are you dealing with ex-evangelicals?* I usually find that those from evangelical churches who say they have become “Reformed” usually mean that they believe in the five-points. This is valuable to know, as you will have to deal with issues like Reformed

worship, the covenants (especially as it applies to the doctrine of the church and sacraments), and debriefing them of their Dispensationalism.

Fourth, *are you dealing with converts?* This is the group of people who need the most instruction. The membership class is even more so for them an initiation into your church. Much pastoral discipleship is needed in addition, before, during, and after the class. For them it must be kept basic, with every term, idea, and person defined and/or explained. Remember, you really are teaching them a new language, “the words of the faith” (1 Tim. 4:6).

Personality/Presentation

The second practical issue when asking how to teach a membership class is your personality and presentation: how you say what you say. In a membership class you must ever keep before you these words: *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* (gentle in manner, strong in substance). As Reformed ministers we understand being “strong in substance,” but it is with the words “gentle in manner” that we need training. In a membership class setting especially, a pastor must be gentle because no one has it all figured out. People have holes in their knowledge. People have baggage from previous churches. Thus you can’t fix them overnight, so don’t try! You must be firm but be smooth and caring in the way you speak.

Another application of being gentle is to be flexible. My classes last anywhere from six to twelve weeks depending on the makeup

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of my class and the needs of that particular class. If a particular class session needs to spend more time on answering questions or explaining in more detail what you are teaching, then take the time. I usually have to be very flexible when I speak about liturgy, baptism, and eschatology. Don't be so rigid with your material that you aren't sensitive to the peculiarities of your audience.

What this all means is that this is pastoral work in the most pregnant sense of that term. You need to be a theologian, an apologist, a polemicist, an evangelist, a shepherd, and a friend in membership classes. As James says, "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19).

"Truth In Advertising"

The third part of the *how* is to be open and honest with your class. Dr. Kim Riddlebarger calls this the "truth in advertising" principle. From the opening of the class you must put your cards on the table: we are a Reformed Church. This means that we believe Reformed doctrine (confessional), worship in a Reformed manner (liturgical), and live as Reformed Christians (communal). The reason this must be said is because you will be tempted as a pastor (no matter how Reformed you are!) to add quantitative members to your congregation and not qualitative! Resist this temptation!

I open my classes in this way and conclude with a survey of our "Public Profession of Faith: Form Number 1."⁸ An example of "truth in advertising" is in reference to vow one, which basically says that we are a confessional church in

which the leaders and laity of the church subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity. As well, in reference to vow four, I let the class know that the reality of discipline is shown in our elders' follow-up with them if they are not in worship regularly or for a few weeks in a row. Because of this some people in the class will not join the church. This is wise. One of our goals must be to actually keep people from joining rashly. You must ask the class to consider seriously what they are being asked in these vows; if they are willing and able to subscribe, praise the Lord. If not, then I speak with them about why.

The Role of the Congregation

The fourth part of the *how* is the role of the congregation. Because we are a communal institution and organism the membership class must not only teach this but also model this. One way we can express community is to involve the congregation, providing a way for the class to hear and see the Reformed Faith. We involve our congregation by doing these four things:

First, the membership class is announced two months in advance so members can invite friends.

Second, the membership class is prayed for each Lord's Day and is a part of our church's "prayer chain."

Third, several members are invited to take the class. This not only adds to the class size and introduces attendees to current members, but it also gives the pastor a way to continue catechizing his flock.

Fourth, during the membership

class, the members are encouraged to be hospitable by inviting attendees to their homes for lunch on the Lord's Day as a way to include the members in the church's outreach.

Conclusion

So that's the *why*, *what* and *how* of my membership classes. They are a tremendous blessing and involve a lot of thoughtful preparation and presentation to those who give us a hearing. May God add to our churches through thoughtful and gentle pastors who catechize the world around in membership classes.

¹ "Public Profession of Faith: Form Number 1." *Ibid.*, 132.

² "Form of Subscription," *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: CRC, 1976) 117.

³ I plan to publish this in the future, but for a copy for your own edification or for your church, contact me through my congregation's website: www.oceansideurc.org.

⁴ St. Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, 3, prologue.

⁵ St. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 103 (IV, 6).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 116 (X, 24).

⁷ William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996) 56-63.

⁸ *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church, 1976) 132-33.

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On Weekly Communion - Some Pastoral Reflections

by

Larry Wilson¹

Most Orthodox Presbyterian congregations celebrate the Lord's Supper quarterly or monthly. That's been my own practice for most of my ministry. However, I've come to believe that the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper is both biblical and desirable. The congregation I presently serve celebrates the Lord's Supper weekly. What were some high points in my own pilgrimage on this matter?

Christ's Institution

For one thing, it became weighty to me that the King of the church himself instituted the Lord's Supper as an element of worship. According to the Westminster Confession, "*the reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God*" (21:5). I began to wonder if it's really right to routinely withhold an element of worship which King Jesus himself commanded. Did I think myself to be wiser than my

¹ The Rev. Dr. T. David Gordon, a PCA minister and a professor at Grove City College, was especially helpful in constructively critiquing earlier drafts of this article and in offering suggestions. The benefits of his assistance go well beyond where I directly quote him.

Lord, who commanded what he deemed best for his church?

I used to argue against having the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day. Some years ago, the congregation I pastored held morning and evening worship services each Lord's Day. We celebrated the Lord's Supper monthly, alternating between the morning and evening services. A few members began requesting that we celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. We discussed it in Session and decided that it was best to retain our monthly frequency. Around the same time, the deacons requested that we discontinue the collection of the offering during evening worship. They said that because most people had given their offerings during morning worship, they didn't put anything in the offering plate during evening worship. The deacons felt as if it was a charade to pass around virtually empty offering plates during evening worship. We discussed this in Session and determined that because the offering is an act of worship, every worship service should include it. I agreed with both decisions. I suspect that most OPC sessions would make similar decisions. At the time I saw no inconsistency. But, in 20-20 hindsight, aren't these decisions inconsistent? Isn't the Lord's Supper an act of worship? Isn't it strange that so many churches insist that every worship service include an offering (where we give God the glory due his name), but at the same time they object to weekly

communion (where God gives us grace to help in time of need)? Eventually it struck me that in order to be consistent, arguments against weekly communion also have to equally apply against weekly Scripture reading, weekly preaching, weekly congregational singing, a weekly offering, etc. There's no explicit command in the New Testament to have the Lord's Supper each week, but neither is there an explicit command in the New Testament to have an offering each week, let alone these other elements of worship. We do these other elements of worship weekly because we believe that there is implicit Scripture warrant to do them.

