

Words of Life

The Bible & Weekly Communion



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To Dr. Coppes

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Apparently, according to some Reformed pastors, the vast majority of Reformed churches and denominations are morally negligent by not participating weekly in the Supper. Grover Gunn contends:

Or is Communion more like a meal, a frequent event that is special because of its necessity?...What will we say when our Lord asks us why we deliberately neglected a primary means of grace in most Lord's Day worship services?...Is it truly good stewardship to hide the Communion cup more Sundays than we use it?¹

Not only that, but they are missing the “singularly unique way” in which life is communicated to the Body of Christ via the Eucharist itself. Keith Mathison asserts:

In a *singularly unique way*, the life of the true Vine is communicated to the branches in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Why would any Christian not want this Communion with Christ to be part of *every* worship service? [emphasis added]²

These surprising and loaded assertions highlight the significance of this issue in some quarters. Moreover, the doctrinal background of Mathison's statement appears to be logically rooted in a peculiar understanding that the Word and Sacrament are mutually interdependent:

Without the word, the sacrament is merely an empty sign. *Without the sacrament, the word is not properly sealed and does not have its full, intended effect.* [emphasis added]...neither the preaching of the word nor the observance of the sacrament is superfluous or optional in regular Christian worship (cf. Acts

¹ Grover E. Gunn, III, “Weekly Communion,” *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, December 1986, 20.

² Keith Mathison, *Given For You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord Supper* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 294.

2:42). Biblical worship includes both.³

Thus, in arguing for a weekly Supper, the author contends that if the Church truly understood the nature of the Supper it would lead her to see it as needful for the Word to have its “full, intended effect”—that the Meal is an “integral and necessary part of the worship of the new covenant Communion.”⁴

Granted, not all proponents of a weekly Supper are willing to defend these statements; however, as will be clear later, some of the justifications, arguments and rationales logically lead to such sentiments and practices.

The following quotes, although cautious, also challenge the church to take seriously the benefits and rationales for weekly Communion:

On the other hand, even if I fall short and preach do’s and don’ts rather than the gospel, the Lord’s Supper helps to remind the congregation of the gospel basics...

... it [weekly Supper] might even contribute toward revival and reformation in lives, in families, and in congregations.⁵

If the sacrament is chiefly a matter of our remembering or our attesting to our faith and obedience [Zwinglian], it is not surprising that it should be infrequent....The point is to suggest the indivisibility of nature and frequency.⁶

In other words, it appears that Communion helps make up for deficient sermons and encourages revival while non-weekly Communion churches are quasi-Zwinglians at best. Four of the five quotes are within the last 5 years, and the fourth quote is found in the *Ordained Servant* of the OPC along with another article focusing on a different interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 which suggests,

³ Ibid, 270. These statements were given in a short section on the relation of the Word and Sacrament. At best this is unclear language.

⁴ Ibid, 294.

⁵ Larry Wilson, “On Weekly Communion—Some Pastoral Reflections”, *Ordained Servant* 14, no. 1, (March 2005): 17, 20. Yet he does not excuse weak sermons.

⁶ Michael Horton, “At Least Weekly: The Reformed Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper And of Its Frequent Celebration,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 11, (2000): 156.

among other things, frequent Communion.⁷

There are no statistics concerning the frequency of Communion, but the general sense is that this practice is on the rise. The Church needs to address the issue, not in the sense of urgency or alarm, but in the historical context of Reformed liturgy. Traditionally, the various branches of the Reformed churches, overall, have not practiced weekly Communion, and this should give one pause. A conservative approach to Presbyterian practice would, in light of this historical fact, at least dialogue about the issue. As Dr. Robert Grossman cogently advises:

Since such a practice has been uniformly rejected by generations past in the Reformed community, one would think that before embarking on such a change, there would be careful discussion at major denominational assemblies.⁸ [or at least amongst fellow presbyters at the regional church level].

In light of human weakness, known reports of laymen avoiding churches based on this issue, as well as men binding their consciences to such a practice,⁹ at the very least discussion of newer practices could and should be discussed with other members (especially older and wiser ministers) in the regional churches.

