

Dabney Center  
Spring 2006  
Sacraments, Part 2: Eucharist

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

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

--- St. Athanasius

### Lecture #1: What just happened?

Imagine you don't know anything about the Christian religion. You just happen to stumble into a church one morning, and you see people eating bread and wine together. You're wondering what this strange event could be. Several questions come to mind: What just happened? Why bread? Why wine? Who all is doing the eating and drinking, and how often? How does this meal form and shape them? Suppose that after the service, you are given an opportunity to chat with the pastor. What would he say to your queries? In these four lectures, we seek to give biblical answers to these questions.

First, it is fundamental to understand that the Lord's Supper (or Communion, or the Eucharist) is God's gift to us. It is not a work we do for God, but a work he does for us. It is "the gifts of God for the people of God." Specifically, this is one of the central ways he gives us Christ and his benefits. If the Eucharist is a mere symbol, it does nothing for us; it can only cast us back upon ourselves, our works, our ability to conjure up faith. The Eucharist is only worth doing if Christ is really present in the sacrament, offering himself to us. Flannery O'Connor explains:

I was once, five or six years ago, taken by some friends to have dinner with Mary McCarthy and her husband, Mr. Broadwater. (She just wrote that book, "A Charmed Life.") She departed the Church at the age of 15 and is a Big Intellectual. We went at eight and at one, I hadn't opened my mouth once, there being nothing for me in such company to say. . . . Having me there was like having a dog present who had been trained to say a few words but overcome with inadequacy had forgotten them.

Well, toward morning the conversation turned on the Eucharist, which I, being the Catholic, was obviously supposed to defend. Mrs. Broadwater said when she was a child and received the host, she thought of it as the Holy Ghost, He being the most portable person of the Trinity; now she thought of it as a symbol and implied that it was a pretty good one. I then said, in a very shaky voice, Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it.

That was all the defense I was capable of but I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about it, outside of a story, except that it is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable.

What makes the Lord's Supper unique is that in this meal, we receive Christ. The whole Christ – the glorified God-man – is really present through his Spirit to bless (or chastise, or curse) us as we feed upon him. While the church has debated the mode of Christ's presence in the Supper, virtually all Christians agree that there is some special communion with God in the meal. It was John Calvin's genius that best summarized the biblical view (though Luther had already come very close).

Debates over the "real presence" began to arise in the ninth century, with the major splintering taking place at the Reformation. The controversy mainly centers over the relationship between the symbol and the reality. What kind of predication is involved in the words of institution? What does "is" mean? How can body and blood be present if they are not perceptible?

To begin, the real presence may be regarded as a subspecies of God's special presence in worship as a whole. Several passages speak of Christ's special presence in connection with the church. Note that the often quoted verse Mt. 18:20 follows on the heels of a passage about church discipline. In context, this verse means Christ is present with the courts of his church, enabling them do what verse 18 promises, namely, pronounce God's verdict on earth. While there are certainly other applications of 18:20 beyond church discipline, the reference is nonetheless clearly to the church's gatherings (i.e., in her capacity as an institution or organization). After discussing how Christians may meet with God in private worship, Peter Leithart writes, "Yet the people of God still meet him chiefly in the *assembly*."

When the writer to the Hebrews encouraged his readers to approach the Lord with confidence, he immediately added a warning against forsaking the assembly of God's people (Heb. 10:19-25). Throughout the book of Acts, we rarely read of the early Christians in their private prayer closets (but see Acts 10:9), but frequently find them gathering to break bread (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1, 42; etc.) Certainly Christians ought not neglect private worship and prayer, but private worship should not be separated from worship of the church. Even in the new covenant, meeting God in worship is a *corporate* as well as an individual act" (*Kingdom and the Power*, p. 91). In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, the emphasis is on the corporate side of worship.

The OT gives us a context for understanding what happens in communion in the new covenant. In the old covenant, God set up his house in the midst of his people. The architecture and furnishings of the tabernacle/temple showed what God had in store for his people. The altars on which sacrifices were made were also tables. To go to God's house for a meal (a peace offering) was to be YHWH's special guest. He would be the host, and would show forth divine hospitality. But in the old covenant situation, God's people were not yet ready to enter the fulness of God's presence, so meals were held in the courtyard of the house. In the new covenant, the veils have been torn, and God's house is fully opened up to all his people (Heb. 10:19ff). We may come into his presence to hear him speak and eat his food. In the Holiest Man, Jesus, we have access to the Most Holy Place.

But questions about the manner of Christ's presence in the Supper – his "special-special" presence -- persist.

On opposite poles, the mentalism of the memorialists and the transubstantiation of Rome are both shot through with problems. In memorialism, we do not receive Christ, we recall him. It is our act of cognition that connects the sign to the reality. The "real presence" is totally subjective and communion becomes our work. The Roman church is not totally monolithic, but transubstantiation in its standard form is based on an Aristotelian metaphysic. Aquinas argued that the sacraments of the new covenant could not be a mere symbols like the shadows of the old covenant. The substance of the elements is converted at the point of consecration, but the accidents remain. These categories are alien to a biblical doctrine of creation. It also tends towards a view of resacrificing Christ in the mass and the adoration of the host, both of which are problematic.

The Lutheran view, popularly called consubstantiation, taught that Christ's flesh and blood are present in, with, and under the elements -- in other words, the flesh and blood of Christ somehow occupy the same space as the bread and wine. (As proof, Lutherans pointed to Jn. 20:19 where Christ apparently passed through a wall. As Christ entered the room, his body and the wall must have occupied the same space.) In the Lutheran view the elements are bread, but *also* body, and wine, but *also* blood. Hence, Lutherans would say we really partake of Christ with our mouths. Luther did not object to adoration. Yet Lutherans rejected the Capernaite heresy, which taught that our teeth actually tore apart his flesh. Its hard to see how this is a consistent position: if Christ is physically and locally present in the bread, how do we not tear his flesh with our teeth when we bite into the bread? The solution, given in the *Formula of Concord*, is that we partake of Christ *supernaturally*. Lutherans were careful to distinguish their view from the Calvinistic view, which they explicitly called a very dangerous doctrine. Furthermore, the Lutheran view failed to live up to its billing to take the words of institution literally, since Luther inserted the prepositions "in," "with," and "under."

Calvin similarly often went to great lengths to distance himself from the Lutheran view. He rejected corporeal and local conceptions of Christ's presence. However, he insisted on the real (or true) *objective* presence of Christ in the Supper and both Lutherans and Calvinists insisted on faith if one was to partake worthily. Calvin wrote, "[It] is not an empty or unmeaning sign which is held out to us, but those who receive this promise by faith are actually made partakers of his flesh and blood. For in vain would the Lord command his people to eat *bread*, declaring that *it is his body*, if the effect were not truly added to the figure. Nor must it be supposed that we dispute this point [with the Lutherans, I assume, since he had just previously referred to their doctrine], whether it is in reality, or only by signification, that Christ presents himself to be enjoyed by us in the Lord's Supper; for, though we perceive in it nothing but bread, yet he does not disappoint or mock us, when he undertakes to nourish our souls by his flesh. The true eating of the flesh of Christ, therefore, is not only pointed out by the sign, but is likewise exhibited in reality...our souls feed on Christ's own *flesh* in precisely the same manner as *bread* imparts vigour to our bodies. The *flesh* of Christ, therefore is spiritual nourishment, because it gives life to us. Now it gives life, because the Holy Spirit pours into us the life which dwells in it" (Comm. on Mt. 26:26). Calvin explains further the presence of Christ and the role of the Spirit: "Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such a great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space. Now, that sacred partaking of his flesh and blood, by which Christ pours his life into us, as if it penetrated into our bones and marrow, he also testifies and seals in the Supper -- not by presenting a vain and empty sign, but by manifesting there the effectiveness of his Spirit to fulfill what he promises. And he truly offers and shows the reality there signified to all who sit at the spiritual banquet, although it is received with benefit by believers alone, who accept such great generosity with true faith and gratefulness of heart" (ICR 4.17.4). Calvin insisted on a *substantial* partaking of Christ in the Supper, though he deliberately refrained from attempting to explain the mechanics of the true presence.