The Apostles' Example

Because the New Testament gives no explicit command to have the Lord's Supper each week, our Directory for Public Worship leaves it up to local sessions to set the frequency of communion.² I affirm that. Still, it does seem that the apostles' example strongly implies weekly communion. Acts 2:42 describes worship in the apostolic church, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.*" If "*the breaking of bread*" does not refer to the Lord's Supper (compare Acts

² "The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated frequently, but the frequency may be determined by each session as it may judge most conducive to edification" (V:A:2).

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20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 11:17–26), then to what does it refer? Did the apostolic church eat a meal during their worship? If so, what kind of meal was it? Surely, it was the Lord's Supper! No less a student of Scripture than John Calvin understood Acts 2:42 to have this implication — “*No assembly of the church should be held without the word being preached, prayers being offered, the Lord's Supper administered, and alms given*” (Institutes 4:17:44). Accordingly, in 1537, Calvin proposed Articles relating to the organization of church life to the Geneva Council. Among other things, he said: “*It would be desirable that the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ be in use at least once every Sunday when the congregation is assembled.*”³

Acts 20:7 provides even more compelling evidence because it says that the believers gathered on the first day of the week “to break bread.” The Lord's Supper was such a significant part of early church worship that their whole gathering could legitimately be designated by its climax, communion with the resurrected Christ in his Supper.⁴

Clear and early references to the practice of weekly communion in the Didache, in Justin Martyr's First Apology, in Hippolytus's Apostolic Tradition, and in Tertullian's Defense of Christianity confirm this understanding that the apostolic church celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly.

It's true that this evidence does not carry the authority of God's Word, but surely it is a significant

³ Cited in Howard Hageman, *Pulpit and Table*, John Knox Press, 1962, pg. 25; emphasis mine.

⁴ T. David Gordon, in personal correspondence

testimony to what the church understood God's Word to teach! Isn't it telling that so soon after the time of the apostles the Christian community observed this practice, apparently without controversy?

The Relation of the Word and Sacraments

It became increasingly apparent to me that this is what we might expect if, as we confess, the sacraments are signs which seal God's Word. They confirm and reinforce the Word. This close relation between the Word and sacraments is a big reason why we insist that only ministers of the Word may administer the sacraments.

We see this connection between the Word and sacraments in the institution of circumcision, the initiating sign and seal of the old covenant (Rom. 4:11). First God gave his covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 12 & 15). Then he gave the sign of circumcision to reinforce his promise, or to give the same promise in a different form (Gen. 17). As Augustine put it, the sacraments are “*the Word made visible.*”⁵ Although more rationalistic forms of Christianity denigrate the sacraments, the historic, biblically Reformed faith takes the doctrine of creation so seriously that it is more wholistic, seeing the physical side of being spiritual, including the sacraments, as vitally important.

It shouldn't be hard for us to embrace this. After all, we are covenant

⁵ Ronald Wallace's book, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacraments*, Wipf & Stock, was especially helpful to me in pursuing this theme. Because Wallace sees Calvin as primarily a student of God's Word, he quotes copiously from Calvin's commentaries to show where Calvin saw the biblical basis for his teaching.

creatures. When two men make an agreement, they don't merely say their promises; they seal them with a handshake. When a man and a woman pledge their troth, they don't just say their vows, they reinforce them with a ring and a kiss. If little children are insecure, their parents don't just say, “I love you;” they say it with words and with hugs and kisses. And this is precisely what our heavenly Father does. He does say his gospel promises (through the preaching of the Word), but he doesn't stop there; he signifies and seals them in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He could say, “You've got my word and I can't lie, so that should be enough.” And it really should. But our heavenly Father pities us; he remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103:13–14). And so he condescends both to declare his gospel promises and to reinforce them with the sacraments.

The Scriptural Pattern of Worship

God's gracious condescension is evident in the entirety of worship. The more I studied Reformed worship, the more persuaded I became that, scripturally, worship is to manifest and renew the covenant bond of friendship between God and his people. Scriptural worship is covenantal through and through. The Bible often uses marriage to illustrate the covenant relation between the Lord and his people — Jehovah is the husband and Israel is his wife; Christ is the bridegroom and the church is his bride. Sometimes people say, “I can worship God anytime and anywhere. So why is it important for me to ‘go to church’?” I point them to Scriptures such as Psalm 87 or Hebrews 10:19–25. But I also use this illustration: husbands and wives are to love each other all the time, but sometimes it's important for them to have

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some special romantic time just to themselves in order to renew their commitment to each other in the marriage bond. That's what worship services are — special romantic time between the heavenly Bridegroom and his bride, the church (and individual believers).

The Lord's Supper consummates the renewing of the covenant bond. The Lord revealed this pattern in Old Testament worship. Although there were subcategories, the offerings fell into three basic categories — sin offerings (for cleansing), whole burnt offerings (for consecration), and peace offerings (for communion with God). These offerings were always offered in that order.⁶ Leviticus 9 gives an example of an old covenant worship service. First, God called the people to worship and they gathered together at the Tent of Meeting. Then we see these elements of worship in verses 15–22: “¹⁵Then he presented the people's offering and took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people and killed it and offered it as a sin offering, like the first one. ¹⁶And he presented the burnt offering and offered it according to the rule. ¹⁷And he presented the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning. ¹⁸Then he killed the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings for the people. And Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar. ¹⁹But the fat pieces of the ox and of the ram, the fat tail and that which covers the entrails and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver—²⁰they put the fat pieces on the breasts, and he burned the fat

pieces on the altar, ²¹but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved for a wave offering before the Lord, as Moses commanded. ²²Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings.”

This pattern — call to worship, cleansing, consecration, communion, benediction — formed the background for New Testament worship. Apparently (perhaps even instinctively after centuries of old covenant worship) it guided early church worship. A study of liturgies will show that, historically, Christian worship basically followed a similar pattern — call to worship, confession of sin and assurance of God's grace in Christ, consecration by the ministry of the Word (John 17:17), communion at the Lord's Table, benediction. Reformation liturgies — for example, those of Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, and John Knox —restored these general contours (cf. Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, and Charles Baird, *Eutaxia*, for the complete texts of the liturgies of the magisterial reformers and others).⁷

These contours make theological and psychological sense. Therefore they make for meaningful worship. Scripturally, when God's people gather for worship they enter into God's special presence. They consciously recognize that they are unworthy sinners, yet they enter God's holy presence in confidence by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way, consciously trusting the media-

tion of their Savior. They come trusting his promise, “*Draw near to God and he will draw near to you*” (James 4:8). They come to receive grace to help in time of need and, in response, to give to the Lord the glory due his name. They hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and they cast their cares on the one who cares for them. The Lord's Supper caps off a full-orbed worship service as God's people eat in peace with their Lord and each other at his Table, and then are sent out with his blessing, refreshed and renewed for service in his kingdom.