Some denominations, especially in the Westminster tradition, have primarily regulated the question of the frequency of the Supper to the discretion of the session.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the significance of the previous quotes ought to bring to the forefront the *rationales* for

⁷ Trice, “‘Drink of It, All of You’ Revisiting Elements of the Traditional Reformed Fencing of the Table,” *Ordained Servant* 14, no. 1, March 2005, p. 21.

⁸ Grossman, “Theses on Weekly communion And The Heresy of Sacramentalism,” unpublished 2005, 1.

⁹ Indeed, some church officers were so intent on practicing weekly communion that when the wisdom of this approach was questioned, one intensely replied that he was “conscience bound” to this activity, and another quietly challenged that instead of questioning their approach charges should instead be brought.

¹⁰ Interestingly, in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s *Directory of Public Worship*, both Sacraments are labeled “occasional elements” (chapter IV.1) and neither is listed in the previous chapter, “The Usual Parts of Worship.” See Appendix A. Some quote the Confession WCF 21.5 that considers the Sacraments as part of “ordinary” worship. Yet, Baptism is a Sacrament and it is surely “occasional,” cf. Refutation section and Appendix A.

celebrating weekly Communion. It is one thing to celebrate it out of a liberty of conscience and quite another to defend the practice upon questionable theological grounds—especially when some of these justifications downplay or move beyond proper confessional and Biblical parameters. There are many *adiaphora* activities, such as candle burning, which are innocent in themselves, yet if practiced for wrong reasons (because it brings one closer to God, for instance) the event or thing is turned into that which is displeasing to the Lord.

After analyzing the various authors and piecing together the differing arguments, it appears that there are four main rationales: 1) since the Supper is an objective means of conveying the real presence of Christ and His benefits, then it should be exercised weekly (this is a combination of several similar arguments); 2) since the Old Testament worship pattern climaxes in Communion, then the Supper (Communion) should be exercised weekly; 3) since Christ and His benefits are in a “singularly unique way” communicated in the Supper, then it should be exercised weekly; and 4) since there are Biblical texts that endorse weekly Communion, then it should be exercised weekly.

Some similar and secondary arguments include contrasting a Zwinglian view of the Supper (tending toward infrequent Communion) against a Calvinian¹¹ view of the Supper (tending toward frequent Communion). Also, a plethora of additional or incidental benefits that accompany the Supper (the evangelistic benefits, rededication or covenant renewal, public testimony, etc.) are brought to the forefront to defend weekly Communion.¹²

A cursory glance at this position readily displays inconsistencies that splinter the original contention for weekly Communion into various positions. Specifically there are two explicit positions: some argue for *only* once-a-week Communion (presumably within a twice-a-week worship service framework),

¹¹ This is the term used to differentiate Calvin’s unique views from others within the Reformed tradition.

¹² Incredibly, Grover Gunn lists fifteen ways in which the Word and the Supper “compliment” each other. With some imagination one could create a longer list, cf., the Refutation section, *Secondary Arguments*, p. 70.

while others argue for *at-least-once-a-week* Communion (preferably more). This latter position is asserted in Horton's title and at the beginning of Mathison's defense of a weekly Supper.¹³ Throughout the rest of their papers, the focus is on once-a-week Communion. Furthermore, Mathison, while defending at-least-once-a-week Communion, reverts to an implicit and radical position: Communion should be "part of every worship service." Presumably, this is asserted because "...neither the preaching of the word nor the observance of the sacrament is superfluous or optional in regular Christian worship... Biblical worship includes both."¹⁴ Thus, while arguing for weekly Communion, Mathison actually has every-worship-service Communion in mind. This is instructive, showing that some of the arguments for once-a-week Communion are, and can be, used to defend not only *at-least-once-a-week* Communion but also *every-worship-service* Communion. For those with only two worship services that means the Supper is exercised twice a week; for churches with only one worship service a week, in practical terms, they are following Mathison's approach. As will be shown through the course of this thesis, these arguments and other rationales used to defend weekly Communion actually buttress an argument for the Lord's Supper in *every* worship service. This would logically mean that morning, evening, mid-week, Thanksgiving and ordination services should have the Lord's Supper.

