

Paedocommunion: A Scriptural and Pastoral Presentation

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May 1, 2002

Note: In January of this year I reported to the Pastoral Committee that I had changed my view about paedocommunion¹ since coming into the Presbytery. As the 1988 General Assembly instructed, I was now making this exception to our standards known.² I also informed them that this change had come within the context of a study our whole session had conducted on this issue over the course of a year and a half, and that all of our elders had come to believe that this is what Scripture teaches. At the Presbytery meeting on January 28th, 2002, the decision about whether to allow the exception was tabled until the May meeting, and our session was directed to further study this issue and submit a paper giving a Scriptural defense of paedocommunion. This I now do writing for, and in consultation with, our other elders. Let me make clear that our session plans to continue to keep our practice in compliance with the BCO and are committed, as the motion of the Pastoral Committee would direct us, to handle this issue within in our body in a way that promotes the peace and purity of the church. The issue at hand, as we understand it, is simply whether my exception as a Teaching Elder will be allowed. Let me also make clear that there are much better presentations of this position and much more able defenders of it as well.³ But I do hope that this will suffice for the immediate purpose and that it might contribute something helpful to this discussion.

Hey, this issue is easy! It says right here in Acts 2:38, "Repent, and be baptized." Repent, and be baptized. There it is! What else can be said? An infant can't do that!

Have you ever heard this one? How do you respond?

Hey, this issue is easy! It says right here in I Corinthians 11 that anyone taking the Lord's Supper has to remember certain things, they have to examine themselves, and that they must discern the body of Christ! There it is! What else can be said? Little children can't do that! And if they can't they are in danger of God's judgment if they partake without doing this.

In presenting a scriptural and pastoral case for paedocommunion, I am structuring my main argument to follow the approach we paedobaptist might take with the objections we so often hear from Acts 2:38 and parallel expressions (Acts 8:37-38, 16:31-33). Then I will add a few other observations and applications at the end of the paper. So the structure of this paper is:

A parallel argument? Paedobaptism and paedocommunion

Scripture must interpret Scripture

- The OT teaching about God's dealing with households, His claim of the children of His people for His purposes and glory, and their being included in covenant

¹ Along with many others who take this position, I would prefer the term "covenant communion" as it more accurately describes this position -- that those who are in the covenant through baptism have a full right to the other covenantal sacrament, the Lord's Supper. This is not endorsing "infant communion" in which infants are force fed the elements. Rather, it is saying that baptized children should be brought to the Table as soon as they can "take and eat," something that my youngest child at 22 months has no problem doing!

² See PCA Digest, Position Papers, Part V, page 514

³ A good starting place is Robert Rayburn's excellent minority report to the 1988 General Assembly, "PCA Digest, Position Papers, Part V, pp. 502-514." A very good book length treatment of the position is the recently published *Feed My Lambs*, by Tim Gallant (Pactum Reformanda Publishing, 2002).

Identity and life

- New Testament affirmation
- Facing the Acts 2:38 challenge head-on
- Facing the I Corinthians 11 challenge head-on

Other observations and applications

Summary

Concluding Thoughts

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A parallel argument? Paedobaptism and paedocommunion

Scripture must interpret Scripture

When challenged with the Acts 2:38 argument, we often tell someone, "As Scripture interprets Scripture, we must consider this passage in context: the context of the passage, of the New Testament, and of the Old Testament!" We might add, "I promise I will come back and address your Acts 2:38 objection, but first let's broaden the Scriptural scope."

I would like to approach the I Corinthians 11 challenge to paedocommunion in a similar fashion. I promise, I will come back to address it before all is said and done.

So what aspects of context might be relevant to address the "Repent and be baptized" challenge?

The Old Testament teaching about God's dealing with households, His claim of the children of His people for His purposes and glory, and their being included in covenant identity and life

A few years ago, Charles Garland (former pastor of Decatur PCA, now a church planter in Portland, OR) and I had the opportunity to present the case for infant baptism to four Baptist minister friends. We started by reviewing many Old Testament passages that speak to God's heart for the children of His people. We asked these men to try to let these Scriptures sink deep into their minds and hearts. Below is a list of some of the passages we used, and others to which we could have referred. I know you are familiar with many, if not all, of these. But I would ask you to read slowly through these to review the importance of God's claiming of our children, His using our children in His purposes, the commitment one generation is to have to another in this process, and the importance of our children having a covenant identity as one of the people of God saved by grace. (I will explain the reason for the underline on some of these later in the paper.)

- Genesis 1:28 -- Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it
- Genesis 7:1 -- The Lord said to Noah, Go into the ark, you and your whole family
- Genesis 17:7 -- I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.
- Genesis 17:9,10 -- God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised."
- Genesis 18:19 -- For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.
- Genesis 22:17-18 -- I will bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of city of the their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

- Exodus 10:1-2 -- "I have hardened [Pharaoh's] heart ... that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians ... that you may know that I am the Lord."
- Exodus 10:9 - And Moses said, "We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD."
- Exodus 20:6 -- "but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me ..."
- Exodus 12:26-27 - "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'"
- Exodus 12:47-48 - "All the congregation of Israel shall keep [the Passover]. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it."
- Lev 22:10-11 - 'No outsider shall eat the holy offering; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing. But if the priest buys a person with his money, he may eat it; and one who is born in his house may eat his food.'
- Numbers 16:32 - the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions.
- Deuteronomy 4:9 - Teach them [the things your eyes have seen] to your children and to children after them
- Deuteronomy 4:40 - Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you
- Deuteronomy 6:1-9 - so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord... Impress [these commandments] on your children ...
- Deuteronomy 6:20-25 - "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?'" then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 'and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'
- Deuteronomy 7:9 "the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him ..."
- Deuteronomy 12:6-7 - "There [in the place God chooses] you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households..."
- Deuteronomy 12:17-18 But you shall eat [your votive or freewill offerings] before the Lord your God in the place which the Lord your God will choose, you and your son and daughter ...
- Deuteronomy 14:26 - "And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household."
- Deuteronomy 15:20 - "You and your household shall eat it before the LORD your God year by year in the place which the LORD chooses."
- Deuteronomy 16:10-11 - "Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand ... You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter"

- Deuteronomy 29:9-15 - Carefully follow the terms of this covenant ... All you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God ... together with your children and your wives ... You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God ...
- Deuteronomy 30:6 - The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart ...
- Deuteronomy 31:12-13 - Assemble the people -- men, women, and children ... Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God ...
- Deuteronomy 32:45-46 - Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law.
- Joshua 4:5-7 - [stones] to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, "What do these stones mean?" tell them ... These stones are a memorial to the people of Israel forever.
- Joshua 8:34 - There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.
- Joshua 24:15 - But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord
- 1 Samuel 1:4 - And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters.
- 2 Chronicles 20:13 - All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.
- Ezra 10:1 - a very large assembly, men, women, and children, gathered to [Ezra] from Israel
- Nehemiah 12:43 - Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.
- Psalm 8:2 - Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.
- Psalm 22:9-10 - But You are He who took Me out of the womb; you made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb you have been My God.
- Psalm 44:1 - We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago.
- Psalm 48:12-13 - Walk about Zion, ... view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation.
- Psalm 71:5-6 ... 17-18 For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; you are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from birth; you are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You ... Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who come.
- Psalm 78:1-8 - We will not hide [what our fathers have told us] from their children, we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, ... He decreed statutes ... which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.
- Psalm 100:5 - For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations
- Psalm 102:28 - The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you
- Psalm 103:17-18 - the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children ...
- Psalm 112:1-2 - [The man who fears the Lord] His children will be mighty in the land
- Psalm 127:3 - Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.
- Proverbs 1:8 - Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