I suspect that a return to the scriptural practice of weekly communion could help to solve the practical dilemmas which plague modern worship. We have our so-called “worship wars” where some want “traditional” worship while others want “contemporary” worship. Those who want “traditional” worship generally are most concerned for reverence, holiness, sound doctrine, and godly living. Those who want “contemporary” worship generally are most concerned for joy, fellowship, vital communion with God, and evangelism. Does God really want us to choose between these things? Is it possible that a return to weekly communion would help us to embrace each of these emphases?

For one thing, it would help to emphasize the centrality of Jesus Christ. Now that I'm practicing weekly communion, I appreciate two practical benefits which I hadn't anticipated. On the one hand, even if I fall short and preach dos and don'ts rather than the gospel, the Lord's Supper helps to remind the congregation of the gospel basics—the death, resurrection, ascension, session, and second coming of Christ. But, on the other hand, no matter

⁶ See *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, 1985 for a helpful chart explaining these offerings, pg. 150.)

⁷ See also *Worship: The Heavenly Pattern* by Peter Wallace (<http://www.michiana.covenant.org/sermons/church11.html>).

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what text or topic I preach, the Lord's Supper keeps reminding me to keep Jesus Christ central. I shouldn't gloss over this, as if weekly communion somehow excuses failure to preach Christ. Having communion weekly is actually painful in certain respects because it exposes my own preaching as less gospel-oriented than I ever imagined. I find it to be a salutary discipline that every sermon I preach from every scripture must so proclaim Christ that it naturally leads the congregation to the Lord's Table.⁸ T. David Gordon rightly warns: "Any pastor or Session that studies the matter of weekly communion should seriously consider the demands it makes on the preacher. Calvin said: 'For we ought to understand the Word not as one whispered without meaning and without faith, a mere noise, like a magic incantation, which has the force to consecrate the element. Rather, it should, when preached, make us understand what the visible sign means.' (Institutes, IV:14:4). But how can the preaching help us understand what baptism or the Lord's Supper mean, unless the

⁸ Even if we do not practice weekly communion, we do well to adopt this as a rule of thumb — that each sermon so proclaim Christ that you could seal it with the Lord's Supper. It seems that scripturally we preachers should prepare and proclaim our sermons with two intersecting mandates simultaneously in mind. First, we must "preach God's Word" (1 Tim. 4:2). What we proclaim should be the Word of God and not the wisdom of man. Therefore, the people in the pew should be able to follow our emphases in their own open Bibles. At the same time, we must "preach Christ" (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:5). The subject of the entire Bible is Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). Therefore, every sermon must preach Christ — and not merely as a "Jesus ex machina" but as a natural explanation and application of the text in its context.

preaching is essentially and profoundly Christological?"

A further benefit is that the Lord's Supper accents the corporate aspect of our salvation. While saving faith in Christ is indeed very personal, biblically it is never private. The Lord's Supper reminds us that because we all partake of one bread (Jesus Christ), we who are many are one body (1 Cor. 10:17). Because we are united to Christ, we are united to one another in the body of Christ; we are members of one another in Christ (Rom. 12:5). This reminds church-hoppers of the importance of church membership. It encourages fellowship. It promotes peacemaking and the restoration of broken relationships. It furthers Christian unity. What church and what believer doesn't need this every week?

What church and what believer doesn't also need to be called to a right walk in the world, to be in the world and yet not of the world? We ever need to be called simultaneously to holiness and to evangelism. Accordingly, we need to see the contrast between the church and the world, between believers and unbelievers. A primary purpose of the sacraments is "to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world" (Westminster Confession 27:1). For this reason, weekly communion has at least two further practical benefits. On the one hand, it reinforces church discipline. Discipline can involve suspension from the Lord's Table, or even excommunication from the visible body of Christ. One purpose of such discipline is to make the unrepentant sinner aware of the gravity of his condition so that he might repent and be restored. But how effective can this be if the Lord's Supper is celebrated infrequently? Weekly

communion provides an unremitting witness of the offender's need to be restored. On the other hand, the Lord's Supper also gives an opportunity for evangelism. Actually, this is the biblical form and place for the "altar call" in worship. By so plainly setting forth the work of Christ on the cross, and by fencing the table, the Lord's Supper calls unbelievers who are present to repentance and faith. Weekly communion provides a regular and natural opportunity to beckon visitors to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As I reflect on these things, I have to wonder whether our neglect of weekly communion has actually contributed to our modern dilemmas. I've become increasingly convinced that, because it serves God's purposes for worship, weekly communion can actually help us to transcend some of the dilemmas over which we tend to polarize.

The Holy Spirit's Use of Means

I became increasingly convinced that the main reason weekly communion would have these benefits is not because it would give us a means by which we could pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps. It's because the Lord's Supper really is a means of grace by which the Holy Spirit supernaturally and powerfully works. The Lord gives the bread and wine in order to tangibly and visibly assure everyone who partakes in faith "first, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely his body was offered and broken for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of him who serves, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs of

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Christ's body and blood, so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood" (Heidelberg Catechism #75). But these benefits come not just by our self-discipline in using a tool the Lord has given us. They come above all by the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit.

God's Word says, "*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*" (1 Cor. 10:16). Our Larger Catechism insists, "*the sacraments become effectual means of salvation ... by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ by whom they are instituted*" (#161).

And yet, for much of my ministry I didn't really believe that. I affirmed it. I thought I believed it. But in practice, I didn't really believe it. I dare say that in practice most people in our churches don't really believe it, either. We can theoretically describe four different views of the Lord's Supper — Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Zwinglian.⁹ But most of us have grown up believing that in practice they really boil down to two views — a Roman Catholic superstitious view and the view that at bottom the Lord's Supper is a God-ordained devotional tool by which we remember what Christ has done for us on the cross, and by which we renew our repentance and commitment to pursue Jesus. This practical belief dominates our expectations. Consequently, for many of us, Lutherans are just "left-handed Catholics." We're quite

certain that we hold the Reformed view because, after all, we are Reformed! But what utterly escapes us is that in our practical expectations, we tend to out-Zwingli Zwingli.

We know that our Standards take pains to distinguish their affirmations from the Roman Catholic and Lutheran views. But we tend to overlook that they also take pains to distinguish their affirmations from the Zwinglian view, that they do insist on some sort of very real supernatural presence of and feeding upon the body and blood of Christ. When we filter their affirmations through the grid of our deeply ingrained practical expectations, they sound "superstitious" to us. If an Orthodox Presbyterian minister merely quoted these salient sections — "*Worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith really and indeed ... spiritually receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being ... really ... present to the faith of believers in that ordinance...*" (Confession of Faith 29:7) — insisting that "*they who worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace...*" (Larger Catechism #168), he probably would be accused of teaching a Roman Catholic view! Most of us have grown up with a practical Zwinglianism and we find it virtually impossible to conceive of the Supper in any different way. This practical Zwinglianism is the foundational assumption behind the argument most commonly made against weekly communion.