It is acknowledged that none of the authors in question assert in their writings that other churches that do not practice weekly Communion are *sub-par*. As a matter of fact, Gunn properly opens his paper with a caveat that his position should not be taken to endorse such an importance upon this view as to question the being or even well-being of other churches, and that people ought not leave churches on this ground. The authors are congenial in their presentation. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated later, what some of the authors' logic and rhetoric imply is that the current practices within many of the Reformed churches are at best

¹³ "At Least Weekly...." He quotes Calvin to that effect on p. 148; Mathison, 292.

¹⁴ Mathison, 294, 270. The latter statements were given in a short section on the relationship between the Word and Sacrament.

unBiblical.

Sacramentalism, Sacerdotalism & Hyper-Sacramentalism

Perhaps a new category of thought needs development. The position of some (as quoted above) is so strongly worded that they may warrant a label that will differentiate them from their theological brothers who are not willing to voice such strong statements.¹⁵ Mathison's quote about the necessity of having both the Word and the Supper in regular worship is such a surprising position that it warrants its own categorization; yet this assertion is not clearly used as an argument for weekly Communion later in the book. He explicitly defends at-least-once-a-week Communion, but sometimes asserts this other implicit position. Furthermore, he speaks of obtaining life from Christ in the Supper in a "singularly unique way." This is not clarified either.¹⁶ Perhaps his position should be labeled hyper-Sacramentalism.¹⁷

In the field of Sacramentology (the study of the sacraments) there are basically two positions (besides the Anabaptistic position) on the nature of the Supper. The Reformed view believes that it is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace; as such it is a means of grace wherein the Spirit seals salvation. Sacerdotalism teaches that the grace of the Spirit is so tied to the Supper that it is contained in it and is always objectively present to the partakers. It is a mechanical approach to the Meal (such as the Romish mass).

The weekly Communion position may be labeled Sacramentalism, but this expression is vague. Surely, those who affirm the Sacraments as against a Memorialist view have no problem with this title. On the other hand, labeling this position as Sacerdotalism is not accurate. There is no theological assertion of

¹⁵ Such strong language is also found in some Federal Vision proponents, notably Rich Lusk (cf. Guy Waters' *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology*, (P&R, 2006), 212.)

¹⁶ It may refer to his belief that there is a distinction between faith and eating. However, as will be dealt with below, this should not preclude our union with Christ as found especially in the Word preached.

¹⁷ Others have suggested that this may be better labeled "High Church" Presbyterianism; similarly cp. Rousas Rushdoony, *The Politics of Guilt and Pity*, (Fairfax, Thoburn Press, 1978) 287.

Roman Catholic *ex opere operato* or High Church Lutheran mechanicalism.¹⁸ There is a formal overlap between these churches and those arguing for weekly Communion because the former also argues for weekly Communion. However, there appears to be no material similarity. None of this should be thought of as an excuse to pigeonhole positions for convenient disposal but rather an honest attempt to logically organize and analyze different arguments and rationales that arrive at similar conclusions.

Thesis

Horton correctly observes, “one’s view of the nature of the supper plays no small part in determining frequency.”¹⁹ However, the stress should be upon “plays.” The nature of the Supper in no way *necessarily* leads to a *definite* answer as to frequency; it only influences it toward a general answer. Nevertheless, it can be shown that the Supper should be practiced less than weekly.

It can also be shown that the normal practice of the Reformed community reflects a confessional view of the Supper. Thus, given that virtually all of Reformed churches throughout a multitude of countries and several centuries decided not to enact weekly Communion places the burden of proof upon those perpetuating this approach to the Supper.

In brief, this paper will begin with an outline of the historical practice of the Church, especially the Reformed confessional community (the Westminster tradition in particular). Next, it will explore the theological foundation of the Word of God, while examining the Biblical doctrine of the sacrament and worship to show that the frequency of the Supper should be less than weekly. Lastly, there will be exegeses of the relevant passages before rebutting counter-arguments. The Word-centric foundation and orientation of the Christian life as a whole, and the worship of the Church in particular, coupled with the moral seriousness and holiness demanded in the Eucharist, demonstrates that the traditional frequency of the Lord’s Supper is the correct view.

