

Paedocommunion is the position that baptized children may participate in the Lord's Supper. The Session of CVP unanimously encourages all families to bring their baptized children to the Table. However, because we recognize that there is some debate over whether 1 Corinthians 11:28 requires self-examination prior to the meal (see below), we allow heads of households to determine whether or not their youngest baptized children should participate.

It is odd that paedocommunion is such a debated subject in the Reformed Church today, since the same arguments that support the baptism of young children so strongly also support their participation in the Church's covenant meal. As such, we encourage you to read our FAQ on Baptism and the Lord's Supper on this same website for a comprehensive treatment of these subjects. Here, we want to provide an analysis of relevant portions of 1 Corinthians 10-11, as well as answer some of the common misunderstandings and questions associated with paedocommunion.

In 1 Cor. 10:1-5 Paul writes: "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness."

The word "moreover" means that this section is a continuation and an emphasis on what Paul has just said in chapter 9. There, Paul urges the Corinthians to run as those intent on obtaining the final prize – an eternal inheritance. Running correctly means exercising self-control and self-discipline, a spiritual fruit the Corinthian church seemed to lack, given its internal division and unaddressed sin.

"Fathers" refers to those Israelites who left with Moses from Egypt. They were the spiritual ancestors of the Corinthian Greeks to whom Paul writes. Paul thus creates a continuity between New Testament, Gentile Corinth and Old Testament, Jewish Israel – Israel's lessons were Corinth's lessons. The immediate meaning of "baptized into Moses" is that walking under the cloud of God's guiding presence and through the Red Sea was a symbolic baptism. This was meaningful to the Corinthians who had received water baptism. Of course, Moses' "baptism" was not *into Jesus* for Jesus had not yet come. Instead, since Moses was their deliverer, Paul makes a loose analogy that this baptism was into Moses.

At the same time, to show continuity with the Corinthians, Paul says that a "Rock" followed them, that Rock figuratively being Jesus. There is a rock that occurs in the Exodus story, namely the rock which Moses struck to miraculously deliver water. In a sense, though, because God provided water for the Israelites throughout their journey, the source of water, typified in the rock, "followed" them. God continued to divinely provide for their needs.

Why does Paul work to create these analogies between the Exodus and baptism and Communion? He wants to suggest that even the Israelites before Christ participated in these two holy sacraments, although their participation was typological and not realized by them. Paul even presses the point by saying that the food and particularly the water that God provided was Christ. This is important to our discussion of paedocommunion because *every* Israelite, every man, woman, and child, was both baptized by the Red Sea and feasted upon the Rock that was Christ. This is a powerful illustration of covenantal participation by all “baptized” Israelites.

In verse 10, Paul writes: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” The participation, response, and behavior of the Israelites was significant for establishing right and wrong practice within the Corinthian church. With that in mind, we’re now ready to look at chapter 11.

1 Cor. 11:17-22 reads: “Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.”

One of the purposes of assembling together as mentioned in the book of Hebrews is “to encourage one another for the days are short.” In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul adds another important purpose – when God’s people commune together in the Lord’s Supper, God’s grace nourishes them. Not only does He bless His people, but in eating the holy meal together they demonstrate unity in and through Christ despite sociological differences.

Sadly, the divisive behavior of the Corinthians contradicted the Supper. The wealthy and those of higher social status would eat first and often eat everything, leaving nothing for the last families. Some engorged themselves to the point that they became drunk. Notice that their conduct did not bring shame to God, but rather to the “church of God.” Because the elements of the Supper pointed to the finished work of Christ, those elements didn’t lose their meaning even when abused. Thus, Christ was not shamed. Instead, the people by their conduct brought dishonor upon themselves.

Verses 23-26 say: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in

remembrance of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.”

People have interpreted “in remembrance of me” in two primary ways: 1) remembrance refers to the individual act of a participant “remembering” and thinking about Christ as he eats the bread and drinks the wine; 2) remembrance refers to the fact that the Lord’s Supper itself, as a sign of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and covenantal faithfulness, memorializes or “remembers” Christ.