Thus, both Calvinists and Lutherans wrestled with this mystery, coming to slightly different answers. I must confess I find Calvin's view superior and closer to the biblical truth, because it does not compromise with the Eutychian or Nestorian errors (see below) and it quite properly emphasizes the sacramental role of the Holy Spirit in the Supper. The Holy Spirit acts not as a replacement or substitute for Jesus, but to make Him present to us in his undivided deity and humanity. However, neither side can claim (or would want to claim) to

have fully solved the enigmas of Christ's presence in the Supper. The Lutherans claim we partake of Christ "supernaturally"; Calvin and the WCF used the term "spiritual" to describe our communion with Christ. (I would prefer "Spiritual" with a capital S to emphasize it is the work of the Holy Spirit.) Calvin was hesitant to use the term "real," often substituting the term "true" – Christ is *truly* present, to give us himself and his benefits. But this true presence is nevertheless real and substantial, though impossible to define in metaphysical terms. At best, in Calvin's discussion, the way in which Christ is present in the sacrament has been hemmed in, not pin-pointed. As Calvin said, the Supper can only be enjoyed, not explained.

Understanding the real presence properly derives from a biblical understanding of the person and work of Christ. All eucharist-ology is really christology, and debates over the nature of Christ's presence all flow out of early christological discussions. The Calvinistic doctrine of Christ's presence in the sacramental feast must be carefully circumscribed to avoid the heresies of Eutychianism and Nestorianism. Eutychius had been the leader of one of the parties represented at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. He taught that Christ was neither fully human nor divine, but a mixture of both. Christ possessed only one nature, his humanity being divinized. The Lutheran view of consubstantiation appears to have a trace of Eutychianism in it, since it requires the virtual omnipresence of Christ's humanity (1 Cor. 10, 15). Rather than teaching God's people are raptured up into Christ's presence by the Holy Spirit in sacramental worship, as Calvin taught, Lutherans claimed Christ descended to dwell in the elements. (Both ascent and descent themes have a basis in biblical theology.) The Lutheran view suggested that Christ's body must be capable of being in more than one place at a time. But human bodies -- even glorified bodies -- face limitations of space and time that divinity does not; in other words, even though resurrected bodies have properties we cannot fathom, *they remain bodies*. Calvinists have always seen this problem of the ubiquity of Christ's human body as the Achilles' heel of the Lutheran position (see Calvin's *Institutes*, 4.17.30-31). Calvin objected to it not because it was irrational but because it jeopardized the true humanity of Christ. At the same time however, Calvinists must beware of the Nestorian error. Nestorius, the leader of another theological party represented at Chalcedon, was accused of separating the two natures of Christ in such a way that they were two distinct personalities. The Reformed are in danger of Nestorianism because sometimes they give the impression only the divinity of Christ is present in the sacrament, to the exclusion of his humanity (e.g., Hodge). Chalcedon affirmed the orthodox position, condemning both Eutychianism and Nestorianism, by teaching that Christ is both truly God and truly man, having two natures in one person, "without mixture, without change, without separation, without division."

An orthodox doctrine of Christ's presence in the Supper must be based upon an orthodox understanding of the incarnation. Again, eucharist-ology must be based on christology. The best defense of the classical Reformed view is John Williamson Nevin's *The Mystical Presence* and his lengthy response to Charles Hodge published in the *Mercersberg Review*. Anyone interested in these questions *must* read and study Nevin's writings. Nevin built upon and developed Calvin's doctrine in a biblical-theological direction.

Related to question of the real presence is the nature of the Eucharist as an offering, or sacrifice. The Reformed have classically affirmed that the Supper is not a repetition of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice on the cross. But in the Supper, God's offers to us the Christ who was sacrificed once and for all. The fact that his body and blood are separated in the ritual points to his sacrifice. The glorified God-man still comes to us in humble form. As with the peace offerings of the Old Covenant (the offerings worshippers were invited to partake in at the tabernacle/temple), in the Lord's Supper we eat the sacrifice as a means of communion with God and his people. It is no coincidence that Jesus was crucified at the very moment the Jews were preparing their Passover lambs (Jn. 19:14). Jesus fulfilled and transformed the old covenant sacrificial system (including the Passover and other feasts) in the cross. In the Lord's Supper Christ gives us himself and the benefits of his cross.

But there is another sense in which the Supper is a sacrifice. It is our sacrifice of thanks towards God. This is what "Eucharist" means. In the Supper we celebrate God's victory with thankful hearts. The Supper is not a time for cold individualistic introspection, but joyful feasting together in triumph with the risen Christ. Calvin said in the Supper, even as God offers Christ to us, so we offer Christ to God. Our "eucharistic movement" answers to God's prior gift; we are simply returning in love what he has already bestowed upon us. We do this by offering ourselves as living sacrifices in Christ. Our thank offering is enveloped by Christ's propitiatory offering. The emphasis on thanks (note that there are two prayers of thanksgiving, before the bread and wine) reverses the fall and rehumanizes us (cf. Rom. 1:18ff). This ritual is training in how we ought to live as God's redeemed creatures. Our lives are to be eucharistic (not propitiatory) sacrifices (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

Further, we can connect all this to 1 Cor. 11:25-26. Jesus said, "Do this as my memorial." The memorial is not our subjective remembrance of what Jesus has done. Rather, the Supper is a covenant memorial, which, like other covenant memorials in Scripture (e.g., the rainbow; Lev. 2:2, 9, 16; Acts 10:31) calls upon God to "remember" his covenant promises. Thus, the "proclamation" of Christ's death in the Supper is primarily directed to the Father as well. We proclaim Christ's death so that he will remember what his Son has done for us and hold our sins against us no more.

What about the Supper and unbelievers? The Supper is an objective means of grace – a real and true offer and promise if Christ and his benefits. It is the "cup of blessing" according to Paul. And yet the blessings of the Supper must be received in living faith. Otherwise, the Supper can bring chastisement (as in 1 Cor. 11) or even curse. In 1 Cor. 11, the Corinthian Christians were being judged negatively because they were not partaking in unity. They were dividing the body between rich (who feasted) and poor (who went hungry). Their Supper practices contradicted the very meaning of the Supper. But the Supper itself, considered according to its design and nature, is God's gracious gift to his people.

While the Supper is intrinsically gracious, we only receive what we carry away in faith. There is no sacramental neutrality – *something powerful happens every time a person comes to the feast, either to drive him closer to heaven or push him closer to hell.* The sacrament will either be a feast of life or of death, a foretaste of eternal bliss in the presence of God or eternal damnation in utter darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The same is true of the preaching of the gospel – the Word is an “aroma of Christ” unto the elect, drawing them to the Savior, but the “smell of death” to the reprobate, hardening them in their sins (2 Cor. 2:14-17). The Word comes to save or judge, but it always accomplishes its intended effect, and it never returns void (Isa. 55:10).

All this is to say, the Lord’s Supper is simply the gospel (in edible form). We must integrate discussion about the Supper into our view of the gospel narrative. We must not get hung up on metaphysical questions, and miss the really important thing. Christ’s promise to be present in bread and wine, eaten and drunk by his people, is not primarily a theological puzzle to be solved but a gracious offer of life and hope to be received by faith. If it’s just a symbol, “to hell with it.” But if it’s Christ’s self-gift, “to heaven with it.” We must receive it and rejoice in it. The mystery of the Supper is not in the conversion of the elements into something else – it is the mystery of Christ giving himself in his Spirit through these means, as we eat and drink; it is the mystery of the Spirit joining us on earth to the glorified Christ in heaven. The Supper is all about union and communion. The Supper means all that union with Christ means – which is to say it *is* salvation.

## Lecture #2: Eating the Elements

Why did Jesus make the central ritual of his community eating bread and wine together?

Why eating? Eating is a sign of our dependence as creatures. We are needy and hungry. This is not simply because of the fall; even before sin entered, Adam was a hungry being. The Lord's Supper is a sign that only God himself can satisfy our deepest longings (Ps. 145:16). Our physical hunger is a sign and shadow of our hunger for God. Not only that, but since all our food is dead, hunger teaches us the God (specifically, the Holy Spirit) must be the Lord and Giver of life. We cannot get life and sustenance from anything in ourselves or any other part of the creation.

The gift of food takes us back to the Garden of Eden. Adam was made to eat the world. In this sacrament, we are given the food of the new creation. There are many links between the Supper and the original Garden situation. Luke 24:13ff shows that in the Supper, the eyes of a new husband/wife pair were opened (cf. Gen. 2-3). In Rev. 22:2, we find a fruitful tree of life in the midst of the New Jerusalem, pointing to the sacramental food offered in the church.