¹⁸ Cf. Warfield’s analysis of sacerdotalism in the Lutheran tradition, *The Plan of Salvation*, Reprint (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, , 1975) 65.

¹⁹ Ibid, 156.

Chapter 2: History

The literature related to the issue of the frequency of the Lord's Supper is imbedded in books on liturgical history and in ancient documents which may or may not reflect the general state of the church, especially in the early church period. The information in the ancient church is especially sketchy. What is being sought before the era of the Reformation is a presumed general practice as found in various writings of the ante-Nicene, post-Nicene and Medieval periods. The study of Reformation, post-Reformation and modern eras will focus primarily on the worship practices, especially in the Westminster tradition. In all periods, because of the influence of doctrine upon practice, a cursory glance at the theory of the sacraments may be presented.

Ante-Nicene

This period contains few references to the Lord's Supper, let alone to the frequency thereof. Nevertheless, the common consensus²⁰ is that the Eucharist was practiced weekly. For example, Justin Martyr (c. 160) in chapter 67, states:

And on the day called Sunday...we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings...and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.²¹

Even so, historians acknowledge the interspersed practice of daily Communion as well.²² What are more interesting are some of the other practices that accompanied the Supper in the late second-century: the over-protectiveness of the elements ("nothing was

²⁰ For an alternate historical interpretation compare, Francis Nigel Lee, *Quarterly communion At Annual Seasons* [pdf], 5th ed, December 2003.

²¹ *The First Apology* [cd-rom], (Albany: The Sage Digital Library, SAGE Software, Version 1.0, 1997); *The Didache*, 14:1 is used as evidence as well.

²² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Vol. 2, 5th ed., *Ante-Nicene Christianity: A.D. 100-325*. (Reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 236.

dropped or spilt”); the practice of sending the left-over elements to the homes for daily consumption after prayer; and warning the members not to leave the crumbs around the house, lest mice or unbaptized members eat it.²³ Thus, a sacerdotal view of the Supper appears to have accompanied its frequent practice.

Post-Nicene

In the Post-Nicene era, as noted by Philip Schaff, some in North Africa communed everyday; other regions practiced it weekly and others less than weekly.²⁴ Around 350 AD, Cyril was explaining detailed instructions for the handling of the bread and wine. During Chrysostom’s time, the Lord’s Table was screened off with a curtain and other elaborate liturgical elements were added.²⁵ Around 400 AD more evidence of daily Communion in larger cities is found.²⁶ Again, the increase interest in the detailed administration of the Eucharist points to an exalted view of the Supper corresponding with its high-frequency practice.

Medieval

Medieval Europe experienced a slow mutation toward an articulated sacerdotalism after Augustine. The superstitious practices among part of the church were already noted during Hippolytus (circa 200), but such attitudes and practices were further amplified in the middle and late Medieval periods.

During part of this period, the frequency of the Supper was mandated minimally to Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. This arose as the priesthood idea dominated the church and divided the sacrament between the laity and clergy.

As late as the 1200s, some were complaining that attendees were too flippant with Communion:

²³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*. (England: Penguin Books, 1993), 266. His summary relies upon Hippolytus’ (c. 170-c. 236) work.

²⁴ Schaff, vol.3, 516.

²⁵ Chadwick, 267; For a detailed treatment of the increasing liturgical complexity during this time, confer William D. Maxwell’s, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Developments and Forms* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 37.

²⁶ Chadwick, 271.

The frequent repetition of the mass became a matter of complaint. Albertus Magnus [1206-1280] speaks of women attending mass every day from levity and not in a spirit of devotion who deserved rebuke.²⁷

In that same century, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) mandated a minimum annual attendance to the Eucharist for layman.²⁸ This quote of Magnus points to an interesting fact: that although the frequency of the Supper was officially limited, its actual practice in some regions was still frequent. The Council became the background against which the Reformers complained about the lack of frequent Communion.