The argument most commonly made against weekly communion — and I've made it myself — is that if we have the Lord's Supper that of-

ten, it will cease to be meaningful. To be fair, this argument reflects a fear which is motivated by sincere love for the Lord. It's right to resist taking lightly the privileges of our Lord's ordinances, to resist merely going through motions outwardly. But, to be honest, this argument also exhibits a subtle form of practical unbelief. It assumes that the Lord's Supper is just a God-given visual aid, a reminder, a devotional tool by which we subjectively remember Christ's atonement and we rededicate ourselves to our Lord. In fact, if that really is the essence of the Lord's Supper, then the fear is well-founded — having communion weekly will make it harder for us to keep working ourselves up to the same level of intensity in renewing our repentance, faith, and commitment. But if the Lord's Supper is more than that, if the Lord's Supper really is what God's Word and the Westminster Standards say it is, if the Lord's Supper truly is a means of grace, then we don't have to work up our own renewal. The Holy Spirit will supernaturally work it as we partake of the Supper in faith. Thank God, the renewing of our covenant walk is not of works; it is all of grace. It doesn't depend on us, it depends on God! The argument that having communion weekly will make it less meaningful actually flows from the practical assumption that the meaning of communion is primarily something that we impart, that the renewing of our covenant walk is of works, and that at bottom it does depend on us! Do you see why I came to be convicted that this practical expectation, which I espoused, is subtle form of practical unbelief?

Praise God, the Lord's Supper is much more than a devotional tool that we use to restore our own souls!

⁹ For a very helpful explanation of these differing views, see "Communion and Christ's Body" by Charles Wingard (<http://opc.org/cce/QandA/64.html#1>).

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It's a God-ordained means of grace that the Holy Spirit supernaturally uses to restore our souls! Because it's a God-ordained means of grace, we can expect the Holy Spirit to work by and with the Supper in believers who partake with the mouth of faith. We can expect the Holy Spirit to use this means of grace to provide God's supernatural help for growth in sanctification. Sinclair Ferguson writes: "No new revelation is given; no other Christ is made known. But, as Robert Bruce (1554–1631) well said, while we do not get

*a different or better Christ in the Supper from the Christ we get in the Word, we may well get the same Christ better as the Spirit ministers by the testimony of the physical elements being joined to the Word."*¹⁰

An Appeal to My Fathers and Brothers

Most of our Orthodox Presbyterian congregations celebrate the Lord's Supper quarterly or monthly. I want

¹⁰ The Holy Spirit [IVP, 1996], pg. 204

to humbly suggest the possibility that our ministers and elders might well serve their Lord, their congregations, and the Kingdom of Christ if only they will prayerfully consider whether the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper might be both biblical and desirable, that it might even contribute toward revival and reformation in lives, in families, and in congregations. After all, how can being supernaturally fed the Bread of Life week after week be anything less than beneficial to those who trust their Savior?

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[Addendum: continued from page 10]

me, but it didn't take root until my early 20's when I began traveling extensively for my job. It was then that I discovered that pornographic movies were available at nearly every hotel in the world. This began a 15-year addiction to pornography." To feed the fantasy life that pornography encourages, says Mike, he became involved in chat-groups on the Internet. "By the grace of God, I have now been free from pornography for two-and-a-half years," he adds.

Steve highly recommends the Pure Freedom program, cautioning

that people are not set free from pornography just through the course, but only through the work of God in the heart. Another participant shared the following testimony: "My wife and I are doing great. I can't believe how much our relationship has grown since I have been porn free. God has really blessed me with a woman that has stood by me through all the junk that I have brought in our lives. I think that I am understanding how Christ loves the church, because I am so passionately in love with my wife and would do anything for her."

According to Mike, "We have peo-

ple come to this ministry who have been enslaved to pornography and sexual impurity all their lives. We work with pedophiles, prostitutes and homosexuals—and have seen some from every category become completely changed. While it is impossible for man to change man, it is a small thing for God and He can do it. If you have been addicted to pornography for 10, 20 or 45 years, have hope that you can be changed."

—By Janet Chismar,
Editor of *Religion Today*.

*Names have been changed for obvious reasons.



“Drink of It, All of You”

Revisiting Elements of the Traditional Reformed Fencing of the Table

by

T. Nathan Trice

Some time ago, after administering the Lord’s Supper in my congregation on a Sunday evening, I received an email with the following sentiments (I have condensed it somewhat):

Dear Pastor Trice,

I have a dilemma. Please help me. I have heard preachers say from the pulpit that if anyone is living in unrepentant, unconfessed sin then they will be judged if they partake of the Lord’s Supper. When I think of this, it makes me think that it would be better for me to abstain altogether than to partake and provoke God’s judgment. Last Sunday, however, you said to the congregation, “If you’re one of Christ’s disciples, he invites you to come and receive a blessing at His Table: don’t turn down such a wonderful invitation!” That made me think that it could actually be sinful of me as a Christian NOT to partake of the Table when Jesus has invited me! How do I resolve this dilemma?

It has become my conviction that the dilemma felt by such spiritually sensitive individuals as this one is actually created by certain elements in the customary fencing of the Table within Reformed churches. Despite our proper insistence in the Reformed tradition that Christ and his benefits are received in the sacra-

ment by faith, we have, I believe, by a misguided emphasis on warning, needlessly created doubt in the hearts of many of the faithful members of our churches. And it is not those most spiritually sensitive brethren alone who are affected. I believe that the typical fencing of the Table in our circles all too often undermines a joyful, believing expectation of blessing on the part of the entire congregation as they approach the Lord’s Table.

It is the purpose of this article to revisit the typical Reformed fencing of the Table in light of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. In what follows, I will seek first to make a few exegetical observations about this passage in light of common misconceptions; then, I will make a few practical observations about the effects of these misconceptions; and in conclusion, I will make a proposal regarding a more proper fencing of the Table.

I. Exegetical Observations

1. Secret Sin?

In the typical Reformed fencing of the Table, an emphasis is placed upon not partaking when there is the presence of secret, unrepentant sin, and Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 11 to “examine oneself” is prescribed as the way to discover and repent of such sins. But however real a problem it is to come to any act of worship with secret sin, it should be

obvious that this is certainly not the problem in Corinth that the apostle is addressing. The sin of the Corinthians was of such an outward and scandalous nature that news of it had found its way all the way back to the apostle (!): “I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part...” (vs. 18). As the apostle then recounts what he has heard about their meetings, he shows that the sectarian spirit which pervaded the congregation had caused them to abandon any effort to eat the meal of the Lord together; rather, they were eating regardless of whether all were present or not, and regardless of whether all had food or not. Even if we should see hyperbole in Paul’s comment, “One goes hungry, another gets drunk” (vs. 21), the critical issue for Paul is that those with the means to bring an abundant part of the elements for the Lord’s Table (apparently the practice in that church) were unwilling to share with those too poor to bring any. This shameful division between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” such that only a part of the congregation at any one time actually partook of the Table, leads Paul to make the obvious assessment that such observations could not be viewed as “communion” services at all: “it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat” (vs. 20), i.e., it is not the meal that Jesus ordained and intended.