In the OT, the term “remembrance” rarely carries the common English nuance of simply a mental activity. Israel, for example, is to *remember* the salvation of God by building a memorial – sometimes an altar, sometimes a pile of rocks, and so on. Israel is told to *remember* the Sabbath, which obviously is less about thinking about the Sabbath, than about observing the Sabbath. Even the Passover meal was called a “remembrance.” Thus, we believe that by calling the Lord’s Supper a “remembrance,” Jesus emphasized the Supper as a memorial to His atoning work.

Why does Paul in this section repeat Jesus’ tradition and wording? It is not that the Corinthians necessarily forgot the words or abandoned the Supper. It is that their behavior contradicted the Supper’s message. The bread and cup “proclaimed” Jesus’ death – that was their message. This was meant to unify the church at Corinth. In contrast to this message, by their behavior the Corinthians proclaimed disunity. God will not long allow such counter messages to go undisciplined in His Church.

When we think of proclamation in Biblical terms, the most immediate sense of the term is the preached Word. Jesus’ death and resurrection are the chief proclamations of the Gospel. The result of preaching is that people are changed. Here, then, we can see a more subtle, and perhaps more profound, meaning of “remembrance.” The Supper proclaims Jesus’ death and *causes* a remembrance. Here the order might be participation + conduct = remembrance, rather than remembrance + conduct = participation.

A parallel to this can be seen in the Passover. During the Passover meal, the children (who participated in its consumption) would ask about the meaning of the various elements. The meal itself, unleavened bread, salt water, bitter herbs, etc., would teach the children about the memorialized event. By participating as God prescribed, the children were led to think upon, and thus “remember” God’s mercy during the Exodus. In similar fashion, when God’s people participate in the Table and bring their conduct in line with what it represents, they both memorialize and are led to think upon what Christ did.

Moving on, in 1 Cor. 11:27-32 we read: “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”

1 Cor. 11:27-32 is the key passage. As we mentioned above, there has been much debate over what this passage means, particularly regarding the admonition not to eat the Lord's Table in an “unworthy manner.” Part of the confusion is that the King James Version originally translated the Greek word “anaxios” as “unworthily” instead of more properly “in an unworthy manner” or “irreverently.” When the KJV used the word “unworthily,” one of the results was that the emphasis on participation shifted. Instead of proper participation (a reverent manner paralleled by godly behavior) leading us to remember Christ, now a failure to remember Christ (sinfully without faith and right thoughts prior to participation) leads to improper participation. This may seem like a small difference, but the ramifications are important.

Think about what is discussed in the earlier verses of chapter 11. The Corinthian people were in great disunity and God had disciplined them for their conduct. “Unworthy manner,” by context, would refer to this irreverent behavior. By not properly remembering Christ by their selfish conduct, they sinned against the body and blood of Christ and brought dishonor upon themselves.

If we correct our understanding regarding the KJV's mistranslation “worthily,” we should realize that the admonition to “examine” one's self is not a warning to see whether we are worthy enough to participate in the Supper (none of us are worthy), but whether or not our actions contradict the message of the Supper. Our conduct must support and agree with the message of the Supper. Otherwise, we profane Christ's death. To be guilty of the “body and blood” of Christ, then, is to engage in the type of sinful, divisive, unloving behavior that led to Christ's crucifixion in the first place.

1 Corinthians 11 is less a threat than a call to truly Christian behavior at the Table and in the Church. Participation in the Table plus improper conduct in the Church = despising the work of Christ. In the language of verse 29 this is a failure “to recognize the body.” What body? Some argue that this is the physical body of Christ Himself. We would argue that what is meant here is the *Body* of Christ – the Church.

There are several strong reasons for this interpretation. Commentator Gordon Fee writes: “It is an illusion to see vv. 27 and 29 as parallels. Despite some similarities, the differences are more

striking, especially (a) the absolute use of “the body,” and (b) the absence of the heretofore parallel mention of the cup. Here, Paul only says “the body.” One is hard pressed to argue that this is shorthand for “the body and blood of the Lord,” since Paul otherwise mentions both when he intends both.