Reformation

With the Reformation's emphasis on the Word of God as the basis of doctrine and practice, a re-examination of all significant beliefs were in order. This naturally included the Lord's Supper. The confessions of that period were significantly unified, in spite of the in-house debate between Zwingli and others. Even so, the Consensus Tigurinus of 1549 struck a compromise that satisfied all parties.

Early in Luther's career he endorsed daily Communion, but modified it to weekly with weekday opportunities open for those desiring the Lord's Supper more often.²⁹

Part of Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper and its frequency is well known. In the *Institutes* he asserts: "...the Lord's Table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of

²⁷ Schaff, vol. 5, 722ff., qtd. Magnus' *In De euchar.* VI.3.

²⁸ Canon 21 All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own (parish) priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist, unless perchance at the advice of their own priest they may for a good reason abstain for a time from its reception; otherwise they shall be cut off from the Church..."

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html> Fordham University Online.

²⁹ Maxwell, 74.

Christians” and “Rather, it was ordained to be frequently used among all Christians”.³⁰ A large part of his reasoning is based upon Acts 2:42,

Thus it became *the unvarying rule that 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 also, we can safely infer from Paul.³¹ [emphasis mine]

Calvin’s assertion actually argues for the Lord’s Supper in *every* worship service. Yet he allowed “at least once a week”. Elsewhere, he appears to soften his position: “As to the time of using it, no certain rule can be prescribed for all...Although we have no express commandment specifying the time or day [of the Supper]....”³²

In spite of these declarations, what is illustrative in Calvin’s practice is his willingness to submit to the local church’s decision to practice monthly Communion. While at Strassburg, before the monthly Communion was taken, members were required “to give him [Calvin] previous notice of their intention, that they might receive instruction, warning or comfort, according to their need. Unworthy applicants were excluded.”³³

Knox carried virtually the liturgy of Calvin straight from the continent into Scotland. However, just as in Switzerland, the practice of weekly Communion was never enacted. There is evidence of monthly Communion among the English colony in Switzerland; however, when they returned to England, the practice of quarterly Communion was solidified by the General Assembly in

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol. 2. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.17.44, 46.

³¹ Calvin, 4.17. 44.

³² In “A Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord,” (1540), *Selected Works of John Calvin*. Vol. 2, *Tracts Part 2*. [CD] (Albany: AGES Digital Library, 1998), 169, 170. Dr. Lee’s interpretation of the later events in Calvin’s life points in a similar direction, *Quarterly communion At Annual Seasons*, 10ff., esp. the Dec. 1540 letter.

³³ Schaff, vol. 8, 374. It would be interesting how many churches would practice weekly Communion if such examinations were regularly practiced.

1562. The country villages, however, enacted less frequent Communion.³⁴ Zwingli's view, although commonly viewed as memorialism, is actually debated.³⁵ Nevertheless, his practice was quarterly observance.³⁶

In short, the almost universal practice of the Reformed churches during the 1500s was not weekly but quarterly or monthly observance.³⁷

Post-Reformation

Post-Reformation Holland's Dordt Church Order (1618), enacted bi-monthly Communion with a corresponding elder visitation before and after the celebration:

The Lordly Supper shall be administered once every two months, wherever possible, and it will be edifying that it take place at Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas where the circumstances of the Church permit.³⁸

Post-Reformation England culminated in the creation of the Westminster Confession along with its Directory of Public Worship. The book states:

The Communion, or the Supper of the Lord, is frequently to be celebrated; but how often, may be considered and determined by the ministers, and other church-governors of each congregation...³⁹

However, the actual practice became erratic, especially in Scotland, during the disquieted times of the Commonwealth conflicts.

³⁴ Maxwell, p.125.

³⁵ cf. *Calvin & Zwingli*, p. 40 in this paper.

³⁶ Maxwell, p.84.

³⁷ Apparently, Strassburg experienced weekly communion for a while, but by 1537 it was weekly in the city cathedral and monthly in the parish churches (Maxwell, p.100).