It is helpful at this point to bear in mind all that we know about the Co-

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rinthian church from this first epistle, in order to recognize why their behavior warranted such a severe response from Paul. The Corinthian church was one notorious for its various problems, as a cursory reading of the first letter will reveal. However, throughout the book the greatest source of concern to the apostle is the measure of division present within the church. Corinth was a strife-ridden church. That this was so is evidenced - after his opening words of greeting - by the very first concern which the apostle takes up: the report he has heard of their quarreling among themselves (1:10ff). The church had become divided into various schools of thought, each of which claimed for itself the reputation of men such as Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. Paul's opening appeal to them, therefore, is *"that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you"* (1:10). Especially relevant to our considerations is the fact that this apostolic consternation and appeal becomes a refrain throughout the whole book. In chapter 3 Paul rebukes them for being fleshly (carnal) and spiritually infantile because *"there is jealousy and strife among you"* (3:1ff). In chapter 6 Paul expresses outrage that this strife has led to lawsuits against each other in secular court, to which he responds with exasperation, *"Why not rather be defrauded?"* (6:1ff). And in chapter 8, where Paul takes up the matter of dealing graciously with a weaker brother, he makes the devastating statement that by *"sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ"* (8:1ff).

In order to understand the apostle's words in 1 Corinthians 11, then, it is important to recognize from the context the utterly scandalous nature of the divisions in Corinth. The apostle's consternation re-

garding the strife in the Corinthian church reaches its apex in the passage here, and that for a very good reason: manifestations of open strife between brothers could not be more sinfully conspicuous than in that ordinance of God expressly intended to manifest and perpetuate the communion of the saints! When the apostle eventually asserts that God's judgment of illness and death had come upon some of them for their unworthy partaking of the Table (vs. 30), he does not leave his readers in any doubt regarding what kind of sin warrants such a severe censure of God, as if various secret sins of individuals within the congregation might be the cause. No, it is the sin problem for which the Corinthian church had become notorious that had provoked God's wrath, and when they brought their shameful partisanship right to the Table of the Lord, God was moved to inflict upon them the severest of consequences. The notion is common among us, and fostered by a typical fencing of the Table, that an "unworthy" eating and drinking and the consequent judgment of God all pertain to secret, unconfessed sins. Yet nothing could be further from the apostle's mind. He is addressing open patterns of sin in the life of the Corinthian congregation that manifested themselves most egregiously in the way they were partaking of the Table. Whatever understanding, therefore, that we acquire for expressions like "unworthy participation" and "eating and drinking judgment," it must be informed by the circumstances Paul is addressing. They do not refer to inward and secret sins, but to the more scandalous manifestations of outward sin. Every faithful Christian struggles with various "secret sins," and, strictly speaking, is guilty from time to time of secretly and impenitently living in such sins—until by the work of the Spirit his sin is revealed

to him and fresh repentance is granted. However, it is not to this experience, common to us all, that the apostle aims his warning. Rather, it is for the outwardly scandalous professor of Christ that the apostle reserves the fearful warnings of 1 Corinthians 11.

Therefore, in the first place, I think it should be apparent that the sin being addressed in the apostolic warning was not inward and secret, but outward and scandalous.

2. *"Eating and Drinking in an Unworthy Manner"*

In the history of Reformed exegesis of this text, key phrases such as this one have become freighted with a meaning broader than that intended by the apostle. One way that the concept of "eating and drinking in an unworthy manner" has been understood is by identifying it with the danger of an individual's coming to the Lord's Supper who is not a true Christian, or truly regenerate. But the apostle is not speaking of this reality at all. The apostle nowhere suggests that the unworthy partaking of the Table is due to the unregenerate state of certain members of the Corinthian church. In fact, he presumes that even the worst offenders among them are regenerate people, because he identifies the Lord's "judgment" upon them as his means of preserving them from being condemned with the world (vs. 32). The apostle's understanding of "unworthy partaking" is something being done by those whose regenerate condition he does not question. However profitable it is to review from time to time the evidences in one's self of a saving work of God, such an exercise is simply foreign to the apostle's concern in 1 Corinthians 11. There is no necessary connection made here between a due preparation for the Lord's Table and the serious entertaining of the question, "Am I really

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a Christian?”¹ Indeed, I would suggest that the typical Christian should be seriously entertaining this question far less frequently than he should be coming to the Table! Yet due to this popular misconception of the apostle’s words, there is an unwholesome level of introspection that often accompanies our observance of the Lord’s Supper.

The other way that partaking “in an unworthy manner” is often understood is by identifying it with the danger of participating in the sacrament without a sufficient level of spiritual preparedness, i.e., sensitivity to sin, felt love for Christ, and a spiritual frame of mind. Of course, spiritual preparations are important for participating in any of the corporate means of grace, but the tendency in our tradition to think of “unworthy partaking” as relating to whether or not we have been “doing well spiritually” is far removed from the apostle’s intent. It was not a general spiritual malaise that was the Apostle’s concern, but rather specific scandalous sins that were being brought, of all places, right to the Table of the Lord.

What then is the unworthy eating and drinking that Paul is warning against? If we resist abstracting these

¹ After suggesting that “the want of right understanding this scripture has been a stumbling block to many,” the Puritan John Flavel goes on to say regarding Paul’s words “let a person examine himself”: “It seems clear, by the occasions and circumstances of his discourse, that he does not intend we should examine our state of grace; whether we are true believers or no, and sincerely resolved to continue so; but he speaks of the actual fitness and worthiness of the Corinthians at that time, when they came to receive the Lord’s Supper. And therefore, verse 20, he sharply reproves their irreverent and unsuitable carriage at the Lord’s table: they coming thereunto disorderly, one before another” (“A Familiar Conference Between a Minister and a Doubting Christian,” vol. 6 of Works, p. 467-8).

words from their context, we will recognize that he is speaking of attitudes and behavior that flagrantly contradict the meaning and purpose of the Lord’s Table itself, thereby making the observance of the Table a farce. The apostle refers to specific things in a man’s life which openly contradict that which he professes in the Table: love for Christ and for his brethren. The Corinthians were guilty of what we would call “disciplinable offenses.” Therefore, while in an absolute sense no one of us can partake of the Table “worthily,” yet in the sense in which the apostle meant it, all of us who are maintaining a Christian walk that is consistent with our profession may eat and drink “in a worthy manner.”