Now Gordon Fee is not a paedocommunionist and his commentary (he contributed to the 1 Corinthians volume of the very scholarly New International Critical New Testament Commentary series) is well-received by both sides of the debate. If Fee is right, which we believe he is, then what does “recognize” mean? Fee argues that the word in Greek is best translated by the word “distinguish” in the sense of identifying something as distinct or different. The Supper is not just any meal; it is *the* meal, in which at one table with one loaf and one cup the Church proclaims through the death of Christ that they are one Body, the Body of Christ. By its conduct the Church must recognize as distinct, this Body, of which they are all part. To abuse one another is to merely act like the world and invite God’s wrath.

To this point we’ve not asked the question at all regarding children communing with us at the Table. However, the issue is implied from what we’ve been discussing. If the Table is a sign of God’s work of salvation, if the remembrance is the act of participation itself, and if a worthy manner is more about right conduct than right faith, then what would keep children away from the meal? Indeed the fact that Jesus uses the Passover for the foundation of the Table has broad implications for the participation of children. We know from Scripture that children ate the Old Testament covenant meal, Passover. If the Lord’s Supper is to be the New Testament covenant meal, why would we not want our baptized covenant members to participate?

In the rest of our answer, we’d like to respond to a few common misconceptions and objections that are raised concerning paedocommunion.

*If we allow our youngest children to participate before they’ve evidenced salvation, are we presuming that they are saved?*

This is the same question that might be asked with regard to baptism. Again, we point to our prior answer to that subject and simply restate here that baptism and the Lord’s Supper do not save, nor do we believe that children who are baptized and participating in the Table are automatically saved. Because we believe that baptized children of believers are members of the covenant community of God, we believe that they should participate in that community’s covenant meal. We also believe that, like the Passover, the frequent participation in Communion will ever put the Gospel in very tangible form before them, reminding them of their obligations under the covenant to love and obey their God and King. Should there come a point where they evidence that they are covenant breakers, we would have to exclude them from the Table, just as Israel had to remove circumcised covenant breakers from the nation.

*Will participation in the Lord's Supper make us relax our efforts to evangelize our children?*

This objection is a bit difficult to answer because it labors under modern conceptions of “evangelizing our children.” To the extent that “evangelizing” means sharing the Good News with every man, including our children, then we believe that evangelizing our children is one of our most important parental duties. God commands us in Deuteronomy to train our children in the Scriptures from the time they arise to the time they go to bed. The Scriptures, being about the redemptive work of God through Christ to the praise of His glory, must be shared in their entirety, both Law and Gospel. Our children need to know that they are sinners from birth who must confess their sin and serve the holy God who created them. They must continually be led to repentance and must, by faith, cling to Christ as their only hope of salvation.

If by “evangelizing” is meant that children are treated as the children of pagans who have no part of God or of His community, we respectfully would disagree. God distinguishes between the children of believers and those of the lost. In 1 Cor. 7:14, Paul says that the children of believers are sanctified. To be “sanctified” in this context is not to mean “saved,” but it does mean set apart from the world. They are a part of the visible Church and we pray that God has indeed also called them as members of the elect, “invisible” Church. Until they demonstrate otherwise, we treat them as members and expect them to serve God fully.

One last important question. Do we not, by allowing our children participation in the very means God uses to increase our knowledge, love, and discernment (i.e. the preaching of the Word, prayer, and sacraments), best evangelize our children? The sacraments are *means* of grace, not *rewards* of grace. They are the divinely commissioned means by which our faith is nurtured, not the rewards of mature faith.

One of the reasons why the glory of God's covenant is not understood well by children is that so many churches keep them from participating in the Table. The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal and thus the confirmation of a covenantal relationship established with Christ and His Church at baptism. If we keep our children from the Supper, we undermine the significance of baptism (especially if our child has already been baptized) and introduce confusion into the minds of our children. We tell them that they were baptized as a reflection of the objective work of Christ, but then tell them they must individually proclaim a subjective, specific set of propositions before they can come to the Table. We thus deny with the Table what we acknowledged with baptism – that our children are in covenant with God. Rather than exhort them to be faithful to the obligations of God's gracious covenant which was symbolized by their baptism, we end up confusing the message by exhorting them to get into covenant with God.