³⁸ Christian Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/neth-ref-order.txt>

³⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Reprint, Glasgow, Free Presbyterian Publications, 1997), 382.

Eventually, due to the infrequency of Communion, many members would travel to other towns for the Lord's Supper; this developed into the traditional Communion seasons. Before each partaking of the meal, members had to notify the session of their intentions and receive a token for admission.⁴⁰

While America was strongly influenced by the Scottish tradition, the Church allowed freedom on the frequency issue. Other churches, the German and Dutch, typically followed their continental counterparts. Nevertheless, most churches practiced quarterly Communion. Even so, some practiced it semi-annually or even annually. With the larger traveling distances, these events became longer services similar to the Communion seasons of the Scots. The typical event would include Saturday, Sunday and Monday with the days bracketing the Sabbath including preparatory and closing sermons for self-examination and fellowships for celebration.⁴¹ However, in the early 1800s the American and German churches moved from the Communion season celebration to a quarterly administration.⁴²

With this background, a rise in liturgical interest occurred in the mid-1800s and led to the Hodge-Nevin debate of the mid-century.⁴³ Although not confined to Presbyterianism (the liturgical renewal seemed to have originated in the Anglican Tractarian Movement of Pusey and Newman), the renewed interests in liturgics produced some works promoting frequent, if not weekly, Communion. In particular, John W. Nevin and Philip Schaff of the German Reformed Seminary of Mercersburg, brought these issues to the forefront of theological reflection.⁴⁴

Schaff respected Pusey's liturgical attempts for pushing weekday services, frequent Communion and "beautifying sanctuaries and altars." Yet he was not satisfied with the Tractarian

⁴⁰ Winter, "American Churches and the Holy Communion...Pt. 2." (Ph. D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1988), 308, 326, pt. 1.

⁴¹ Winter, pt. 2, 419ff.

⁴² Winter, pt. 1, 188.

⁴³ *Princeton Review*, April, 1848.

⁴⁴ Charles Baird and Charles W. Shields were their counterparts in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

Movement's downplay of the Reformation.⁴⁵ He also chided Protestants for their "disproportionate esteem for the service of preaching," while he longed for the medieval sacramental-centric centuries when "the holy sacraments ran like threads of gold through the whole texture of life...."⁴⁶ His partner, Nevin, wrote a book, the *Mystical Presence*, where he defended his understanding of the Supper. He strongly contended for a Eucharistic-centered worship in which the entire service focused upon the Lord's Supper as "the last ground of all true Christian worship, the mystical presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the desired outcome of frequent Communion never bore fruit.

Modern

With a plethora of denominations in the modern ecclesiastical scene, the best approach is to sample some church orders. A sample of the American Dutch tradition as well as the Westminster tradition will be employed. The chart in appendix A enumerates the relevant sections of the URC, PRC, PCA, RPCNA and OPC.

Given that chart, it still is not easy to ascertain the normal practice in America without any statistical evidence. What is clear is that the Westminster tradition allowed a greater flexibility than the Continental tradition. Nevertheless, the recorded practice of the earlier Reformed churches from the 1500s until the 1800s clearly pointed to a frequency less than weekly.

Overall, the history of the church has various answers to the question of the regularity of the Supper. From daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly, the history of the church, especially before

⁴⁵ Ibid, pt. 2, 736.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pt. 2, 736ff.

⁴⁷ "A liturgy is not just a collection of prayers and other single forms of devotion, but a whole order...in which all the parts are inwardly bound together by their having a common relation to the idea of a Christian altar, and by their referring themselves through this always to what must be considered the last ground of all true Christian worship, the mystical presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist," Nevin, qtd. by Winter, pt. 2, 766, from *The Liturgical Question with Reference to the Provisional Liturgy of the German Reformed Church*, (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1862), 1.

the Reformation, practiced divergent approaches that do not yield an immediate answer for the current issue. Nevertheless, it does suggest that the nature of the Supper influences the frequency, but not necessarily so. During the Reformation, Luther, with his different view of the Supper, endorsed weekly Communion while the Reformed churches, through the elders' and ministers' deliberations (Calvin's protestation to the contrary) practiced a less frequent approach even though holding the Calvinian view of the Supper. Thus manifesting the genius of Presbyterian deliberations.