Therefore, in the second place, I would insist that the words of the apostle regarding eating and drinking “in an unworthy manner” have in view, not the danger of partaking of the Table in an unregenerate state, nor the danger of partaking in a state of general spiritual ill-health, but to the danger of partaking of the Table in a profane and scandalous manner.

3. “Let a Person Examine Himself”

The words “*Let a person examine himself*” (vs. 28) have come to be understood by many as a prescription by the apostle for a preparatory exercise of introspection uniquely required by the Lord’s Table. The Puritan expositor Matthew Poole fairly represents our tradition when he enlarges upon the meaning of that expression as follows:

He is to examine himself about his knowledge, whether he rightly understands what Christ is, what the nature of the sacrament is, what he doth in that sacred action; about his faith, love, repentance, new obedience, whether he be such a one as God hath pre-

pared that holy table for; it is the children’s bread, and not for dogs; a table Christ hath spread for his friends, not for his enemies.²

It is my contention, however, that the apostle does not in this passage prescribe a broad exercise of self-examination that is uniquely a prerequisite to a proper partaking of the Table. Rather, his call is for due consideration and contrition over specific sins which he has already named! That is to say, the apostle’s call for self-examination is made in the context of his having made specific charges of guilt regarding the Corinthians’ behavior. After rebuking them specifically for their scandalous degree of schism, and after declaring to them that such sin involves a profaning of the Table, he then makes the poignant observation, “*Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*” Bearing in mind this context, we can see that the apostle is not calling for self-examination apart from any and all pastoral direction. Rather, he is saying in so many words: “In light of this sin that is in your midst as a congregation, every one of you ought to consider what guilt you share in that sin, repent of it to God and to each other, and only then come together to the Table again.” The urgent need of self-examination, lest one eat and drink judgment upon himself, is not, therefore, held out indiscriminately to every believer in every circumstance, as if this were a spiritual exercise uniquely required before the Lord’s Supper. Rather, it is a form of introspection that is urgently necessary and incumbent upon those who are guilty of profaning the Table by ongoing, egregious sin.

² Matthew Poole’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol III, p. 581.

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It is of course true that the apostle speaks in universal language here—“whoever,” “let a person,” and “anyone who eats”; and it is true that he does so in order to underscore a vital principle that transcends the Corinthian situation. However, a proper discerning of what that transcendent principle is can be gained only by understanding the circumstances which provoke these statements. Often in our tradition, the transcendent, universal principle has been understood to be something like this: “Self-examination (of a general kind) is a necessary prerequisite to properly partaking of the Lord’s Supper.” I submit that this is not the apostle’s concern at all. Rather, it is the principle: “Anyone guilty of conduct which by its nature profanes the Lord’s Supper must stop, consider his peril, and repent of his ways before participating further in that ordinance.”

As an illustration, suppose that I as a pastor learned through a counseling situation that a man in the congregation had been guilty for many months of defrauding other businessmen in the congregation. Under such circumstances, it would be most appropriate for me to say to him, with all due severity, “You had better examine yourself before coming again to the Lord’s Supper, or you will be eating and drinking judgment upon yourself.” On the other hand, however, it would be a grave error on my part to apply that same severe warning to the entire congregation on each occasion of the Lord’s Supper, apart from any knowledge of sin in their midst, i.e.: “You had better examine yourselves before coming again to the Lord’s Supper, or you will be eating and drinking judgment upon yourself.” The first instance would be a faithful, pastoral use of the universal principle contained in 1 Corinthians 11, while the second instance would be a misguided, abusive use of the apostle’s

words, and one that is foreign to his intention. I am afraid, however, that as a result of this fundamental misconception about 1 Corinthians 11, the faithful people of God in many churches hear again and again stern and fearful words that were never intended to be applied to them.

Therefore, I submit, thirdly, that the apostle’s call for self-examination is not a universal prescription for an exercise of introspection uniquely required for the Table, but rather a particular exhortation to those guilty of certain identifiable sins to consider their ways and to repent prior to returning to the Table.

4. “Discerning the Body”

Without the exercise of “discerning the body,” Paul tells his readers a person “eats and drinks judgment on himself” (vs. 29). Reformed expositions of this text have typically seen in this phrase an explicit requirement for a certain level of understanding regarding the nature and purpose of the sacrament: “discerning the body” therefore means having an adequate understanding of the spiritual realities which set this meal apart from ordinary meals. This belief is reflected in the wording of the OPC form which warns that the Table is not for the “uninstructed.” To admit any to the Table without adequate understanding is viewed as making them liable to judgment.

But once again I wish to ask: Is this in fact what the apostle means by this phrase in the context in which he uses it? Does he intend to teach as a universal principle that insufficient understanding on the part of participants in the Lord’s Table, and that alone, makes them liable to the wrath of God? Is the apostle indeed teaching that God’s anger is directed toward such believers simply because

they don’t understand well enough? And, finally, exactly how much of an understanding of the mystery of the sacrament is necessary to avoid God’s wrath and displeasure?

These questions point us to the conclusion that the failure of the Corinthians to “discern the body” was something far more serious than a mere failure intellectually to grasp certain doctrinal truths. The Corinthians had been guilty of a flagrant disregard for one another in their celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and here the apostle calls this specific sin a failure to “discern the body,” that is, a failure to consider one another in love as they partook together. A growing number of commentators today view the “body” that Paul refers to here, not as the physical body of Christ, but as his body, the church. They note that Paul has already used this expression in reference to the church, in chapter 10, verse 17, which reads: “we who are many are one body.” For example, F.F. Bruce writes:

When they broke the bread, which was the token of the body of Christ, they not only recalled his self-oblation on the cross, but proclaimed their joint participation in his corporate body. If, then, they denied in practice the unity which they professed sacramentally in the Eucharist, they ate and drank unworthily and so profaned the body and blood of the Lord; if they ate and drank “without discerning the body” they ate and drank judgment upon themselves. To eat and drink “without discerning the body” meant quite simply to take the bread and cup at the same time as they were treating their fellow-Christians uncharitably in thought and behavior.³

³ Apostle of the Heart Set Free, p. 285.

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In this interpretation, which I find quite persuasive, the “discernment” that the apostle requires in verse 29 is simply the opposite of the attitude and behavior he forbids in verse 22: “*Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?*” By despising the church in so scandalous a way they were not discerning the body, and were thereby eating and drinking judgment to themselves.

Neither is Paul calling for a learned understanding of the much disputed relationship between the sign and the thing signified in the sacrament, or for the precise nature of the presence of Christ in the meal. Rather, Paul is calling for a loving consideration of the body of Christ, the church, and, for the participants in the sacrament at Corinth, that body was represented by those seated around them with whom they were not on good terms. To convey to our congregations that partaking of the Supper apart from a certain level of instruction and resulting comprehension incurs the judgment of God is to miss entirely the apostle’s concern. It leads the people of God to ask a question of themselves that is foreign to the apostle’s concern, namely: Do I understand well enough what this sacrament means? rather than the question he intends to raise: Do I have a right attitude toward my brothers and sisters as I come to this sacrament? Instruction of an ongoing kind regarding the nature and purpose of the Lord’s Supper is certainly important, but it is not such a lack of understanding acquired by instruction that the apostle warns against. It is a lack of regard for others acquired by love that he warns against, and which constitutes “not discerning the body.”