Eating is incorporation (cf. the analogy with sex/one-flesh in 2 Cor. 11:2-3). Eating is a covenant forming/bonding act. In the OT, God "eats" the sacrifices offered on his altar-table. Leviticus calls the sacrifices God's "bread" or "food," though, of course, this does not indicate any "lack" in God (Ps. 50). Rather, God's acceptance of sacrifice is an act of love and grace. God's communal life is "open" to those who seek him in faith He desires fellowship with us, and does so by means of food. Thus, in the sacrificial system, the worshipper is representatively and symbolically ingested by God (cf. Rev. 3:16) and grafted into the glory cloud as the Spirit-fire on the altar consumes the sacrifice. In the peace offerings, the worshipper got to eat God's own food as well. In this way, he was sacramentally united to Christ. The manna from heaven and water from the rock in the wilderness served the same purpose – communion with the coming Christ (1 Cor. 10).

"You are what you eat" is sound theology. As we eat the body of Christ, we *become* the body of Christ. The body/bread is not only Christ's glorified humanity, it is the church. We are not only incorporated into Christ in the Supper; we are incorporated into one another. The mutual eating of the Lord's Supper forms and bonds the church into the covenant community. "The Eucharist makes the church" is a theological slogan with sound biblical warrant (cf. 1 Cor. 10-11).

The rite of the Supper is about eating and drinking. This is what we are commanded to do. We do it as Christ's memorial (cf. rainbow). The sacrament does not take effect as we look at it, as the elements are prayed over, or at the words of institution. It's when we eat and drink together in this context that we receive Christ. (This is called receptionism, over against consecrationism.)

From beginning to end, the Biblical story is a narrative of feasting. It begins in the Garden, where "every tree" is given to Adam for food (with one temporary exception). The story of eating continues when Abraham is fed by Melchizedek (Gen. 14). It continues in the history of Israel, with manna from heaven, and the multiple feast days of the old covenant calendar. The prophets described the coming kingdom as a feast (Isa. 25). Jesus came eating and drinking – and was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton. Jesus' most scandalous act was eating with sinners (e.g., Luke 15). He began his public ministry with a wedding feast, complete with the best wine (Jn. 2). When he wasn't eating and drinking, he was talking about it. Most of his parables center around food and feasts. When Levi was called, the first thing he did was throw huge a banquet (Lk. 5). All of Jesus' meals foreshadowed the Last Supper, which was really the First Supper of the new covenant. After Pentecost, the new Israel continued its life together by fellowshiping around food (Acts 2, 20, etc.). The book of Revelation ends with the wedding supper of the Lamb. Truly it may be said, "the kingdom of God is a party." We eat and drink our way into the kingdom.

Rightly, C. S Lewis said God is the ultimate materialist. The kingdom is comes from another world, but it envelops this one, and transforms (rather than rejects or replaces) our physicality. The Supper's centrality is the ultimate affirmation of the goodness of creation and the ultimate antidote to gnosticism in all its forms.

Why were these elements chosen for the central Christian act of worship? See Ecc. 2:24-25, 10:19, Ps. 104:27-28. Bread and wine are the most basic foods. On day 3 of the creation week, God makes grain and fruit plants – the plants from which sacramental elements derive. Bread and wine encompass the whole of human life and experience. Bread is alpha food – our basic sustenance, which makes work possible. Wine is alpha drink—it enables us to rest and celebrate our work after it's completed. The Supper is all of life in a symbolic microcosm.

Bread and wine are for our enjoyment. God is not parsimonious with his gifts. Bread and wine were created by God to bring man pleasure. We should not be embarrassed by this. Pleasure -- even physical pleasure -- is not intrinsically evil. There is nothing wrong with enjoying God's creation so long as we do so lawfully and to his glory (Mk. 7:1-16; Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 10:23-26). Calvin said, "We are nowhere forbidden to laugh, or be satisfied with food, or to annex new possessions to those already enjoyed by ourselves or our ancestors, or to be delighted with music, or to drink wine" (*Institutes* 3.19.9). Commenting on Ps. 104:15, Calvin wrote "It is lawful to use wine not only in cases of necessity, but also thereby to make us merry." (The Scripture clearly endorses the use of alcoholic beverages even for uses other than communion, though this freedom needs to be qualified in at least two ways: It must be within the bounds of the law of God,

namely, in moderation, to God's glory, showing love for others. And it must be done in the right context. Christians are forbidden from drinking with certain people -- specifically, drunkards [Prov. 23:20] and hypocrites [1 Cor. 5:11]).

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

Note that the Supper does what it does, not in the contemplation (or adoration) of the elements, but in their reception. The elements are the body and blood to us as we eat and drink them, and not in any other way. We must "Do this!" -- and the doing is eating. (Again, this is a receptionist, rather than consecrationist, view of the Supper.)

Why bread?

Bread was used extensively in old covenant worship. It is part of God's good creation, the fruit of the earth. But bread is not found "in the raw."

The processes used to make bread indicate that God welcomes not only our persons, but our works and culture, into his kingdom. Bread -- human labor at work transforming the creation -- is the "stuff" out of which God makes all things new. The Supper does not use something raw, but something man has shaped. Thus, the Supper is rightly regarded as a double offering -- God offers us the gift of Christ, but we offer ourselves and our works in union with Christ as a thank offering (as we noted above).

Leithart points out that "Jesus instituted that most common of all human activities -- eating and drinking -- to symbolize the kingdom and to communicate life to his people...the Eucharist teaches that it is precisely *this* world -- this material, physical world of eating and drinking -- that is the 'matter' of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is ultimately *this world* transfigured by the Spirit...the Eucharist teaches that *this* world is to be redeemed, transfigured into the kingdom of God." The Supper is proof that man and the rest of the universe will ultimately fulfill God's original purpose for the creation. Sin has not thwarted the plan of God but has been overruled for his ultimate glory and man's good. Warfield echoes this: Through the redemptive work of Christ, "the human race attains the goal for which it was created and sin does not snatch it out of God's hands: the primal purpose of God with it is fulfilled" (*The Plan of Salvation*, p. 102-103). The Supper is proof God's goal for the creation will be accomplished -- and indeed has been accomplished already in Christ's work.

Both leavened and unleavened bread have a place in the liturgy -- leavened to represent the dynamic potency of the kingdom as it transforms all of human life, and unleavened to represent our break with the old creation and entrance into the new through repentance from sin. (Unleavened bread is especially appropriate for Lent.)

Why wine?

This is more controversial since so many churches today do not use wine. Let's briefly trace out a biblical theology of wine:

- Wine is a sign of rejoicing in Scripture. It symbolizes the joy of God's people in his redemptive work. The OT uses wine repeatedly to portray the gladness that will accompany the coming of the Messiah and his long awaited salvation (Isa. 25:6; 55:1; Amos 9:13-15; Zech. 9:15-17). We see this anticipation fulfilled in the NT when Jesus contrasts the joyous age he ushers in with the old order, of which John the Baptist was the last representative member (Lk. 5:33-39; 7:33-34). Wine symbolizes rejoicing in a way unfermented grape juice does not. Wine is a reminder that the Supper is a joyful feast in which we give thanks and praise to God. It was not meant to be a morbid, doleful, sour event, as many Reformed Christians have come to view it. The holy feast signifies a great wedding banquet, not a funeral for a departed friend. It was said of the joyous, exuberant early Protestants that they were drunk with the wine of the forgiveness of sins; may the same be true of us as we drink the blood of our Savior who died to redeem us.
- God inspired Isaiah to prophesy of the coming days (clearly the New Covenant) when God's people would drink the wine they had worked to harvest "in the courts of my sanctuary" (Isa. 62:8-9). To not drink wine in church when we partake of the Supper is to nullify this prophecy.
- Wine was forbidden to the Levitical priests in the OT while they were "on the job." They could not drink wine in God's presence (in the tabernacle/temple; see Lev. 10:9) just as they could not sit down (Heb. 10:11). This is because their priestly work was never completed; they could not yet rejoice and rest fully before the Lord because no truly effective sacrifice had been offered. Likewise, OT worshippers had to pour out their wine offerings at the altar rather than drink them (Ex. 29:38-41, Lev. 23:13, etc.). In fulfillment of all this, Christ refused wine while performing his high priestly duties on the altar of the cross (Lk. 23:36). Jesus' vow to not drink until the kingdom came was probably a Nazarite holy war vow (Num. 6). His vow was completed when his cross work was done.
- After his priestly work was done he did drink (Jn. 19:28-30). Now that Christ has won for us victory over sin and gained for us access into God's presence, we are to joyfully worship our Lord in the Most Holy Place, with wine as a part of that worship. Now we drink wine in the place of worship rather than pouring it out on the altar, as God transforms us into living sacrifices.