Chapter 3: Word of God

The Word's Supremacy in General

Grounding all of life in the Word is the hallmark of the Reformation churches. While this is surely admitted by all of the authors in question, some of their language and emphases point toward a more mechanical approach to the Supper: Mathison speaks of the “unique way” one receives Christ, and Horton insists that the Supper is more “objective” than “subjective.” From another perspective, Wilson believes that the Supper is not only a capstone of worship but that the Supper will help overcome weak sermons.⁴⁸ To that end, a summary of the centrality of the Word in general—for all of life—is in order before fleshing out its detailed implications in the Christian life through the instrumentalities used by the Spirit: the means of grace, worship and the sacraments. This will demonstrate more of the “subjective” need for sanctification. It will also demonstrate that since the Word is *the* central and supreme means used especially by the Spirit, the arguments for the Supper are misguided, focusing on the Supper and its benefits instead of the Word that yields those benefits and supports the entire life of sanctification. Hence, the preached Word should be more frequent than the Supper. This foundational and central role of the Bible in general is established through its close alignment with the Spirit, its role in redemptive history, its work in the lives of believers, and its centrality in the ministry of Jesus and Paul.

Word & Spirit

The first and foremost theological relationship of the Word is with the Spirit. The Bible, either preached or read, is mightily used by the Holy Spirit to convert, sanctify and preserve the elect. As Ezekiel 37 demonstrates, the Spirit of Christ is pleased to use this humble tool of the Word to even resurrect spiritual Israel from the

⁴⁸ Mathison, 294; Horton, 156, Wilson, 17. Furthermore, Mathison asserts that the Word needs the Supper to fully affect the work of the Word, 270. He also claims that it is an “integral and necessary” part of every public worship service, 294.

dead. Further, the Westminster Confession notes:

Q155: How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A155: The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing....[sinners].

The Confession clearly echoes the Bible's own insistence that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). It is an instrument so closely aligned with the work of the Spirit that Paul claims that those who call upon God need the Word preached (Rom. 10:14ff.), for "it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).⁴⁹ Indeed, the power of preaching the Word is the power of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4). Turretin explains:

He [the Spirit] is not given to us in order to introduce new revelations, but to impress the written word on our hearts; so that here the word must never be separated from the Spirit (Is. 59:21). The former works objectively, the latter efficiently; the former strikes the ears from without, the latter opens the heart within. The Spirit is the teacher; Scripture is the doctrine which he teaches us.⁵⁰

Thus, the Word has no intrinsic power but only that which the Spirit is pleased to bestow through it. To further understand the impact of the Word, a perusal of the history of redemption is instructive.

Word & History

Christ was and is the Eternal Word⁵¹ spoken by the Father in

⁴⁹ NKJV.

⁵⁰ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, 2.2, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 59.

⁵¹ My use of "Word" will focus on the spoken, inscripturated and preached functions that Christ the living Word uses through the Spirit. Nonetheless, Christ, the Spirit and the Word are elements interrelated and cannot be artificially separated. Compare

eternity past. God, who is a spirit, exists beyond the bounds of physical limitations. However, it pleased the Father to speak His Word, creating all things seen and unseen, and to bring that Word from the inter-Trinitarian fellowship into a created world. Thus, even in the creation of Adam, given the perfect environment and clarity of general revelation, He still spoke His Covenant to Adam. This Covenant existed because of the Word. After the fall, He continued His gracious and powerful speech to Adam, Noah, the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. And through that Word, He renewed and expanded the Covenant of Grace. This revelation was climaxed in the person and work of Christ, carried on in the Apostles, and eventually inscripturated in the Bible.

Naturally, God in His condescension not only gave His Word, but also accompanied it at times with signs. Man was created a whole man: physical and spiritual. Therefore God speaks to the whole of man. From Adam to the New Testament Christian God assigned symbols. And some of these signs were also sacraments: they pictured and sealed redemption in the heart of the elect by the power of the Spirit.