- Proverbs 7:1 - My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you.
- Proverbs 23:26 - My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways.
- Proverbs 30:17 - The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.
- Isaiah 44:3-4 - For I will pour out water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit in your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow...
- Isaiah 54:13 All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace.
- Isaiah 59:21 - "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouth of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever"
- Isaiah 61:8-9 - Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.
- Jeremiah 32:38-39 - They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.
- Ezekiel 37:24-26 - And My servant David will be king over them ... they shall live on the land ... their sons, and their sons' sons ... And I will make a covenant of peace with them ...
- Joel 2:15-16 - Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants.
- Joel 2:18 - And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy ...
- Malachi 4:5-6 - I will send the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers

At a certain point in seminary a group of us were struggling with baptism, with the choice looming ahead of us of either throwing our hat in with the Reformed Baptist or the Presbyterians. Dr. Richard Pratt, feeling our pain, said, "Guys, you are making it so hard." I hate to break this to you, but it really is not hard. You just have to learn to come at the New Testament through the momentum of the Old Testament. If you will just "test drive" this issue from that direction, you'll find the thing is really easy! Well, that was the breakthrough I needed. And I do believe he is right. Look again at this list of Scriptures. Consider the amazing repetition of these themes at every point of the history of God's dealings and unfolding of His purposes. Consider the importance of our children being seen in the covenant, and seeing themselves in the covenant, recipients of God's amazing grace and those called to know, worship, and serve Him ... from the womb. Consider the importance of "fathers," both as heads of homes and as one generation to the next, knowing their responsibilities of teaching and modeling covenant faith, worship, and obedience, as they grasp the call to be instruments of covenant blessing and not covenant cursing to their children. Their children are in the covenant not because their children do something or believe something as individuals, but because they are theirs, thus saints in God's holy nation, and thus God's! And their whole lives were to be a process of maturing into this calling which is theirs by grace, with timely warnings of covenant judgment upon those who would forsake these blessings.

Of course, many Baptists might see all this and say, "Yea, this is impressive." It was a big deal for Israel because the whole focus was on blood connection and household connection. But doesn't the New Testament change all that? Doesn't God now deal with people more as individuals, and not in connection with households? Isn't that part of the greater responsibility of the greater gifts and provision, the more internal focus of the Gospel?

In our reply, we might start by pointing out facts such as:

This whole issue of the centrality of the next generation begins at creation, is affirmed in Noah, and then is applied, not begun, with Abraham and Israel. It was never just "an ethnic thing." That the prophets applied these truths looking to the days of the Messiah and the restoration of Zion, repeatedly stressing the ongoing role of the children of God's people. They repeatedly emphasized not only that children would not be excluded, but that their inclusion was a major part of the blessing!

That the covenant signs were never strictly external -- they were always outward signs of inward realities.

But, of course, the main thing we would do is go to the New Testament to demonstrate that this economy and these priorities have stayed the same.

New Testament affirmation

Here are some of the texts that many of us probably use to do that:

- Mark 10:13-16 - Then they brought young children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God."
- Luke 1:17 - [The angel speaking about John, quoting Malachi 4:5-6] And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous -- to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.
- Luke 1:50, 54-55 - "His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation ... He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and His descendants forever, even as He said to our fathers."
- Luke 19:8-10 - Jesus said to [Zacchaeus], "Today salvation has come to this house ..."
- Acts 2:16-17 - No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people." "Your sons and daughters will prophesy ..."
- Acts 2:39 - "The promise is for you and your children ..."
- Acts 11:14 - "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and your household will be saved."
- Acts 16:31 - "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household."
- I Corinthians 7:14 - Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.
- Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
- 2 Timothy 3:15 - and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Consider Luke 1:17: The context is the gospel (1:19), the good news or glad tidings that was announced in Isaiah (40:9, 52:7, 61:1) and described in Isaiah and in many other places.⁴ This anticipation of glad tidings spoke of a new covenant, a new day, in which God would, among other things, come to visit and restore Zion, to raise up His Messiah-King, to forgive Israel and give them repentance, to pour out the Holy Spirit upon them and their descendants, to exalt His Name among the nations, and to fulfill all His

⁴ The "gospel" is thoroughly grounded in OT expectations. Consider Luke 9:6 in which we are told the disciples went to these Jewish villages and households to preach the gospel (which was the same as preaching the kingdom -- 9:2; also see Acts 20:24-25). This is before disciples had any knowledge of the cross and resurrection of Christ. What gospel were they preaching? What gospel was communicated when they sat around the table and talked with the Jews in the homes where they were received? Obviously, it was one that entirely comprehensible and identifiable within the context of the OT, even though the end of the story was yet to be understood and would have a few surprises. All this helps us see the profound continuity and fulfillment in the NT and in the gospel, which is important in our arguments both for infant baptism and paedocommunion.

promises. God would be faithful to His covenant! Interestingly, God chooses to break the silence of the years since the close of the Old Testament by putting in Gabriel's mouth the last words He spoke -- that at the heart of these glad tidings would be the turning of the hearts of fathers to the hearts of their children. This is not sentimental, but is summing up and capturing the whole Old Testament of effective transmission of this identity and calling down through the generations, something that God has revealed as central in His purpose. And God makes clear in Luke that this is at the heart of the gospel and the kingdom He is bringing about through His Son (Luke 1:32-35). In other words, the covenant connection, unity between generations, and vibrant transmission of truth and commitment from one generation to the next are all at the center of the gospel! At the heart of the kingdom!⁵ And vital to the outworking of God's promises to Israel, and through them to the world, that are "Yes" in Christ Jesus.

Now we might, at this point, suggest this to the one defending the Baptist position: I'll line up the Scriptures I just covered in a column on the left side of a page. And then in the column on the right you list every Scripture that indicates a changing of these covenantal connections and identity in thought, teaching, practice, and in sacramental life. To help beef up the right side, you could even encourage him to add Scriptures that give us guidance and information about a child who was raised in a Christian home later coming for baptism after a profession of faith. What will they end up with in that right column? Mainly "Repent and be baptized" and a few parallel passages.

Well, what about paedocommunion? The Scripture and themes we have considered so far not only show the importance of covenant children having a covenant identity and being included in the rituals, practices, and celebrations that affirm that identity, but they also show the specific ways in which covenant children were included in covenant feasts and meals, including Passover.⁶ Please look back at the verses in the OT and note the ones underlined -- these all show the children's inclusion in these covenant meals. And the New Testament shows us that the Lord's Supper is the fulfillment of all these covenant feasts, including Passover.^{7 8} As the Confession reminds us, "The sacraments of the Old

⁵ Mark 10:14 -- "But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God'."