- Over and over again in Scripture, God describes his people as a vineyard (Ps. 80; Isa. 5; Mt 21). Christ calls himself the “vine” and his people the “branches” (Jn. 15). If wine is intrinsically evil, why these images?
- Just as wine was a necessary part of several OT sacrifices, so it also was required in several OT feasts, most notably Dt. 14:22-27, where the people drank in celebration of God’s goodness. If anything, NT worship should be far more festive because we have so much more to celebrate. It is therefore not surprising God would command wine as a part of sacramental worship in the new age Christ inaugurated. We drink a toast to our Savior in honor of his redemptive accomplishments on our behalf. But actually, we drink much more than just a toast in remembrance of Christ: we have fellowship with him as our risen and reigning Savior, eating and drinking the forgiveness of sins, and sanctifying grace.
- Melchizedek (either a preincarnate Christophany or a prefiguring of Christ) served Abraham wine and bread in a victory feast (after Abraham routed the four kings) that clearly foreshadowed the Lord’s Supper Christ serves us (Gen. 14:18).
- The fact that we eat and drink with Christ is proof that the kingdom is here (Lk. 22:29-30). Fermenting wine symbolizes the advance and maturation of God’s kingdom. With the coming of Christ, new wine has been poured into old wine skins. The boundaries of the Old Covenant have burst; the gospel is no longer “bottled up” in Palestine but has been “uncorked” and now runs over into Gentile lands. It is air from the fermentation process which causes the old skins to break as the yeast transforms the liquid from grape juice into alcohol; this is a wonderful picture both of Christ transforming the Old Covenant into the New Covenant, as well as the effects of the gospel transforming the world as it spreads. Of course, the skins of the old covenant can’t contain the wine of the new covenant so new skins (new forms of worship, new community) are needed (Mt. 9:17; Mk. 2:18-22; Jer. 31:12; Hosea 2:22; Joel 2:19, 24; 3:18; Amos 9:13-15).
- Most importantly, Christ appointed wine to serve as the sign and seal of his blood shed for his people. The “blood of grapes” (Gen. 49:11) seals the “blood of the New Covenant” (Mt. 26:28). Certainly Christ knew what he was doing when he chose an alcoholic beverage to be a part of one of the church’s permanent rituals. The symbolism of wine is thus at the heart of the gospel. It represents the basis of our past hope (Christ’s cross, where he shed his blood), our present hope (ongoing forgiveness and communion with the Savior), and our future hope (when we will sit down at the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb at his triumphant return). The blood of Christ is wine for the soul. God causes our cups to run over (Ps. 23:5) as we feast in his presence at the table he has set before us!
- God himself is a wine drinker (Jdg. 9:25; Ps. 78:65).

This is not to say that wine cannot be abused. The Bible is replete with warnings to that effect. But that’s just the point: the Supper trains us in the right use of wine. It trains us in the right use of power and of God’s good gifts. Christian liberty has less to do with what we drink as how we drink (Rom. 14, 1 Cor. 8) – we should never violate the rule of love. But the right practice of of the Supper (that is, using wine) is not an area of Christian liberty. Why do we think we are wiser than God, free to alter his rituals? Why don’t we realize that wine’s danger is precisely one of the reasons it was chosen? There is only one food law in the new covenant – “Do this.” Let us “do it” as Jesus taught us. (This is a great time to kick in a strict application of the “RPW”!)

Wine, like many other biblical symbols drawn from the creation, can serve as a sign of blessing as well as cursing. The cup of salvation becomes the cup of wrath and condemnation to unworthy partakers; rather than drinking the forgiveness of sins, such hypocrites drink damnation (Job 21:20; Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17ff; Jer. 49:12; 51:7). Even believers who abuse the communion table suffer negative sanctions (1 Cor. 11:30). Wine is often used as a sign of God’s wrath against his enemies (Ps. 78:65; Isa. 63:3-6; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 17:2; 19:15). God curses drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:21, 29-35 Isa. 5:11; Lk. 12:45; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Gal. 5:19-21), and drunkenness itself can be a form of God’s judgment on a people (Isa. 28:7, 8; 49:26; Jer. 13:13-14; 25:16; Ezek. 23: 28, 33; Nah. 1:9-10; Hab. 2:15-16; Lam. 4:21-22; Rev. 19:6, 19). The bottom line: Drunkenness is a terrible wickedness that distorts one’s view of reality, clouds one’s moral judgment, destroys one’s productivity and family life, and possibly leads to addiction. It is a heinous sin to be avoided and detested by God’s people. But none of this detracts from the glorious meaning of wine at the table. Instead it reminds of the potency and conditionality of the table.

### Lecture # 3: Who may partake? What is the effect of partaking?

The Supper belongs to the baptized (1 Cor. 12). It is for the whole covenant community.

This is controversial with respect to children in Presbyterian circles, so we will briefly build a case for paedocommunion.

1. For the new creation to really manifest a new humanity, it must include every age and stage of life found in the old creation. Otherwise, redemption is not co-extensive with creation, and some portion of “nature” is beyond the reach of “grace.”
2. The covenant promises and practices always include children. The covenant signs include the next generation. There was no meal an adult Israelite could partake of that excluded his children.
3. Covenant children are regarded as believers in Scripture (e.g., Ps. 22).
4. Jesus welcomed covenant children to himself. Surely “Let the little children come” includes coming to the table – where else can they go to meet Jesus?
5. Our children are members of the body, and there must be included, lest we fail to rightly discern the body (1 Cor. 10-12). Paedocommunion is consistent with Reformed ecclesiology.
6. Overall, church history is weighted towards paedocommunion. The Reformers restored adults to the table, but did not really consider the arguments for restoring children.
7. No argument against paedocommunion holds up under scrutiny. Passages that are used to bar them from the table are wrongly used (cf. 2 Thess. 3:10).

What is the effect of regular, faithful participation in the Supper? The Supper is not only an expression of faith; it is formative of our faith. Faith is never just an inner disposition; it is always already embodied. Thus, what should be the faith-content embodied in our practice of the Supper?

How does the Supper “norm” church life? For too long we have focused on the narrow effect of the sacrament on the individual (what Leithart calls the zoom lens) and we have neglected the wider ranging meaning and efficacy of the sacrament. What does the Supper say about and to the church? Are there ways in which our practices at the table contradict the church’s identity? Are there ways that our life together as a church community contradicts what we do at the table?

Also, faith is formed from the outside-in. The Word comes from outside of us. The sacrament also changes us from the outside. How should participation in the Supper continually reshape our faith? How does the external discipline of the Supper impose itself upon our heart commitments and attitudes?

Finally, what does a “spirituality of the Eucharist” look like? What does the Eucharist say about the kind of community or culture the church is, is becoming, or should be? The external form is not neutral; what does the Supper say about the Christian life? How does it model “the way things really oughta be”? How does the Supper ritualize what life in the kingdom is all about?

1. Gratitude – This is what “Eucharist” means. The Supper reminds us of both our creature-hood (we are dependent on God for our very life and being) and our sinner-hood (we are dependent on God for forgiveness and renewal). The Supper manifests that everything we are and have is a gift. We become our true selves when we are “eucharistic” (Rom. 1:18ff; Eph. 5:20). Just as refusal to give thanks is the root of all sin, so the fundamental posture of a redeemed life is to offer thanks to God. The basic liturgy of communion includes TWO prayers of thanksgiving to call attention to the eucharistic character of restored life. This is the only way to respond to God’s gifts.
2. Community – The Supper is inescapably communal and irreducibly social. We cannot do the Supper according to the biblical pattern in isolation; it is intrinsically fellowship oriented. A “private eucharist” makes as much sense as a “square circle” or a “married bachelor.” Bread and wine must be given and received, there must be sharing, we must eat together, etc. This is our family table/meal (e.g., Lk. 14:10-11; 1 Cor. 11:17ff); unites us not only to Christ, but to one another. Here, we learn proper table etiquette/manners/protocols. We are trained in the behavior codes of the City of God. We are tained to wait for one another, to not put ourselves first, to serve one another. Plus, meals are covenant bonding events (e.g., Ex. 24). At the table, we are covenanted anew to God and to one another. We experience friendship with God and one another (“companion” = one who shares bread). Because of the corporate and covenantal nature of the sacrament, it is a protection against individualism. The table embodies a kind of gospel equality as all partake together. The table manifests a kingdom justice and economics, as we eat together as one body. The table also requires that we live in unity and harmony, lest we partake in an unworthy manner (Mt. 5, 1 Cor. 11). The table trains us in the art and skill of peace making, reconciliation, and forgiveness. It should come as no surprise that churches which do not partake frequently are plagued by individualistic tendencies. Biblical piety does have an individual dimension, but this individual aspect is perverted if it is divorced from life in the Christian community, the church. The sacrament is something we do together; it is a constant reminder of our oneness in the body of Christ. Ignatius summarized the nature of Christian piety by saying, “Try to be together as much as possible.” The Supper is perhaps the preeminent way we “come together.” The symbolism of the “one loaf” and “the cup” (singular) reinforce this mutual fellowship of believers (1 Cor. 10:16, 17).
3. Mission – The old Latin rite ended with the words “*Ita missa est*,” meaning “You are sent out.” Having received God’s food, we are strengthened to serve in the world, to fulfill his mission and purpose for us, transforming the world into the home for God that it was