Finally, therefore, I would argue that the “discernment” called for by

participants in the Table consists, not in an intellectual comprehension of the nature of the sacrament, but in a loving regard for those with whom one enjoys fellowship in the sacrament.

Practical Observations

1. A Dampening of Celebration at the Table

The most immediate practical effect of these misconceptions is the creation of a general atmosphere around the Lord’s Table which is largely incompatible with true celebration. The sheer repetition of the words of the apostle, apart from their context, has produced a subtle but real tendency among us to identify the observance of the Lord’s Supper with an introspective focus (“examine yourself”), a consideration of our sins (“if we judged ourselves”), in the context of possible judgment (“eating and drinking judgment”). But these stern words were never intended to set the tone for the regular observance of the sacrament! They are lifted from what is essentially an apostolic tongue-lashing given to a grievously errant congregation and should not be made paradigmatic for every congregation’s approach to the Table. Under what kind of circumstances would any pastor fairly make the assessment of a congregation, “*Your meetings do more harm than good*” (vs. 17, NIV)? Clearly, only under circumstances involving flagrant, egregious sin. The application of this point is simple: in our routine fencing of the Table, it is a grave mistake to adopt the same severity toward our own congregations as that found in the apostle’s warnings in the absence of the kind of sin which warranted it in the Corinthian church. By quoting extensively and even exclusively from this passage in our pre-Supper exhortations, we have

imposed upon essentially healthy congregations and their orderly observances of the Supper the heaviness of the apostle’s rebuke to a seriously errant congregation. The opening words of the current OPC form could hardly illustrate better the setting of such a tone of heaviness:

It is my **solemn duty to warn** the uninstructed, the profane, the scandalous, and those who secretly and impenitently live in any sin, **not to approach the holy table** lest they partake unworthily, not discerning the Lord’s body, and so **eat and drink condemnation** to themselves (OPC Directory of Worship, IV:C:2, emphasis mine).

In light of such sober warnings given by the minister immediately preceding the meal, it is highly understandable if our members tend to view the time of receiving the elements as a time more for lamenting sin than enjoying and rejoicing in their salvation. The fact that often in our tradition “celebrations” of the Lord’s Supper feel anything but celebratory is due to more than our Western personal reserve. It is due, in part, to a theologically imbalanced view of the Table itself, perpetuated by a common fencing of the Table.

2. Private Abstentions from the Table at Will

The unfounded hesitation on the part of some believers to come to the Table has given rise to the common but highly questionable practice of members in good standing voluntarily, for undisclosed reasons, abstaining from participation in the Lord’s Supper. If questioned, such persons may confess to feeling “unprepared” for the Table, perhaps due to felt conviction for some moral failing that week. The conviction of many seems to be that a sense of spiritual well-being is a prerequisite to com-

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ing to the Lord's Table, and, when they honestly acknowledge a season of spiritual lethargy or struggle with sin, they become convinced that they are unprepared for the Table. It can even be thought a matter of piety to refrain from the Table from time to time under these circumstances. The problems with this way of thinking are manifold.

First of all, it practically turns a means of grace into a reward of grace, as if the spiritual food of the Table were reserved for those who were already well nourished! Jesus compares His body to food, indicating that the sacrament is a means by which the people of God are nourished in grace. Therefore, it is precisely at times of spiritual leanness and struggle with sin that it is most needed, and should be most eagerly sought. In the second place, this way of thinking overlooks the fact that the Lord Jesus, in spreading the Table, calls his people to it, and that it is a serious thing for a professing disciple to resist that call. His words are "*Drink of it, all of you*" (Matt. 26:27), and however gracious that invitation is, compliance with it should not thereby be construed as something merely optional, any more than compliance with his call to assemble for worship as a whole is optional. Third, this way of thinking ignores the serious implications of a communicant member's abstaining from any given celebration of the Table. Since it is by barring a person from the Table in discipline that the church ultimately removes him from its fellowship, this practice amounts to individuals "excommunicating themselves for a day." Not only does such an act deprive the rest of the congregation of the full fellowship with the body that the Table is intended to afford; it also subtly shifts the authority to extend or withdraw fellowship in the Table from the officers of the

church to the individual.

The solution, therefore, for those with hesitations about coming to the Table is to remember that only willful patterns of sin which are incompatible with a profession of love to Christ and the brethren give rise to an unworthy partaking of the Table as it is defined by the apostle. It should be noted that where such patterns of sin exist, it is still a sin not to come to the Table, yet it is a greater sin to profane the Table. The proper recourse in such a situation is not simply to "sit out" all Lord's Supper celebrations, but immediately to repent, reform one's life, and return to the Table. The apostle nowhere tells the Corinthians not to partake of the Table. Rather, in light of their sin, he tells them to examine themselves before coming to the Table. His objective is not for any of them to abstain from the Table, but for all of them to partake of the Table rightly. When a member of the church has good reason to be concerned about his coming to the Table, it will be due to some area of notable inconsistency in his profession, and, as a general rule, faithful elders will have already begun to bring warning and admonition to him regarding it, as the apostle did with the Corinthians.

3. An Individualistic Approach to the Table

Yet another practical effect of our misconceptions of 1 Corinthians 11, as embodied in a typical fencing of the Table, is the obscuring of the primary point of the passage: the horizontal dimension of the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is a time for the felt enjoyment of our relationships with each other as a church, as well as with Christ. It is an expression of our love for one another, as well as for Christ. The failure of the Corinthian

church to recognize this is the sum and substance of the apostle Paul's great angst. To be sure, they were profaning and offending God himself at the Table, but precisely by means of their disregard for their brethren. The fundamental principle underlying Paul's severe words to the Corinthians is in fact the same one made throughout Scripture: you cannot be right with the Lord without being right with your brothers in the Lord. It is on the basis of this principle that the Old Testament prophets repeatedly warn the people that their worship and sacrifice, if offered apart from fairness and goodness toward their brothers, constitute a stench in God's nostrils, and only provoke his wrath (see, for example, Amos 5:21ff). It is the same principle that Jesus reiterates when he calls for a man, upon remembrance of an offense between himself and a brother, to "leave his gift at the altar" and, only after being reconciled to his brother, to resume his worship (Matt. 5: 23-24). It is the same principle that the apostle has underscored earlier in this epistle when he states: "sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ" (1 Cor. 8:12). The use of abstracted portions of 1 Corinthians 11 can suggest that "getting right with God" is the primary issue of the passage, when in fact "getting right with your brother, in order to be right with God" is the issue. As Gordon Fee has put it:

One wonders whether our making the text deal with self-examination has not served to deflect the greater concern of the text, that we give more attention at the Lord's Supper to our relationships with one another in the body of Christ.⁴

Yet the typical observance of the Table in our churches, ironically, is the

⁴ Fee's *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, p. 569.