⁶ Dr. Jack Collins, from his outline "Children and Communion," writes that the Lord's Supper is instituted at Passover (Luke 22:15) and is "based more widely on the OT 'peace offering':" I Corinthians 10:16-18 (the Passover was a kind of peace offering). He goes on to say that "If the theological roots of the Lord's Supper are in the peace offering, then we should assume that the meanings should be similar: namely, to celebrate God's provision of grace, and to enjoy his presence as he draws near to us in the meal ... If the Lord's Supper has its roots in the peace offering, it stands to reason that the same people belong at the one as at the other." Internet source, 2002. Access at: http://www.prpc-stl.org/auto_images

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Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New" (XXVII, v).

So if we followed the same column exercise here as with the baptism issue, what verses would we end up with in the right column? What passages, by teaching or example, indicate that these covenant blessings and life are now to be withheld from covenant children? What passages would indicate that covenant children are to not be included in this expression of covenant fulfillment, life, grace, and sustenance until they are of such an age that they, as an individual, can articulate their understanding and commitment, i.e., give a "profession of faith"? To help strengthen the right side, we could also add verses that would give us guidance and information about the proper age for a child brought up in a Christian home to be examined and included at the Lord's Table. Or verses or passages that illustrate the early church practicing some form of an "age of discretion" that would help us in our discussions about the proper time and way to bring these covenant children to the Table. What verses or Scriptural examples do you refer to when discussing the proper age for covenant children to make a profession of faith so they can become communing members of the church? What verses do we end up with in the right column? From what I have seen, basically a few words and phrases from I Corinthians 11.

So as we continue to pursue Scripture interpreting Scripture, we will first come back to the primary passages that the anti-paedobaptist would use, and then to the ones the anti-paedocommunionist might use to show that these covenant realities and understandings changed in the New Testament. And would it not be fair to say that these passages are buckets carrying a lot of water, and that there ought not be any holes in them?

Facing the Acts 2:38 challenge head-on

I will consider four things we might want to say to a paedobaptist from this passage:

1. Specific adults are being addressed in a specific situation -- These are adult Jews gathered at the transition from old covenant to new covenant. So, without additional information, we should be cautious in using the words "Repent, and be baptized" to say that the children of these adults should not be baptized.
2. This passage and its context emphasizes continuity and covenant unity -- First, note that the audience (the "them" of 2:38) is Jews who know the promises of the Old Testament and yearn to see their fulfillment. We must work to hear these words as a Jew might hear them! Just consider these points of continuity for Peter and for these listeners:

"Repent" - This is the long-awaited repentance associated with the day God would visit Zion and bring in His kingdom.⁹ This, of course, was the background for the repentance called for by John (Matt 3:2) and Jesus (Matt 4:17) and spoken about by Peter in Acts 5:31 - Him God has exalted to His right hand as Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel.

"and let every one of you be baptized" - We start by noting that this should be something comprehensible to a first century Jew who knew the OT Scriptures. What might he relate baptism to in the OT?¹⁰ They

⁹ The basic argument is as follows: If all the covenantal meals of the Old Covenant are fulfilled in the one covenantal meal of the New Covenant, the Lord's Supper, and if children partook in the Old Covenant communion meals, therefore, unless there is some explicit New Testament statement to the contrary, children in the New Covenant ought also to eat with the family at the New Covenant feast, the Lord's Supper. Myers, p. 1

¹⁰ see Joel 2:12; Isa 44:21-22, 45:22, 46:8, 55:7, Jer 3:10, 14-15, 22; 4:1, 5:3; 15:19; 24:7; Ezek 14:6; 18:30; Hosea 3:5; 6:1; 7:10; 11:5; Haggai 2:17; Zeph 1:3-6, and many others.

would think of such prophesied "baptisms" as those described in Ezek 36:25, Isa 44:3, Isa 52:15 - baptisms from above (pictured by pouring or sprinkling and built on all the earlier OT ceremonial baptisms -- see Heb 10:10-21) that would be the sign of God's gracious cleansing and renewal for Israel and through them for the nations.

"in the name of Jesus Christ" - Israel's covenant relationship with God is summed up in being those whom God has placed His name upon -- see Numbers 6:24-27

"for the remission of sins" - This was always at the heart of Israel being able to dwell with their covenant God and have Him dwell with them. It was also a hoped for and anticipated gift of the "last days" of covenant fulfillment -- see Isa. 43:25, Jer 31:34, Micah 7:19-20, Acts 5:31, 10:43, Eph 1:7, Heb 8:12.

"and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" - see not only Joel 2:28-29 that Peter applies in Acts 2:16ff, but also many other OT prophecies such as Isa 44:3-4, Ezek 36:27-28. Also note the explicit connection between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11, John 1:33), a baptism always described in Scripture in terms of sprinkling or pouring.¹¹

"For the promise" - the promise of covenant fulfillment for Israel spoken in Joel 2:28, 29 -- a promise that gave expression to all the promises to Israel beginning with the promises to Abraham.

"and to all who are afar off" - The OT always envisioned that the salvation God would bring in the "last days" would be one that reached far and wide, reflecting God's Lordship over creation and His promises to Abraham -- see Gen 12:2-3, Eph 2:11-13.

Even though there were mysteries being unveiled for these Jews, including Peter and the apostles, the basic contours and meaning of all this was the application of OT truth, patterns, and expectations. Thus, this would weigh in favor of the continuation of children being considered in the covenant and receiving the covenant sign unless Scripture indicated otherwise.

3. There are specifics in the context of "Repent and be baptized" that point to the inclusion of children in this covenant sacrament -- See:

"This promise is for you and your children" (2:39) - this does not specifically say that the children receive baptism, but it specifically ties these "last days," kingdom blessings to the children.

"Your sons and daughters" (2:17) - this brings into view the whole OT stress upon the inclusion of covenant children in the blessings of God and in the specific promises of the days of covenant fulfillment.

4. When properly understood, this passage should be seen as an argument for paedobaptism rather than one against it. This is even more clear when you add in other biblical texts and themes.¹² In sorting out baptism with folks who are struggling through this issue, I have often found that they don't turn the corner in their minds and hearts on this issue until they can actually see this: that the Acts 2:38 challenge is not only one that can be answered, but it actually should be (graciously and with gentleness, of course) turned on its head. It is a great text for grasping and affirming paedobaptism.

Facing the I Corinthians 11 challenge head-on

¹¹ See John 1:22-25 where we see that these Jews and John found the meaning of baptism in OT history, promises, and expectations.