meant to be from the beginning. How does the Supper shape the church's missional consciousness? The Supper prepares the church to die for the life of the world. Though we commune with and feed upon the glorified Christ, the fact that the bread and wine are separated reminds us that there is no glory apart from sacrificial death. If we want to enter into resurrection glory, if we want to transform the creation into the kingdom, we must be willing to die. The table is a sign that suffering service is the way the kingdom comes. The table should give rise to the church's cruciform mission and vocation in the world. Of course, this is also linked with baptism, which initiates us into a life of suffering service as well, by placing our lives under the sign of the cross. As we are identified with the crucified and risen Christ in baptism, so the Supper reinforces this pattern of life upon us. Through union and communion with Christ, we are enabled to be the sign and instrument of Christ in the world. As we eat the body of Christ, so we more and more become the body of Christ – scars and all. The table trains us to use all we are and have to promote the good of the kingdom and world.

4. Hospitality – Because God has welcomed us with free food at his table, we are ready to go and help others in the same way. We are called to live like God lives, and that must mean hospitality. We are to imitate his generous welcome towards outsiders. We know we are not worthy to eat even the crumbs from his table, but he has fed us lavishly. By analogy, we are compelled to go and show mercy to others. Because his meal is not earned (e.g., Isa. 55:1), we are ready to show the same free grace in the world. God's "incarnational" ministry to us provides a pattern for our own word and deed ministry to others (Mt. 11, Jn. 13, etc.). Our words should expound our deeds, and our deeds should enact our words. God not only says, "I love you" (in preaching and absolution); he embodies that love for us at the table. We must learn to do the same (1 Jn.)
5. Goodness of creation and culture – William Temple rightly said, "Christianity is the most materialistic of all the religions." Capon said, "God is the ultimate materialist." The Supper trains us in a kind of "godly materialism." In the Supper, we glory in our sheer physicality – and the fact that the "Word became flesh." We embody the reality that we are not saved merely by the transmission of ideas, but incarnational action. In the Supper, products of human labor, transforming the creation, are consecrated to God. Thus, we know that all cultural transformation of the world is fit to be brought into God's kingdom, through Christ. Thus, the Eucharist calls upon us to be good stewards of God's creation, enjoying and wisely ruling over all he has made and put under our rule. The Supper, properly administered, is a real challenge to those who create taboos around certain aspects of God's good creation. This is especially true of wine in the Supper. In 1 Tim. 4:1-5, Paul uses very strong language against those who would forbid certain foods (and implicitly, drink). He says it is even demonic teaching. Why such a harsh condemnation? Because the goodness of God, as well as the responsibility of man for his sin, are at stake. If there is something wrong or inherently evil in the material creation perhaps man is not to blame for his sin. Just as Adam satanically wanted to blame the woman God gave him for the fall, these false teachers claim the problem is not with us but with our environment. Paul is attacking this false teaching that lodges responsibility for man's rebellion somewhere other than in man himself. To view wine as intrinsically evil is far more Platonic than Pauline; to refuse to enjoy wine is more Stoic than Scriptural. It is man's abuse of God's good gift that is sinful. Our rebellion turns God's blessing into a curse. But the gift itself, as well as the proper use of it, is pleasing to God. Anything in God's world is good and we are free to use it provided we do so with thanksgiving and for God's glory. If we are going to forbid alcohol simply because it can be abused why not forbid all sex and food and sleep as well since these too can be abused? The problem is not "in the stuff" as though sin were "out there" in the material world and we could avoid evil by avoiding contact with creation. No, the root of the problem is our sinful hearts. As Luther put it, "Do not suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the objects that are abused. Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we prohibit and abolish women? The sun, moon, and stars have been worshipped. Shall we pluck them out of the sky?" Cotton Mather put the same truth this way: "Drink is in itself a good creature of God, and to be received with thankfulness, but the abuse of drink is from Satan. The wine is from God, but the Drunkard is from the devil." This was the general Puritan attitude. The Puritans, including the first settlers in New England, paid their pastors (at least in part) in alcoholic beverages, but strongly condemned the abuse of alcohol. The early Puritans knew how to enjoy life, but they knew they had to do so within the boundaries of God's law. We see Jesus affirming a positive view of creation, and specifically wine, in his first miracle (Jn. 2:1-11). Jesus created an *overabundance* of wine in that act of "transubstantiation" – about 150 gallons! The Son of God drank publicly and socially, apparently without sin and without fear of hurting his witness (Lk. 7:33-35). Scripture actually commends the use of wine in several instances (Dt. 14:22-27; Prov. 30:6-7; Ecc. 9:7; 1 Tim. 5:23), while strongly warning against the dangers of drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 23:20; Eph. 5:18; etc.). Clearly, we may drink wine to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Wine is even promised as a reward for those who obey God (Prov. 3:9-10). All forms of asceticism, monasticism, neo-Platonism, and Gnosticism that deprecate the material world run counter to Christianity (Col. 2:20-23). We are to rejoice in the things God has made, just as he does (Ps. 104:31). As redeemed image bearers, we have dominion over the creation because in Christ, all things are ours (Gen. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 3:21-23). The creation is under our care and there is no reason to seek to escape it or require others to do so. As John Murray has said, "It is iniquity to condemn that which God approves." God approves of his creation. We must do the same. The Supper forms us in a pro-creation spirituality.
6. Joy – What is the Eucharist all about? Tomb or table? Funeral or feast? Much of contemporary Christianity is wrong at just this point; indeed, the problems trace back at least to the medieval church. But we should rejoice because at his table, God fills us with good things (Ps. 145:14-19). The Supper should cultivate joy among the people of God cf. Dt. 12, 14; Isa. 25). There is something gloriously excessive about the bread and wine of the Supper. It cannot be reduced to something merely utilitarian. The Supper is not merely to be used, but enjoyed. This is the most uncommon common meal imaginable.
7. Grace consciousness – Some may say, "I cannot partake because I am unworthy." When Christians say this, they show a total misunderstanding of the Gospel and the Supper. The Supper signifies and embodies all the gospel is about. Thus, to wrongly view the one is to wrongly view the other. The Supper trains us to understand the radical grace of God. Yes, we are sinners. And, yes this is

God's holy food. ("Holy" in the Bible means set apart, separated, unapproachable.) But even as sinners, we can partake of what is holy because in Christ we have become holy ourselves. "Holy things for holy people!"