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most individualistic part of our service. In the quietness of the distribution and partaking of the elements, each member is essentially alone with his reflections and prayers, in contrast with the rest of the service in which all join with each other in some common hymn, prayer, or received Word from the pulpit. In other words, an introspective orientation has undermined the very purpose of the meal: fellowship (communion) with God and each other.

4. Impediments to Frequent Communion

One final effect of this mistaken perspective is that it has created psychological impediments to more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. When coming rightly to the Lord's Supper involves a regiment of self-examination and an emotional and spiritual preparation distinct from what is required by the other elements of worship, then it is easy to think that the observance of the Table should be reserved for more infrequent, "special" occasions. Ironically, however, 1 Corinthians 11 provides what is probably the clearest biblical evidence for a weekly celebration of the Table by the apostolic church. It is the obvious assumption of the apostle as he begins the passage that their meetings together as a congregation are accompanied by the observance of the Lord's Supper: "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (vs. 20). It was clearly the practice of the Corinthian church, when they gathered, to bring food with them from which the elements of the Table would be taken. We can of course assume that celebrating the Lord's Supper is not all that they did, but we must conclude that they did identify meeting together with eating together at the Lord's Supper. None of the apostle's

words of reproof are directed at the frequency of their celebrating the Table. In fact, in directing them first to satisfy their hunger at home with a regular meal before gathering (vs. 22, 34), he implies that he expects them to continue to celebrate the Lord's Supper in those gatherings, though in a more appropriate way: they will still "come together to eat" (vs. 33). Therefore, while the Lord's Supper should in fact be viewed as requiring preparation and consecration of ourselves afresh to the Lord, it should also be recognized that this is part and parcel of a weekly preparation for the Sabbath and all its corporate means of grace. The Table is arguably the climactic part of worship, but it was clearly an ordinary part of worship in the apostolic church.

A Proper Fencing of the Table

With a proper understanding of 1 Corinthians 11, as well as a biblically balanced view of the Lord's Supper, of what should our routine fencing of the Table consist?

In the first place, we should take it as axiomatic that the proper purpose of the "fence" which we maintain around the Table is to keep out, in the first place, "those who are not sheep," and, in the second place, "those who are not acting like sheep." This first category, those who "are not sheep," represent those who are not communicant members in good standing of a local congregation of the visible Church.⁵ They are not of the number of the recognized saints of God, such a number being determined by the ob-

⁵ It is my conviction that all those who are communicant members in good standing of an evangelical church should be admitted to the Table in any particular congregation, as opposed to the practice called "closed communion," which limits participation to the members of that particular church or denomination. It is not my purpose, however, to argue that point here.

jective criteria of membership in the visible church. The Lord's Supper is the Church's ultimate expression of the communion of the saints, and is to be guarded from all those who are not saints. Such people present in the congregation should be graciously but clearly informed that this meal is not for them.

The second category, those who "are not acting like sheep," represents those members of the visible church that, while still at present retaining their membership, nonetheless have manifested patterns of sin which are incompatible with a faithful Christian walk. Such individuals within the congregation are identified through the ongoing oversight of the congregation by the pastor and session. When such patterns of sin are discovered, and repentance for such sin is not forthcoming, the elders should take steps to warn such a person from coming to the Table until that sin is dealt with. This warning should be with the full severity of the apostle's words to the Corinthians, inasmuch as the sin involved is of the magnitude of the Corinthians' sin. Because of the seriousness of such a situation, the congregation as a whole should be informed of this action, and all should recognize it as an intermediate form of discipline: that which is commonly known as "suspension from the Table." Such discipline should be carried out toward members who have fallen into conspicuous patterns of sin—i.e., they are not acting like sheep. The Table is not for them either.

It should be clear from this that I am directly challenging the practice of routinely setting before the congregation the notion that the Table is for them if they meet a set of criteria that only they can apply, i.e., that they have examined their hearts suf-

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ficiently, they are spiritually prepared, they really understand what they are doing, etc. This has the regrettable effect of erecting a “fence” around the Table that is subjective, indefinite, and up to the members of the church ultimately to establish for themselves, when, in fact, the fence around the Table should be quite objective, definite, and established by the elders themselves as leaders of the Church. I believe that this element, when it appears in the fencing of the Table in our circles, is entirely without biblical warrant and is contrary to God’s intention for the meal. In fact, I would argue that it is contrary to the very nature and purpose of the sacraments according to our Reformed confessions. The Westminster Confession (27:1) provides an excellent definition of the sacraments as:

...holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits; and to confirm our interest in him: as also, to **put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world**; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word” (emphasis mine).

I would ask the question: How can the Lord’s Supper serve to put a visible difference between those that belong to the church and the rest of the world when, in the fencing of the Table, we encourage members of the visible church to absent themselves from it according to the state of their heart at any given time? The very ordinance which is intended to preserve the boundaries of the visible church in an ongoing way ends up, in the typical Reformed practice of fencing the Table, obscuring those very boundaries.

With what words, then, should we preface the celebration of the Table? As we have seen, those who are not members of the visible Church, and those who are members under discipline, should be clearly forbidden to partake. All others, however, should be assured that as members of the covenant community, the covenant meal is for them. Our words to the assembled saints, prior to the celebration of the Supper, should be words of warm invitation to come to the Table. In fact, in light of the misconceptions which church members in our tradition commonly labor under, they should be encouraged—

even strongly—to come to the Table. It is for them! Despite their many struggles with sin, and even profound sense of spiritual failure, they should be reminded that the Table, as Calvin expresses it, “is medicine for poor sick souls.” It is the Savior’s desire that they should have it, and God’s people should be exhorted not to resist the mercy and grace offered therein. He has said to his people: “Drink of it, all of you,” and the only appropriate response for each of us is humbly and gratefully to comply, by faith expecting great blessing.

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The Westminster Larger Catechism

Q. 174. What is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the time of the administration of it?

Ans: It is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that, during the time of the administration of it, with all holy reverence and attention they wait upon God in that ordinance, diligently observe the sacramental elements and actions, heedfully discern the Lord's body, and affectionately meditate on his death and sufferings, and thereby stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise of their graces; in judging themselves, and sorrowing for sin; in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ, feeding on him by faith, receiving of his fullness, trusting in his merits, rejoicing in his love, giving thanks for his grace; in renewing of their covenant with God, and love to all the saints.