¹² Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:25; Joel 2:28,29; Mal 3:10; Acts 8:16; 10:44,45; 11:15

Finally! On the question of paedocommunion, we look in our right hand column and see some words and phrases from I Corinthians 11. As one who embraces paedocommunion, what can be said about this? Is this enough to turn back the momentum of all of this emphasis in the OT about our children's inclusion in covenant life? I'll follow the four points I developed above in the Acts 2:38 discussion in developing my argument for why it is most definitely not (you might want to open your Bible to I Corinthians 11 for reference):

1. Specific adults are being addressed in a specific situation -- Paul is addressing adult Corinthian believers who are engaging in a heinous violation of covenant unity -- the "haves" are celebrating their blessing through sumptuous meals at the church assembly while the "have-nots" of the body have nothing but the bread and wine.¹³ Note that Paul brackets the passage with this theme (17-22, then 33-34). It is this specific context that must determine how we interpret phrases like: "unworthy manner" -- vs 27 -- this is the manner that Paul is specifically condemning "a manner of partaking with a blatant disregard of your brother and his needs." Davies writes that "Conscious and active disobedience is being contemplated, by Paul, as the condition which would bar one from partaking unworthily"¹⁴

"examine himself" -- vs 28 -- in regards to the violations being discussed here. "When Paul calls the Corinthians (especially the well-to-do among them) to 'examine themselves' he is commanding them to cease from their contemptuous behavior of humiliating the poor among them."¹⁵ Fee writes, "It seems certain that their version of the meal is less than satisfactory right at this point, probably not so much because they were not 'thinking on Christ' properly, or failing to be in right communion with him, but because by their abuse of one another they were negating the very point of that death -- to create a new people for his name ..."¹⁶ Gallant writes, "The sin, in context, is not lack of self-examination. The sin is schism at the table, which Paul hopes to counter by calling for self-examination. There is a world of difference between these two views of the passage."¹⁷

"discern the body" -- not the body of Christ pictured in the elements, but the church! In the study notes of the New Geneva Study Bible, we read "The warning in vs 29 about 'discerning the Lord's body' almost surely refers to this failure to maintain the unity of the church as the body of Christ ... Because some of the believers in Corinth were celebrating the Supper in a way that destroyed the unity it represents, God had brought judgment upon the community."¹⁸ ¹⁹ Fee writes "The Corinthians are missing the meaning of the 'body' given in death; but Paul's present concern is with the further sense, the church as that body."

¹³ Note that this argument has not even taken into account the issue of circumcision.-- I am convinced that the case for paedobaptism can be made independent of the circumcision/baptism connection, though the connection is certainly true and a powerful argument in and of itself.

¹⁴ I am greatly indebted to Gordon Fee's excellent comments in The First Epistle to the Corinthians in the NICNT series. I was also helped by Tim Gallant's material in Feed My Lambs.

¹⁵ Davies, p. 19

¹⁶ OPC, p. 385

¹⁷ Fee, p. 557

¹⁸ Gallant, p. 91

¹⁹ New Geneva Study Bible, page 1815. Also see the proximity of these two different, but intimately related, uses of "body" in I Corinthians 10:16-17 and the frequent use of "body" for church in 12:12-27.

(page 564)

And just like with Acts 2:38, we must recognize that Paul is giving specific instructions to specific adults in a specific situation. Thus we should be, at the very least, cautious about trying to say that Paul is barring children.^{20 21}

2. This passage and its context emphasizes continuity and covenant unity -- Consider: This was a "coming together" (11:17,20) which is the language of the OT covenant assembly.²² Many of the OT verses in the first part of this paper show the importance of the presence and participation of children in such assemblies.

"Remembrance of me" connects this meal with the other "memorial" meals of the OT, especially the Passover.²³ This is not an individualistic remembering, but a corporate remembering of the deliverance God has brought to His people. "It is the sacrament that leads to remembrance, rather than the reverse."²⁴ And of course all of these acts of deliverance have now been summed up in the remembrance of "Me" -- Jesus our Lord. Again, note that these OT covenant meals not only included children, but children were vital as they were especially the ones who needed to have these memories built into their lives to shape their identity and help them pursue faithfulness in response to God's saving grace and calling.²⁵ Gallant writes, "Hence, the forward look of the Supper testifies that it is a memorial, instituted to retain Christ's sacrificial work in the corporate memory of the covenant people, even as Passover retained the memory among God's people of the events of the passing by of the death angel, and the deliverance of the exodus

²⁰ We also need to deal with the fact that if all of this language says there must be a certain intellectual capacity as well as a capacity to articulate these things, then to be consistent, we would need to bar the mentally defective from the table. Have you ever seen anyone use I Corinthians 11 to keep a senile person from the Table? If the traditional applications are correct, we should do this to keep them from the possibility of judgment.

²¹ "We do not understand Acts 2:38 to deny baptism to little children, Romans 10:13-14 to deny them salvation, or 2 Thess 3:10 to deny them food." Rayburn, 509

²² Also note that nowhere in this passage are elders told to evaluate whether someone should be at the Table. This is strictly about self-examination. Now, we can build a case for such oversight from other Scripture, but not here!

²³ Many exegetes and theologians have established that the NT "ekklesia" explicitly fulfills the OT assembly. See D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, page 369, "Whenever ekklesia in the LXX is translating Hebrew, the Hebrew word is qahal ('assembly,' 'meeting,' 'gathering'), with reference to various kinds of 'assemblies', but increasingly used to refer to God's people, the assembly of Yahweh."

²⁴ See Fee, p.553 -- "Of the various possibilities from the OT the most obvious as to what Jesus intended lies within the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, where the rite of the bread is specifically enjoined as a perpetual 'remembrance' before their eyes. Thus just as the Passover meal itself was such a 'remembrance' to be kept forever in Israel, so Jesus is now reconstituting the 'memorial' for the true Israel that will gather around the Table in his name to 'remember' its own deliverance through him." That is why he describes it as "my remembrance." It is not simply "in memory of him," but it is eaten as a "memorial" of the salvation that he has effected through his death and resurrection. Also see footnote #91 on page 83 of Gallant where he gives similar comments from Marshall and Thiselton. Gallant adds, "I have not yet encountered a defender of the current Lord's Supper practice who even gives any indication that he has considered OT usage at all in connection with I Corinthians 11. There is simply a supposition that we know what remembrance means, and little kids can't do it."

²⁵ Gallant, p. 86

as a whole."²⁶

"new covenant in my blood" -- Of course, this is a direct allusion to Jer 31:31, which also brings into view Exodus 24 and many other covenant ceremonies and scenes.²⁷ Note that the whole congregation, including the children, were sprinkled with the blood of the covenant.²⁸

This whole passage recalls many OT passages in which God condemned Israel for covenant feasts and worship that were joined with actions that denied their unity as a covenant people.²⁹ Note that children were not denied access to those meals because of these dangers.³⁰ Why would we think they are now?

So just as with Acts 2:38, we see that the basic contours and meaning of this passage and these instructions are found in OT truth, patterns, and expectations (as is the case with every word in the NT). Thus, the clear OT pattern of inclusion of covenant children should be expected unless there is explicit instruction to the contrary.

3. There are specifics in the context of these instructions that point to the inclusion of children in this covenant sacrament
 - I Corinthians 10:1-4 - These verses form part of the direct flow of sacramental issues of baptism (see 12:13) and the Lord's Table (here in 11:17-34, also in 10:16-17) that Paul is addressing. They describe these shadows of the NT sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Table in Israel's life in the wilderness.³¹ Who were included in those shadows? Obviously, the children -- in both!³² Now, like all covenantal blessings, these signs brought judgment to those who did not press on in faith

²⁶ "In administering the sacraments to the people of God, the question we need to ask is not, 'What does the administration of the sacrament do to the subjective condition of the participant in the moment of its administration?' or, 'How does the subjective condition of the participant affect the sacrament in the moment of its administration?' But rather, 'What is the content of the declaration God makes in these sacraments?'" From the majority report of the "Report of the Committee on Paedocommunion," OPC Fifty Fifth General Assembly, page 377 of Minutes.

²⁷ Gallant, p. 85

²⁸ Fee, "In Paul's version [of the words of institution] the identification is made directly with the covenant, in this case the 'new covenant' of Jer 31:31 ... However, that passage also mentions the covenant of Exodus 24 as that which is being replaced."