8. Lord's Day – The Supper reveals the true meaning of the Lord's Day, not as a day of burdensome regulations, but a day of feasting and rejoicing. The Lord's Day should be the highlight of the week, and the Lord's Supper should be the highlight of the day.
9. Hope – As a God-ward memorial, each Supper cries out to God to keep his covenant, to once again vanquish tyranny, and to fulfill his covenant promises. "Til he comes" (1 Cor. 11) means the Supper has an eschatological emphasis. The Supper creates an eschatological longing, because of Christ's "real absence" – and that longing will only be fulfilled in the consummation. Before Israel entered the promised land, her spies brought back "ahead of time" huge grapes and other fruits. These were signs of their promised hope and inheritance – a foretaste of what would someday be theirs. In the same way, the Supper is our present foretaste of what is to come. It is a taste of the future in the present. It comes from the future "promised land" into the present, by means of the Spirit, to empower us for the journey and the battle. The Supper is proof that God is redeeming his fallen and sin-cursed creation through the finished work of Christ; in this sense it is an eschatological feast foreshadowing the consummation and the renovation of all things in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:9-10, 20-23; Col. 1:15-20). God has accomplished definitively this restoration of the cosmos in Christ, and the fruits of his redemptive work progressively permeate and penetrate the culture of man as the Kingdom of God spreads (Mt. 13:31-33; Dan. 2:44-45; Isa. 11; Rev. 11:15). Thus the Supper, as the king's royal banquet, serves as the integration point for creation and redemption, life and liturgy, work and worship. A proper understanding of the Supper annihilates the secular/sacred dichotomy that has plagued the church for much of this century. Peter Leithart quotes Geoffrey Wainwright as saying, "The eucharistic celebration does not leave the world unchanged. The future has occupied the present for a moment at least, and that moment is henceforth an ineradicable part of the experience of those who lived it...the kingdom of God has come closer with each Eucharistic celebration." Leithart then goes on to say, "The Eucharist points toward the goal of creation and history – the eschatological wedding feast – and, if faithfully celebrated, brings that goal nearer to full realization. On the other hand, if the gift of the kingdom is offered to an unreceptive people, God intervenes to judge (1 Cor. 11:29-32). Either way, the celebration of the Eucharist leaves its inevitable mark on the world...The taste [of the Supper] makes us long all the more for the consummation of the promise, when we shall see God face to face, know even as we are known, and sit with him at his table in the eternal kingdom of heaven." (*ibid.*, p. 125-6). I would add, following James Jordan, that it is not only the real presence of Christ in the Supper that makes us long for His return; it is also the real absence of Christ that gives us this longing -- meaning that while Christ is truly present, He is not present in that full and final way that He will be when He returns. Weekly feasting with Christ heightens our anticipation for his return in a very profound way.
10. Testing – The Bible is filled with food tests (Gen. 2-3, Israel in the wilderness; Num.5/Ex. 32, Mt. 4, 1 Cor. 11, etc.). God tests us by means of food and drink. We must eat and drink in faith and unity to pass God's test.

In summary, the Supper calls upon to live distinctively gospel shaped lives in the church and world. The Supper, along with the other means of grace, nurtures and nourishes us in the life of the kingdom. It also establishes normative patterns for us to live up to, lest we betray our identity. The Supper incarnates the virtues and practices that train us for fruitful service. The Supper inculcates and encourages the church to embrace and enact the gospel in all of life. It both expresses our deepest faith commitments and continually reshapes them.

#### Lecture #4: How often? In what form?

The topic of frequency controversial because a lot of churches have moved away from the historic practice of weekly communion, to a more infrequent observance.

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

[Note on church attendance: This statement about church attendance may require some justification. The gist of this section of the book of Hebrews (chapters 8-10) is that the New Covenant is superior to the Old because the sacrifice of Christ is better than any animal sacrifice. Animal offerings were types and shadows of the final human offering yet to come that would put away sin rather than bringing it to God’s remembrance as Old Covenant sacrifices had done (Heb. 10:1-4). But implicit in this better offering is the better sanctuary in which it was offered. Old Covenant worship took place in an earthly tabernacle (Heb. 8:5). But Christ presented himself to the Father in the true sanctuary of heaven (Heb. 9:11). Now the tabernacle in Jerusalem is obsolete, as the events of 70 A.D. attest. The writer of Hebrews is showing that Old Covenant worship has been superseded and transformed with the redemptive work of Christ. New Covenant worshippers no longer go to an earthly tabernacle to meet with God; rather they go to church (the Christian assembly), where they are in some sense transported into the heavenly throne room of God, the Holy of Holies (Heb. 4:16; 10:19ff). Old covenant worshippers drew near to God by going to Jerusalem, the earthly Mount Zion (Heb. 10:2); we draw near to God in worship by assembling together in church, the heavenly Mount Zion (Heb. 10:19ff; 12:18-29; Jn. 4:21). Biblically speaking, the church’s formal gathered worship takes place in the heavenlies, in the very presence of God and angels. Thus to forsake the church, as 10:25 forbids, would be not only forsaking to meet with one another, but it would be forsaking to meet with God. Abandoning the church’s assembly is equivalent to apostasy in 10:26ff (compare to 1 Jn. 2:19 for another passage that virtually equates leaving the church with apostasy). If we forsake the church’s gathered worship, we are forsaking our weekly entrance into the Holy of Holies. A comprehensive look at this section of Hebrews makes for fascinating study and has several implications for worship that are often overlooked. But for our purposes, it will be sufficient to point out simply two considerations. First, the church, among other things, is the New Covenant temple and is therefore the meeting place of the covenant people with their God. The writer of Hebrews wants these Jewish Christians to know that God has “moved,” leaving the Judaic temple desolate (Mt. 23:38); he no longer resides in the earthly temple, but now dwells in the church, His people-temple (1 Pt. 2:4ff). The veil separating the people of God from the presence of God has been torn, and we are now free to enter in by this new and living way. Secondly, the New Covenant church, as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant temple, is now the center of what we may call sacramental/sacrificial worship. Just as feasts and sacrifices (Old Covenant sacraments) took place in the earthly temple of Jerusalem (Dt. 16), now the church is the place where we are cut open with the Word of God, in order to be transformed into living sacrifices (Heb. 4:12, 13). In New Covenant worship, *we* are the living sacrifices offered up to God (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15). Likewise, the church is now the place of feasting with God in his presence, just as the Old Covenant temple had been. Bringing these considerations together, we may conclude that when 10:25 requires attendance at church, it is requiring attendance at the sacramental (i.e., temple) service (Dt. 12:5-14; 14:22-29; 16:1-17). We are not necessarily required to attend a church event each and every time the doors open. But the church service that fulfills the temple typology and imagery, namely, the sacramental service, is mandatory for Christians. Of course, for churches that do not take weekly communion, this would seem to make church attendance optional quite a bit of the time. Obviously this is unsatisfactory; the sacramental service be held every Lord’s Day and all Christians have the duty to attend unless providentially hindered. Certainly, elders may see fit to schedule formal, sacramental, “temple” worship at various times, but we know from apostolic example that this kind of worship in the New Covenant church took place regularly on the first day of the week, the day of our Lord’s resurrection. This is the pattern we should follow.]

The central argument for weekly communion flows out of the pattern of covenant renewal worship. In Leviticus 9, we are given the template:

- Call to worship (9:5) – the people are gathered to draw near
- Sin offering (9:15) – confession and absolution
  - Ascension offering (9:16) – consecration through Word and praise
  - Tribute offering (9:17) – tithes and offerings (works) as tribute to our King
- Peace offering (9:18-21) – communion meal with God
- Benediction (9:22-23) – sent out with God’s blessing

This pattern is transformed by Christ, but it is not abrogated. It shows itself again and again, through out the Scriptures. The sacrifices follow a basic pattern that culminates with an covenant renewal meal. To lop off this part of the service is truncate the purpose of worship and miss our on abundant blessing.

There are other ways the OT points us typologically to a weekly observance, e.g., the priests eating the temple show-bread (“face bread,” or “bread or presence”) from the tabernacle every week. But let us turn to the NT.

It is surprising at first glance to realize that the New Testament gives very few explicit commands concerning formal worship. In light of 1 Corinthians, perhaps we could say we are told more of what *not* to do than what we actually should do. But the lack of explicit instruction in the New Testament epistles is not due to any insufficiency in Scripture; rather it is due to the nature of the church’s Old Testament precursors. The church is the fulfillment of both synagogue and tabernacle/temple. Of course, the New Testament presents Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the Old Testament temple (Jn. 1:14; 2:19; Col. 2:9). Similarly, Christians, because they are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ are called temples (1 Cor. 6:19). But by far the greatest number of New Testament references to the temple apply to the church corporately considered. I would contend that most references in Scripture to the church as God’s people-temple focus on corporate worship.

The church grew out of the synagogue, which grew out of the “holy convocation” mandated in Lev. 23:3, which in turn was patterned after the tabernacle itself. Jesus attended a synagogue and read Scripture there, thus putting God’s stamp of approval on the institution. The synagogue was staffed by Levites in local communities and was primarily a place of instruction. The tabernacle, and later the temple, was the place of sacramental/sacrificial worship. The OT saints were required to go to Jerusalem regularly for feasts after settling in the Promised Land. Eventually, even the Passover was moved to Jerusalem (Dt. 16). The imagery and symbolism of the temple is repeatedly applied to the NT church (see 1 Pt. 2:4-10; Heb 10:19-25; 12:18-29; Eph 2:19-22; 2 Cor. 6:16).