²⁹ See I Peter 1:2, Hebrews 9:19-22, 10:22, and 12:24 to see that this covenant sprinkling was a shadow of our new covenant sprinkling in Christ.

³⁰ See, for instance, Isaiah 1:14-17, Amos 5:21-24

³¹ Rayburn, p. 510, "An appeal to I Cor 11:28 is rendered all the more dubious an argument against paedocommunion by the incontestable fact the OT contains similar warnings against faithless and hardhearted participation in the sacraments, similar calls to self-examination before participating, even (as in I Cor 11:30) threats of death for such offenders (Isa 1:10-20; Amos 5:18-27; Jer 7:1-29). Yet these warnings can in no way be said to have invalidated the practice or the divine warrant for family participation in the sacral meals as prescribed in the law."

³² A blessing, imparted by the Holy Spirit, is claimed by Paul to have been effected by this sacramental eating and drinking in the wilderness ... Significantly, Paul does not say that the rock prefigured Christ, or even that the rock (now) is Christ. Rather the rock was Christ. Glenn Davies, *The Concept of Covenantal Communion*, p 10, from the material gathered by the 1988 GA Study Committee, obtained through CE/P office.

and obedience,³³ as they did in the church in Corinth (11:29-32)³⁴ But does that mean the children must not participate? Obviously not. "The lesson which Paul derives from Israel's experience, therefore, is that covenant disobedience and not covenant immaturity merits the condemnation of the Lord."³⁵ Let me add that I don't see these verses as a "proof-text" for paedocommunion, but they certainly give it weighty support.

- I Corinthians 7:14 - Paul teaches that children who have at least one believing parent are covenantally "holy." We often refer to this verse in our discussions with the anti-paedobaptist. "This, as we often point out, confirms the whole OT momentum of the inclusion of our children." And it makes it hard to believe that a few chapters later Paul would be teaching that we are to keep them from the Lord's Table, which would effectively say they are unholy, or of the world.
- 4. When properly understood, this passage should be seen as an argument for paedocommunion rather than one against it. This is even more clear when you add in other biblical texts and themes.³⁶

Paul's passion in this passage is to maintain, in the face of callous actions and attitudes, the unity of the body in the covenant meal that points to that unity established in God's sovereign calling and grace. By one Spirit we have been baptized into one body (I Cor 12:13; 10:17). When we add together the fact that children are not the ones involved in this heinous sin being addressed, along with all the other evidence described above, I believe we should embrace this passage as one that not only doesn't argue against paedocommunion, but actually helps us understand how important it is to practice! Are our children not in the covenant? Have they not been baptized with the one baptism (not one baptism for adults that gives the right to be nourished in Christ, and another baptism that only gives the hope of one day being able to say and do the right works so that you can now start to be nourished in Christ)?³⁷ Are they not our children -- the children that have been claimed by God and must now be sustained in His grace through Christ? Is it not vital that they remember that they are saved by grace and are to be nourished in that grace from the earliest days of their memory? Are we not improperly discerning the body if we leave them "out" until they can do some additional thing? Remember that the whole problem that Paul so directly and forcefully attacks is the creation of distinctions that would make baptized believers feel that they are some sort of halfway members in the body. It would be ironic indeed, and sad, if we were to use a passage designed by the Holy Spirit to overcome erroneous "distinctions" between groups in the church to establish (or perpetuate) a practice that excludes a large "class" of church members -- namely, our covenant children --

³³ Also see John 6:31-35: Here we see that the children ate of the "bread from heaven" which is a type of Christ, the true bread. Also note that the Lord's Supper is a celebration of the blessings on those on whom the "end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11) and, as we have already noted, this "age" of OT fulfillment is one in which the covenant children are included, specifically and emphatically.

³⁴ But do note that the cursing was upon the adults - all those over twenty years old - who participated in this blatant disobedience.

³⁵ Also see Hebrews 6:4-6, John 15:1-8, Romans 11:17-22. All these are best understood when approached from a covenantal understanding of the visible community which includes those who are truly regenerate and those who will be revealed as not God's.

³⁶ Davies, p. 22

³⁷ "The cumulative effect of this repeated rejection of paedocommunion on the sole basis of a perfunctory appeal to I Cor 11:28 and without attention to possible objections to this argument is to establish two impressions: 1) the consensus against child communion was so complete and so much taken for granted that neither argument nor careful reflection was thought to be required and 2) the reformed consensus on this subject has never rested on a substantial biblical or theological foundation." Rayburn, p. 509

from the Lord's Supper.³⁸

As we often say in our discussions with paedobaptist, "we must let Scripture interpret Scripture." We must come to I Corinthians 11 with the full weight of Scripture in mind. We must come with the glorious and weighty scriptural emphasis of the place our children have in the covenant and the need to nurture them in this great salvation. We must come with great awareness of the themes of unity, of the one baptism, of the covenant inclusion of our children, and of the OT inclusion of covenant children in the OT shadow sacraments ... all that has been taught in surrounding verses! And, as we stress in our arguments for infant baptism, we must come with a thoughtful awareness of how a first-century Jew would consider these issues. Can you imagine the confusion of a first-century Jew when he found out that his children, who the year before were included in Passover and the other feasts, were now to be kept out of this new covenant feast until they could prove something on their own? Would that have added up to the long-awaited good news? As we approach and interpret this passage with these things in mind, I believe we should conclude that this passage is well-suited not to keep children from the Lord's Table, but to welcome them.

One more point before leaving I Corinthians 11. Even though the passage is addressed to adults, there are plenty of applications that can be made to covenant children at levels appropriate to their understanding. I have often found myself telling my children at age two or three that they must "share" with each other, and act in "love" to each other in our home and at our table. The reason they must do this is that they are Christian children and have been called by God to this unity.

They can "examine themselves" and "discern the body" in a way appropriate to their age and maturity.³⁹ And if they became hardhearted about submitting to this covenant obligation, then fathers should talk to the elders about the possible need to withhold the Lord's Supper from them, just as we would consider doing with hardhearted adults.

Some other observations and applications

Some of these are applications or elaborations of the argument above. But I will begin with a few points that relate to Confessional and historical issues.

Rayburn points out that paedocommunion seems to not only be consistent with, but a necessary consequence of the Confessional description of the church and the sacraments. He writes, "The custom of excluding children from the table can be derived from no principle of Reformed ecclesiology. The visible church is defined as 'all those ... that profess the true religion, together with their children ...' (WCF XXV, ii); the sacraments are said to be 'holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace ... to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him:' as also to put visible difference between those that belong unto the church and rest of the world ...' (XXVII, i); and further it is maintained that 'The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New' (XXVII, v)." From these principles of our ecclesiology the practice of infant baptism is derived and by no application of these same principles is it possible to invalidate paedocommunion. On the contrary, paedocommunion seems to be as much the necessary consequence of

³⁸ OPC, p. 403, "Since there is only one baptism, God is saying the same thing about infants baptized at his command that he is saying about adults baptized at his command.."

³⁹ OPC, p. 388

this ecclesiology as paedobaptism.⁴⁰

The fact that the Westminster Divines rejected paedocommunion in the Larger Catechism should give us great pause in now going against tradition at this point. One of our ruling elders, Larry Bricker, was persuaded Scripturally of paedocommunion, but held back from a firm conviction until he could gain some understanding about how the Westminster Divines could have gotten this wrong.-- This is wisdom! It does help to recognize, as Rayburn points out in his minority report⁴¹ and as Dr. Clowney acknowledges in his majority report,⁴² that the position was a fairly unexamined one in our Reformed heritage as it was generally more received than investigated or defended.

So our belief is that paedocommunion is entirely consistent with, or even a "necessary consequence of," our Confessional presentation of the church and the sacraments.

Another point of historical perspective is that the church practiced paedocommunion until the twelfth century and the Eastern Church continues this practice. The reason the church moved away from this was the teaching of transubstantiation and the superstitions that flowed from that teaching.⁴³

Now, for applications that more directly flow from the first part of my paper ... We tell our children, "God has claimed you; you are called to covenantal faithfulness and service. God has claimed you. It is all by grace." Do we not want that message deep in their bones?⁴⁴ But what is the message every time the bread and wine passes them by -- this bread and wine that they are told represents and, through the Holy Spirit communicates, our fellowship with God through Christ? "When you are ready to do and say the right thing, you will become God's." Now, we try to correct that: "No, sweetheart, the first thing is God's sovereign grace and calling." But what speaks louder?

⁴⁰ Davies, p. 24, "The smallest olive shoot may not yet be able to bear the weight of an olive, yet it still requires a living union with the stem for its sustenance and life (Psalm 128:3; Rom 11:17ff). The shoot is not cut off from its life supply because a certain kind of fruit is not yet present. The very fact that it grows, that it is a live shoot and not a dead branch, is evidence of its union with the main stem."

⁴¹ Rayburn, p. 510

⁴² "The virtual unanimity of opinion on this question, though impressive, may, however, be deceptive. Certain considerations suggest that this consensus may be due less to the persuasiveness of the arguments commonly advanced on its behalf than to the absence of serious criticism of a custom which predated the reformation and, consequently, to a relatively superficial examination of the question." Rayburn, p. 503.

⁴³ PCA report, p. 498

⁴⁴ Rayburn, p. 503, "The Lord's Supper was lost to the church's children in the west not as a result of a purification of the church's practice of the sacrament but rather as a result of a horrible corruption of it." Also see Gallant's treatment in chapter 4 of his book, and see Tommy Lee's "The History of Paedocommunion: From the early church until 1500." This can be found at the paedocommunion.org website.

We tell our children, "You are a member of the church by baptism. A real member!"⁴⁵ But everytime the bread and wine passes them by they think, and sometimes ask, "When will I get to become a member?" We tell them, "No, sweetheart, you are already a member by baptism." But what speaks louder?⁴⁶"

A good test to see what, indeed, does speak louder is this: If you were to ask the noncommuning children of your body, "When will you become a member of the church?" what would they answer? How many would say, "I am a member! I am baptized and God has already claimed me and made me part of His body." Or how many would say, "Well, when I (fill in the blank with whatever the process used in your body to become a communing member)"?

The 1986 OPC majority report on this issue is very helpful in describing the way our present practice tends to remove the focus from the objective content of the Lord's Supper and makes subjective factors primary. "The effect of the whole is a tendency to obscure Christ, as the object of faith, from our view, and to hinder the very effectiveness of the sacrament in the life of God's people which we are concerned to promote ... The sacraments -- like the gospel itself -- are, in a word, God's faithful testimony to us concerning His covenant. They are not our statement to God about ourselves." (pages 378, 400).⁴⁷

If we had a way to measure what percentage of our worshippers' attention was focused objectively on Christ and God's sovereign, covenantal grace poured out in and through Him, or what percentage was focused on more subjective thoughts and emotions, what might we discover? I'm guessing a majority of their mental, emotional, and spiritual energy is more inward than outward and that the tendency is to try to generate, or find, some kind of thoughts and feelings from within. Yes, we should consider the possibility of a hard heart, especially in regards to disunity with our brothers and sisters.⁴⁸ And yes, the Lord's Supper should generate thoughts and feelings of gratitude, awe, sorrow for sin, and zeal for obedience. But the focus should be outward and objective on Christ, the grace brought to us corporately through His death in which all of God's promises are fulfilled and through which He has established His

⁴⁵ "We celebrate the Lord's Supper because He gave Himself for us and nourishes us with Himself. We love Him because He first loved us. Our little children need to hear that message over and over again from their parents. The only way we can expect any child to have a firm faith is by giving him a firm foundation on which that faith may rest. If we make our children think that God's favor in Christ is something which they need to attain, then we will greatly confuse them. Instead, we must teach them that they have been engrafted into Christ (Romans 11:17) by His great mercy to them. We must raise them to respond to God's love and mercy in Christ by a life of faith and obedience, so that they remain in Him and He in them (John 15:4)."-- Mark Horne, "You and Your Son and Daughter," p. 12. -- Internet source, 2002. Access at: <http://www.hornes.org/theologia>

⁴⁶ Davies, "Thus the covenant community is to be recognized by its one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph 4:5). Though there may be many members, comprising both adults and infants, they form one body (Eph 4:4; I Cor 12:13). The question must be raised, therefore: How can we deny the sacrament of the Lord's Supper which rightly bespeaks the one body (I Cor 10:16f), to those who rightfully and properly (because covenantally) belong to that body?"

⁴⁷ But even this is in response to objective truth: the recognition of the "body" of Christ that has been established through the physical blood and body of our Lord and the deliverance brought about through His death.

⁴⁸ Jeff Myers powerfully makes these last two points by describing possible conversations a child might have with their father in "Young Child Communion," pp. 4-5. Also note from the OPC, p. 408, "It has been noted above, that our present practice -- to all intents and purposes -- results in our covenant children learning to think of themselves as 'outsiders.' They may look forward to the day when they can join the church too. But they certainly do not regard themselves [being non-communicate members] as full participants in the communion of the saints. If the [paedocommunion] model we recommend is accepted, we may at last begin to overcome this distressing mind-set."

Church.'

But consider this -- does not our current practice in relation to our children tend to facilitate this subjective focus? In his 1988 PCA General Assembly report, Robert Rayburn asks, "Could it not be that our practice of delaying participation in the sacrament and, in that way, divorcing the Word from the sacrament tempt our children to think of the operation of the sacrament as being very different from the operation of the Word and creates exaggerated expectations for the sacrament which in turn have led to confusion and, not infrequently, disillusionment."⁴⁹ If a child's access to the Lord's table is withheld until they have provided some further work, are we surprised that many of us still focus more on ourselves than Christ when we partake?

A related observation is that the gospel sets before us the primary reality of a people who are claimed by God, and only within that, persons. And not an "invisible" people, but a visible one! But by making our children wait until they do something as individuals we tend to obscure this reality. The result is that I Corinthians 11 is often used in a way that moves us in the opposite direction that Paul intended his instruction to move us. Rather than focusing on our corporate connections and responsibilities, we focus more in an individualistic, introspective manner.⁵⁰

9. Our children are to be trained up as covenant children. This covenant status, and the baptism which is the entry sign and seal of that status, both make strong statements about regeneration and election. But the primary, or overarching, category in our oversight of church life and in the training of our children is not regeneration or election, but is covenant. "We do not know who are the elect; but God has told us who are in His covenant."⁵¹ We pray for God to give them new hearts and take confidence in God's promise to regenerate them according to His covenant love and mercy, but we don't delay calling them to Christian lives and fruits until some point of decision or profession. We raise them as Christians.⁵² We teach them to sing, "Jesus loves me" and to pray to God their Father. We help them call out to Christ for forgiveness because they are one of the holy nation on whom forgiveness has been poured out. We call them to walk in the fruits of the Spirit and to do the law of God from the heart as members of the new creation which Christ has established through the new covenant instituted in His blood.⁵³ These are truths and

⁴⁹ Of course this is a problem not only with our practice in regards to children, but the whole way I Cor 11 is often applied.