Thus the church’s formal meetings bring together both Word (synagogue teaching) and sacrament (temple worship, primarily the Passover). We can add prayer to this list because Jesus called the temple a “house of prayer” (Mt. 21:13). Worship is thus a form of corporate covenant renewal in which God meets with his people in a unique way. God draws near to us in preaching and the sacraments, and we respond in prayer and praise. It is this theology of worship that must serve as the background for our discussion of weekly communion.

To summarize, wherever Christians gather to worship, there is the Temple of God, the holy mountain (Jn. 4:21). The mountain was the place of sacred feasting (e.g., Ex. 24). There is no longer one central sanctuary in the New Covenant; worship has been *decentralized* with the coming of Christ and the pouring out of his Holy Spirit. (Of course, in another sense, worship is still centralized because there is still one central sanctuary -- but it is in heaven, not on earth.) It is our failure to deeply ponder the theology of worship found in the OT that has kept so much Protestant worship barren and minimalistic. The OT is full of liturgical theology that is critical to the New Covenant church, provided we make appropriate redemptive historical adjustments. Even in Presbyterian circles that are staunchly covenantal in other respect, a kind of “liturgical dispensationalism” frequently sets in and the OT (especially Leviticus) is ignored.

If the gathered church is the synagogue/temple/mountain of God, then it must include both Word and sacrament. To have one without the other is incomplete. Jesus fulfilled this pattern in the Upper Room (a mountain type environment) when he gave both the “new law” (Jn. 13) and the new feast (the Last Supper).

We must also keep in mind that apostolic example in the early church appears to have been considered normative. The “traditions” (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6) the apostles handed down to the churches they established are of universal and binding character, since the apostles served as the representatives of Christ and the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). There is much internal evidence in the NT to support this claim. For example, in 1 Cor. 11:2, Paul praises the Corinthians for “holding to the traditions” that he had passed on to them. However, in 1 Cor. 11:16, Paul chides the Corinthians for departing from apostolic practices followed in other churches.

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

Let us then consider the apostolic exegetical case for weekly communion.

First, consider 1 Cor. 11:17-20. Paul speaks of “your meetings” and “when you come together as a church.” That phrase “come together” in the context of a gathering of believers is used elsewhere to describe formal gathered worship (see for example 1 Cor. 14:26). Thus it seems that whenever the Corinthians gathered together as a church, they partook of the Lord’s Supper. It is hard to make sense of

this language in any other way. Paul did not say, “at *some* of your meetings...” He just says, “when you come together...” It seems a member of the Corinthian church could have said, “When we come together, we partake of the Lord’s Supper. At our meetings, we take communion.” These things could only be said by a church that practices weekly communion.

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

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

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

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

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

Therefore, we may reasonably conclude that we should have the sacrament every Lord’s Day.

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

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

Weekly participation serves as a safeguard against all kinds of unhealthy theological tendencies. Salvation does not mean escape from the physical environment or the material world, but escape from *sin* and its effects. We are saved in space and history, not outside of it. Weekly observance reminds us that biblical piety and worship are not divorced from the world but embrace it. Gathered sacramental worship is not something isolated from the rest of life or tacked on to the rest of life as an added “extra,” but the very means by which the kingdom transforms life in the world. In the Supper, heaven leaves its imprint on earth. The efficacy of the sacrament extends into the whole life of the true worshipper. Frequent administration of the sacrament protects the church from Gnostic and monastic influences. It fights the prevailing pietism and escapism of our day. Because the Eucharistic liturgy focuses on giving thanks to God, it puts us in the proper frame of mind for going back out into the world for another week’s work. Because we have given thanks to God while feasting at

his table, we are better able to give thanks to him in the rest of life's activities, allowing worship to flower into every facet of life. The kingdom and its influence thus flow out into all that we do. The Supper allows cult to shape culture, as it ought. It is a weekly reminder of the "sacramental" quality of all of life, and indeed of all of creation.

Recurrent ritual, so far from being subhuman or dehumanizing, is actually one of the most "human" things we do. The structure of the biblical liturgy, especially the Lord's Table, provides a regular outlet for emotion and expression in worship. Weekly communion, over time, will shape our understanding of Christian piety, worship, and community, as this pattern of feasting with Lord and each other every Lord's Day day becomes progressively ingrained in us. It frees us from the Stoic elements of contemporary evangelical piety. There is always the danger of trivializing or formalizing ritual, but this is true of every worship element, not just the Supper. It is my conviction however, that weekly communion is one of the best ways to prevent worship from becoming stale or hollow. In the Supper, Christ meets with us personally and corporately, giving his life to us through these elements and energizing our worship service with his Spirit.

While many in the church today (unknowingly under the influence of Rousseau, no doubt) believe spontaneity to be the essence of sincere worship, the wisest of Christians have seen great value in recurrent, basically unchanging liturgical forms. C. S. Lewis called the urge for constant novelty in worship the "liturgical itch." Continual change in the worship service actually becomes an obstacle to worship. Worship forms, like dance steps must be learned, and only when we have so learned them that we feel at home in them, can they become true vehicles of worship: "As long as you notice, and have to count the dance steps, you are not dancing but only learning to dance." The most helpful liturgy "would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping... There really is some excuse for the man who said, 'I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats?...' Lewis rightfully desires "permanence and uniformity in worship," saying he could "make do with almost any kind of service whatever if only it would stay put. But if each form is snatched away just when I am beginning to feel at home in it, then I can never make any progress in the art of worship. You give me no chance to acquire the trained habit." (*Letters to Malcolm*, 4-5). Should not the Lord's Supper be a constant part of our worship so that our congregations "feel at home" at the Lord's Table? Could it be that our desire for "freshness" in worship is really due to the desire to be distracted away from the God with whom we have to do?

Church history bears strong testimony to weekly feasting. While church history is never ultimately authoritative (as is Scripture), the historic practice and teaching of the church can give us further insight and set a precedent for us to follow. Weekly communion, so far from being an innovation of Rome, appears to have been the practice of the church from antiquity. The Roman Catholic church has become known for weekly communion today, but at the time of the Reformation the situation was quite different. One of the major controversies sparking the Reformation was the Roman practice of giving church members communion only once a year. Oddly enough, today this is one point on which the church of Rome is more "Calvinistic" than most Reformed churches.

To cite examples from antiquity, Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165 A.D.) and the *Didache* indicate clearly that the Supper was an ordinary part of worship every Lord's Day.

Justin Martyr: "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read...Then we all rise and pray...when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying, Amen; and there is a distribution to each and a participation of that over which thanks have been given."

The *Didache*: "But every Lord's Day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions."

J. J. Von Allmen traces the loss of weekly communion: "Up to the fifth century, it was taken for granted that all the baptized who were not excommunicate would communicate each Sunday. But for various reasons, and in particular because of a lack of balance in the development of Eucharistic doctrine -- which, especially in the West, favoured the memorial aspect to the detriment of the aspects of communion and parousia -- the communion of the faithful became ever less frequent, until about the ninth century it was on average annual communion; and this indifference threatened to become a matter of total abstention, so much so that the Lateran Council required the faithful to communicate at least once a year at the season of Easter. The Eucharist was still celebrated each Sunday, but the celebrant was almost alone in communicating. Thus, broadly speaking, communion was divorced from the Eucharist. Such was the situation faced by the Reformers. ...At the Reformation, Luther maintained the Sunday Eucharist, and normally the Anglican Church did likewise. The Reformed Churches were alone in giving it up...But whatever the truth of the matter, it is the fact that, despite hesitations which were never lacking, the Reformed Church, alone among the great liturgical traditions, excluded from its Sunday worship the celebration of the Lord's Supper." *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 147-153.

Further examples of ancient church practice, as well as the opinion of John Calvin, can be found in Calvin's *Institutes* 4.17.43-46. It is very evident that Calvin wanted to partake of the Sacrament weekly, if not more often. Unfortunately, he was not able to implement this practice in the church of Geneva, because a stubborn city council would not allow it. So much for the idea that Calvin was a dictator! Calvin says, "The Supper could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church very often, at least once a week...no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving. That this was the

established order among the Corinthians, we can safely infer from Paul.” Calvin called annual communion an “invention of the devil” and said the Lord’s table should be spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians.” Likewise, Luther, while not setting down a hard and fast rule, reports that Protestant churches in his day offered communion daily and wrote, “it is to be feared that anyone who does not desire to receive the sacrament at least three or four times a year despises the sacrament and is no Christian.” It appears Christians from the apostolic church onwards partook of communion weekly.