⁵⁰ Jeff Myers powerfully makes these last two points by describing possible conversations a child might have with their father in "Young Child Communion," pp. 4-5. Also note from the OPC, p. 408, "It has been noted above, that our present practice -- to all intents and purposes -- results in our covenant children learning to think of themselves as 'outsiders.' They may look forward to the day when they can join the church too. But they certainly do not regard themselves [being non-communicate members] as full participants in the communion of the saints. If the [paedocommunion] model we recommend is accepted, we may at last begin to overcome this distressing mind-set."

⁵¹ Horne, p. 4, "The truth is clear: God wants us to regard our children as Christians. He does not want us to regard them as little unbelievers who need to be converted at some later age. There is nothing anywhere in Scripture about an 'age of accountability' after which their profession of faith may be believed but before which is to be considered insincere hypocrisy."

⁵² But even this is in response to objective truth: the recognition of the "body" of Christ that has been established through the physical blood and body of our Lord and the deliverance brought about through His death.

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practices that should shape the culture of our covenant homes and find lodging deep without our children's hearts.^{54 55} Again, though, does not our present practice at the Lord's Table give a different message? If we could justify this from Scripture, then we would have to learn from the message. But if this message is not a Scriptural one, we can be assured that it creates unbiblical thoughts and perceptions that will eventually lead to bad fruit, if not in our children's lives, then in our children's children's lives.

We are called to exercise great faith in God's covenant promises, power, and grace to establish and build our children. We should pray with Andrew Murray (referring to Isaiah 44:3-4 where God promises to pour out His Spirit on our descendants), "O Lord, we draw nigh to you to claim the fulfillment of this promise on behalf of our beloved children. Lord, may they from their very youth have your Spirit poured out upon them that even in the simplicity of childhood they may say, 'I belong to the Lord.'"⁵⁶ In reading the anti-paedocommunion literature, it seems to me that behind some of it is a lack of faith in what God says should be the case with our children in the outpoured grace of the gospel. May [God] help us to believe and receive all He is willing to be to our children through our lives, to seek for them nothing less than God seeks ...⁵⁷

One argument often made is that the sacraments are both covenantal but distinct in that baptism is the sign and seal of initiation into the covenant (more specifically of regeneration, or of our union with Christ) while the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of our communion and nourishment in Christ. But how could it be valid to separate those two things? We are saying to our children, "You are now in union with Christ, but one day, when you get old enough and can articulate your profession, you can begin having communion and nourishment in Christ." Just stew on that one for a moment -- by our practice, we say that union with Christ or regeneration can be separated from ongoing communion and nourishment from Christ. Rayburn writes "What is more, this argument assumes the doubtful premise that children born into a family would be denied nourishment for a number of years." It seems to me altogether odd that the distinctions drawn by these writers between baptism as a sacrament of regeneration and the supper as a sacrament of nourishment should be employed as an argument against child communion. Something one must always see to on behalf of newborns is their nourishment! (page 507)

Above I wrote that the "right column" could include Scriptures we might use in trying to sort out the proper "age of discretion" or the best process for children of Christian homes being examined for their profession in order to become communing members. Ever have a hard time with that discussion in terms of any Scriptural certainty? I believe the reason is that Scripture never envisions such a discussion

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⁵⁵ Of course this is a problem not only with our practice in regards to children, but the whole way I Cor 11 is often applied.

⁵⁶ Horne, p. 4, "The truth is clear: God wants us to regard our children as Christians. He does not want us to regard them as little unbelievers who need to be converted at some later age. There is nothing anywhere in Scripture about an 'age of accountability' after which their profession of faith may be believed but before which is to be considered insincere hypocrisy."

⁵⁷ "What should we think about our children? ... They are raised in the faith: {} Genesis 18:19; Deut 6:4-9; Psalm 71:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:15 ... Discipling, not evangelism, is the pattern -- that is, we constantly assure them of God's love and call on them to live out what they profess (as we do with adults). Dr. Jack Collins, "Children and Communion," p. 1. Internet source, 2002. Access at: <http://www.prpc-stl.org>

because God never envisions our children being barred from the Lord's Supper,⁵⁸ except, as is the case with adults, through covenantal unfaithfulness.

Having the Lord's Supper does not add to the judgment of a covenant child who turns away from Christ. He is already under that potential judgment through hearing the Word and through having been a part of the enlightened community and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit (see Hebrews 6:4-6). Do we close our children's ears from preaching and teaching, or shield them from church fellowship and worship, in order to spare them the possibility of judgment in case they one day turn away? Well, if we don't, it makes no more sense to withhold the Lord's Supper from them.⁵⁹ Instead both Word, Spirit-filled church life, and sacrament are means of grace God gives to sustain them in covenant growth and maturity.

If we are really committed to keeping children of the church from covenant judgment one of the best things we can do is train and encourage their fathers to take responsibility for their children's hearts and lives and to recognize the impact of their own lives upon their children both for blessings and cursing. Paedocommunion helps strengthen these father-child connections as it reminds us that our children are God's and are saints through that connection rather than through something they have done as an individual.

Rayburn points out certain practical considerations that further support participation of young children in the supper. First, the impression which the Word is intended to make in this tangible and visible form seems in many ways especially suited to young children.[60] Second, the celebration of the supper with their children, as well as preparation for it, would provide parents with a regular and most important opportunity for instruction and examination, as the Passover provided in ancient times. Third, paedocommunion would reinforce a conviction, much needing reinforcement today, namely, that covenant children are to be holy and pure members of Christ's body, lovers of God and of the brethren from the beginning. (page 511)

The argument is sometimes used that our present practice is good because it gives motivation for parents and the church leaders to teach and catechize their children. But the Scriptural motivation is not to teach them leading up to something (examination) but teach them because they are something - Christians whom God claims and wants to use in great and mighty ways, which is reinforced through participating in

⁵⁸ I would encourage all to read Robert Rayburn's paper, "The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession," if you have never done so. You can find the paper at www.FaithTacoma.org. Rayburn shows how we as Presbyterians need to regain a thoroughgoing covenant view of our children and make the applications in our thinking about evangelism and church growth and strengthening. It was upon reading this paper seven years ago that it became clear to me that I knew just enough covenant theology to help me make it through Presbytery exam and to feel confident in baptizing infants, but that, otherwise, it had little effect on the way I lived as a father and elder.

⁵⁹ Sydney Bush, one of the men in our church who has recently grasped covenant theology and is working to faithfully apply it in his home, came up with this helpful illustration. Sydney, who graduated from the Univ of Southern Miss and is a faithful supporter of his alma mater, told us that he had some little black and gold (USM colors) socks to put on the feet of his first child ... in the hospital! He never asked this child, Jordan, if he wanted to be a USM fan, never waited for a profession of allegiance. He didn't say, "Son, can you explain to me what it means to be a Golden Eagle?" before putting that first pom-pom in his little hand. When he was born, when he came home from the hospital, as he grows up, he simply was and is a USM fan, by virtue of being born into the Sydney Bush family. As Jordan develops as a USM fan, he will simply be growing into all this original calling meant. (Sydney, don't get misty-eyed on me.) But if his heart drifts away and he begins turning his heart toward Oxford (Ole Miss) or Starkville (Miss State), he would be lovingly but firmly warned of the dangers, and could eventually be cut off from the Bush table. Just kidding, of course, but I think it is helpful in understanding the covenant and some of the implications for how we see and raise our children.

the Lord's Supper. This is where our shepherding and teaching energy should be exerted rather than to rely on man-made motivations. (Even if God has graciously used, and uses, these man-made processes in our lives or in the lives of others.)

We recognize that the practice of paedocommunion would demand much more intense and consistent shepherding and oversight from elders.[61] This challenges our session at Redeemer, but is a challenge that we need. Such faithful shepherding is a gift of the gospel and the establishment of Jesus as our Chief Shepherd[62] and is crucial for the health and saltiness of the church for generations to come.

Summary

I have done two things in trying to present our case for paedocommunion:

A parallel argument? Paedobaptism and paedocommunion

I attempted to show that the same Scriptural understanding and reasoning that we use in presenting paedobaptism is the same understanding and reasoning that is important in building the case for paedocommunion. And just as this approach not only answers, but actually reverses, the "Repent and be baptized" objection, I have tried to show that it also reverses the normal I Cor. 11 objections to paedocommunion.

Other observations and applications

Here I applied much of the Scriptural argument from Part 1 to various aspects and applications of this question, and then also brought in some other arguments that relate to Confessional and historical material.

Concluding thoughts

Our session came to this issue with shepherding and ministry concerns in mind. Let me explain.

In the six plus years of Redeemer's existence, we have pursued an approach to ministry that puts great emphasis on shepherding men to minister in and through their households. We see this as an application of our covenant theology and a vital part of God's plan for success in our call to disciple nations. As we began pursuing this in worship and ministry, we began finding something interesting. Folks coming from Baptist backgrounds (the large percentage of our congregation) began grasping the covenant enough to see and take hold of paedobaptism along with pursuing a covenantal, generational vision in and through their homes. As they did, many of them began asking questions about communion. This was especially relevant as we have weekly communion,⁶⁰ and we keep our children in the whole worship service.⁶¹ It seemed odd to many of them that their children, who they now understood to have partaken of the one baptism in Christ, were not to have the sacrament of communion and nourishment in Christ. They struggled as they meditated on Scriptures such as the ones bulleted in the first part of this paper and then had to somehow treat their children as separate from this aspect of covenant life and identity until they could do something as an individual, apart from them. None of them were contentious about it, but were

⁶⁰ Andrew Murray, *Raising Your Child to Love God* p. 133, (Bethany House, 2001). This book has been published under a number of different titles. Though Murray has a few theological slants with which many of us may differ, it is a beautiful and devotional presentation of covenantal, faith-filled, parenting.

⁶¹ Murray, p. 144

asking good questions for good reasons. Finally, Dan Brown, one of our ruling elders, asked if we could study this issue. That study has brought us to this point and to these convictions.

We were prepared to tell people, "Yes, we understand the question, but here is why the Scriptures say that they should not partake until they can make a profession of faith." But we also believe that if the Scriptures don't teach this, it would be important to be able to tell our people, "We don't practice paedocommunion as we are grateful for, and committed to the PCA, as we need accountability to our brethren, and as we are willing to wait and patiently work and pray for change. And even if we are right about this issue, there are many other areas where we are immature and deficient and need the connections and accountability of the brethren. And by submitting to the PCA brethren in our practice we can help our children grasp the need for accountability and respect for our church heritage and tradition and unity. But we do believe your instincts and observations are right." In this way, we can help them "close the covenantal loop" in their minds and hearts, even if not yet in practice, which leads to a more vigorous application of the covenant in the way they view and raise their children and in the way we corporately view and are committed to the next generation. We believe God has made very clear that this is not only one of the gifts of the gospel, but is vital for the spread of the gospel out into the world and down through the generations.

Let me close with this. My first pastor in the PCA was Wayne Herring, who was pastoring Woodland PCA in Hattiesburg, MS at the time (1983). Wayne and his wife, Joyce, have five girls. One day I heard someone ask Wayne if his oldest girls had yet "made a decision for Christ." Wayne's reply was one that I had never heard, but one that I have come to understand as thoroughly covenantal and true to the Scripture. He said something like, "Well, as far as I know none of them have made decisions in that sense. My prayer is that my girls will grow up and never remember a day when they didn't know Jesus Christ was their Lord and their only hope for salvation." This answer threw me - from an entirely revivalistic, "decision," "profession of faith" oriented background - for a loop! But at the same time, there was something about it that seemed attractive, good, and important.

After many years I have come to embrace this answer as my own desire for my children. But here's something else I believe we should want: that our children -- both biologically and the children of the church -- will never remember a day in which they didn't know that they were God's by grace and that they must be fed by Christ in order to press on in faith and obedience and to be strong warriors for their King. I would love for them to say, "From as early as I can remember, I know that Christ died for me, that I am one of His holy nation saved by grace and for service, that I am claimed by God so that I should quickly repent of sin, praise Him for His death for me, and be obedient through the Holy Spirit that has been poured out upon His church and me as a member of that church. I never remember not knowing that this is my heritage, this is my calling." I believe these truths would be more evident to their hearts and minds if they know that the bread and wine is theirs by calling, and not because of some further action they had taken. And that it is theirs to build them, and at certain important times, warn them, so that they can grow faithful and one day be used by God to influence the next covenant generation to be strong and mighty in the land. And since this privilege is theirs through a God-ordained covenant connection with their parents, it will help keep their hearts turned toward their fathers and their fathers' hearts turned toward them. When this happens, curses are removed and blessings abound.

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Tommy Lee, "The Theology of Paedocommunion," gives this helpful summary in support of the position that children did participate: "Looking briefly at the events surrounding this feast, we see that Moses insisted that the little children would participate (Ex 10:9, 10); the lamb to be used was to be enough for every member of the household (Ex 12:3,4); little children were explicitly commanded to observe this ordinance (Ex 12:24); little children were expected to be so involved that they would ask questions as to the meaning of the rite (Ex 12:25-27); little children (boys) are circumcised, and so are free from the only basis of exclusion given (Ex 12:43-49). Internet source, 2001. Access at: <http://www.reformed.org/sacramentology>. In "Young Child Communion," Jeff Myers writes, "To even suggest that the children sat and watched as the parents ate strikes at the heart of God's covenantal familial relations with his people." Internet source, 2002. Access at: <http://www.prpc-stl.org>

I would also point out that it is not even necessary to prove that children did partake of the Passover meal to make the case for including them in the Lord's Supper on the basis of their covenant identity, a point that Tim Gallant helped me appreciate in his book. The reason is that the thrust of the transition from old to new covenant is a widening thrust, just as we argue with paedobaptism.