Many Puritans, including Reformed Baptists and Independents of the seventeenth century, practiced weekly communion. John Owen’s catechism included the following question and answer: “How often is the Ordinance of the Lord’s Supper to be administered? Every first day of the week, or at least as often as opportunity and conveniency may be obtained.” Westminster divines Goodwin, Nye, Simpson, Burroughes, and Bridge, all practiced weekly communion. While Presbyterians usually favored quarterly or annual communion, some Presbyterians, such as Richard Baxter, would have preferred weekly communion as the norm. (On the frequency of communion during this period, see Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, ch. 12.)

Thus, we can say with a great deal of confidence that if Reformed worship is to be truly *catholic* (in the best sense of the term), it must include a weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Von Allmen’s remarks are to the point: “We have not the right, unless we wish to injure the catholicity of our confession, to regard the Eucharist as an optional rather than essential element in the cult...We should be wasting our time on aesthetics and archaeology, and the deeper the exercise seemed to be, the more stupid it would be, if we were now to try to present a pattern of worship that lacked its peak point, viz., the Eucharist. What we must aim at in our Church is the healing of our liturgical troubles by the restoration of the primitive and normal rhythm -- namely, the Word and the Sacrament -- and all other things will follow” (288). In other words, all attempts at liturgical reform are purely academic apart from a restoration of the weekly Eucharist. Von Allmen says that restoration of the weekly Eucharist should be our highest priority and warns the Reformed church accordingly: “We cannot do everything at once [in the reformation of corporate worship] and the important thing is to know where to begin. The answer to this is clear: we must begin where it is most faulty, and where the fault has the gravest implications. We must begin by emphasizing the sacraments. For four hundred years the best minds among us have been demanding a weekly communion service and protesting against the amputation of our worship. For four hundred years, or nearly, it has become more and more glaringly obvious how greatly this deprivation of sacramental life not only impairs our cult, but falsifies our Church. Hence it is there that we must begin: we must restore to our cult what will fully justify it, namely the Lord’s Supper. Let all those who do not wish our Church, reformed according to God’s word to die (unless it were to be reborn along with other Christian churches in a new-found unity), let all such passionately demand as starving men clamor for relief, the restoration of the Eucharist. Let them apply to the authorities of the Church, demanding the re-introduction of the weekly communion service, by a measure that will be concerted and deliberate...In doing this, they would only be reminding the authorities of the duty of obedience to Jesus Christ. It is not easy, because obedience at this point will show clearly how divided and confused is our obedience at so many other points, and hence it will provoke strong opposition from church members. But this is no reason to grow disheartened, and a good educator does not easily submit to the limits and progress imposed by those whom he wishes to educate. Here then is where we must begin...If we do so, the other factors, a fuller participation of the laity and the introduction of a paschal character to the services, cannot fail to follow, probably more quickly than we think. In fact, if the Church has resisted attempts that have been made in these latter points by various liturgical movements, the reason is that we have not decisively begun with the sacraments. If we begin there, it will not seem like a demand of the laity (or like a desire on the part of the clergy to involve the laity, who are quite happy to see the clergy alone assume responsibilities for which they are paid), nor will it look like a pursuit of aesthetic-catholic aims. It will be manifest as a matter of simple obedience to Jesus Christ from which the rest will follow. But these other factors, as much as a new emphasis on the sacraments, will give our church a new look: it will again become, not Roman, certainly, but catholic. This we must know; and it is perhaps because we know it, or at least because we have a presentiment of it, that we are content to listen to our great doctors, from Calvin to Barth, demanding the weekly Eucharist, without giving into their demands. But if, in order not to become once more catholic (in the fullest sense), we are unwilling to obey Jesus Christ through the restoration of the weekly Eucharist (with all its consequences, liturgically and ecclesiologically), then the day will soon come when even what we have will be taken from us (cf. Mk. 4:25 par.)”

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

But there is another reason why a church may not want to take communion weekly. Not only may a church be afraid of coming under judgment; she may also be afraid of rendering judgment. Luke 22:29, 30 is used far less often in our communion liturgies than 1 Cor. 11, but it is certainly a significant passage. I take this passage to describe the *present* reign of Christ and the saints, consistent with New Testament teaching elsewhere. Christ definitively established his kingdom in his first coming (Mt. 4:17; 11:11-14; 16:28; 28:18-20; Lk. 11:20; 17:20-21; Jn. 12:12-15, 30-33; 18:36-37; Acts 1:8; 2:33, 36; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 1:19-23; 2:6; Col. 1:13; Heb. 1:13; 2:6-9; 1 Pt. 2:9; Rev.

1:5-6; 20:4-6) and bestowed his authority on his apostles. Of course, this kingdom will grow throughout history, and extend into eternity. The reference to eating and drinking in this passage must look back to the Lord's Supper, which, in Luke's account, was instituted just previously (Lk. 22:13-20). In the context, the disciples of Jesus were arguing over who would be the greatest. Jesus goes on to explain the essence of greatness in his kingdom: it comes from service to others and feasting at the King's banquet table (Lk. 22:24-30). Leithart says, "worship is a chief way we participate in Christ's rule over all things...Heaven is both the place where we meet with the triune God in intimate fellowship, and the place where we sit upon thrones ruling all things. Sitting is a posture both of kings and dinner guests; during our worship in the heavenly sanctuary, we both sit on thrones to rule and at a table for a feast" (*ibid*, p. 98).

The Supper is a means of judgment not only *on* the church, but *by* the church. Through her liturgy, the church shapes history and wages holy war on the world. Luke 22 connects the Lord's Table with the authority of his people. Communion furthers the dominion of God's people because in partaking they are exalted to sit with Christ on his throne (Rev. 3:21, 21; Eph. 2:6; see Calvin's *Institutes* 4.17.31). If we don't want to partake frequently, perhaps it is because we are afraid of the responsibility that comes with ruling and having dominion. First we dine with Christ; then we rule with Christ. We don't take communion weekly for the same reasons we don't do church discipline or sing imprecatory psalms: We are afraid of imposing God's negative sanctions on anyone. We don't want to serve as judges. As a result, sin goes unchallenged in the church and in the culture. The church never formally and officially asks God to judge the wicked and so God does not do it; the wicked among and around us continue to prosper. The sacrament empowers God's people for subduing the earth and exercising godly authority, but with this task comes tremendous accountability. Again, while this may explain why a church would not want the sacrament every week, it is actually another reason to do it. The Supper forces us to take responsibility, to deal with sin, to further biblical dominion, and to think more militantly. The twentieth century American church is wimpy; weekly communion may be the best way to strengthen her for war.

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

Some say, "The Supper will lose its meaning if taken so frequently." But why isn't this true of other elements such as preaching, singing, prayer, etc. as well?" Also, where do we draw the line? If having the Supper less frequently makes it more special, why not do it once a year? Or once a decade? Or even once a lifetime? Then it would really be special! This "psychological" approach to worship, which bases practices on subjective experience rather than God's Word, is very dangerous. We should start by asking "What does God require of us in worship?" rather than "What will we like the most?" Someone might reply to my response by claiming that the Lord's Supper becomes monotonous more easily than other elements; for example, preaching does not lose its freshness because we hear a different sermon every week. Once again, however, this misses the point. I'm sure the Levites got tired of offering up the same old sacrifices to God day after day, year after year (Heb. 10:11). The question is not about our personal preferences, but about God's requirement. The sacrament is objectively a vehicle of God's special presence, whether we subjectively feel anything special or not. Of course, partaking carelessly can be dangerous (1 Cor. 11:29) and this makes weekly communion a challenge to us all to stay on our toes spiritually. The subjective side of the sacrament *is* crucial -- we must partake in faith. But the bottom line is that God can and will use the sacrament as a means of grace to believers even if they don't get spiritual goosebumps every time they partake; the sacrament has *objective efficacy!* Worship is not simply about subjective experiences, but objectives *acts*. Also this objection can be reversed into a powerful (albeit subjective) argument in favor of weekly communion. The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon confessed that he feared that taking the Supper weekly might "take away from the impressiveness of the holy feast." Instead, he found it "to be fresher every time." He went on to say that those who took only monthly or quarterly did not really give the Supper "a fair opportunity to edify them" because they "so grossly neglect" it.

Finally, we must consider the form of the Supper. What is the liturgical shape of the rite? What are the actions that constitute the ritual? What exactly does "Do this" entail? How does the Supper make the church into the church?