However, these signs and sacraments were meaningless and dangerous to the people of old who, through ignorance of the Word of the Covenant, worshipped God in a sinful manner. This is clearly demonstrated in their quick degeneracy into worshipping the bronze serpent (2 Kgs. 18:4). Accordingly, God brought the voice of the prophets to correct and revive the Old Testament Church. For instance, the discovery of the Law, in the time of Josiah (2 Kg. 22:3ff.), reform in worship and life commenced with a verbal recommitment to the Covenant (2 Kg. 23:1ff.).

As revelation progressed, the signs and seals multiplied to become the detailed-oriented administration of Moses. As a Tutor to children, the Lord emphasized externality and visibility to impress upon the Church in infancy the sinfulness of sin and the graciousness of grace (Gal. 4:1ff.). The width, breadth and depth of God's work in the Sacrifice-to-come manifested itself in signs, seals and types of Christ's work. With the full revelation of the Word

professor Alan Strange's "Comments on the Centrality of Preaching in the Westminster Standards," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10, (1999): 185.

incarnate, the plethora of sacraments was reduced to two: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are sufficient until the end of the age. The New Testament Church is a church of maturity and completion that was not fully experienced and comprehended in the younger Church (Heb. 11:40; Gal. 4:1ff.). On the other hand, the New Testament Church is also not as fully matured and completed as she will be when the transformational Eschaton ushers in the fullness of Christ and His glory.

Admittedly, externality and visibility do exist in the New Testament, but they are not as emphasized as the internality and the invisible. This is evidenced in the obvious reduction of worship from the complex older worship to the simple worship of the New Testament. In other words, reviewing the history of redemption shows that God emphasized the Word. It created the Covenant, sustained the People of God and expanded His Kingdom. On the other hand, symbols were used but not always connected to the making of covenants (i.e. Covenant of Works or the Davidic Covenant), nor always connected with their renewal (i.e. Josiah's revival).

Word & Experience

The point of the centrality of the Word is further reinforced by inspecting the experience of the Church. The growth of believers in all ages depends upon the Word of God, spoken in ages past and written for us today. While the number of signs and seals differed in each age, the constancy of the Word prevailed, whether given privately to the Patriarchs or publicly to the prophets. Abraham's life exemplifies this truth by the fact that he believed God's Word years before he was given the visible seal of the Covenant. Israel exemplifies this fact by its constant renewal through the prophets' Word-revivals. The New Testament Israel exemplifies this fact by its life-sustaining growth through the Word (Acts 4:4; 6:7; 8:4; 13:49; 19:20).⁵²

⁵² The constancy of the Word and the limited usage of visual images in worship as related to the Second Commandment shows that undue emphasis upon the Lord's Supper is to misunderstand the Bible. For a popular treatment of this subject, read the author's booklet, *Passion for the Word*, www.denverprovidence.org.

Word & Christ

Any Reformed scholar does not seriously deny the centrality of the Word in the ministry of Christ. He preached, taught, exhorted, condemned and commanded wherever and whenever he could. He declared that his words were life (John 6:63), a sanctifying truth (John 17:17) that is implanted into the soil of the soul (Matt. 13:23) and brings forth fruit. Indeed, he was the Word incarnate (John. 1:14). He baptized no one and initiated the Lord's Supper at the end of his ministry with only the twelve disciples. The word was indeed central to his ministry.

Word & Paul

Furthermore, Paul's mission was also focused on the Word, both for evangelism and teaching. In 1 Corinthians chapter one he vigorously minimized his role in baptizing anyone. He did not wish this to be a source of division in the Corinthian church. To reinforce this point in verse 17 he proclaimed that he "came not to baptize but to preach" ! Since Paul would never depreciate preaching the Word in such a manner, he put the Sacraments in their subordinate position to the Word.⁵³ There would be judgment upon him if he preached not the Gospel: "yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16). The Word is central to the ministry and sustains the Church through doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction, for the equipping of the saint for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16).

Why is this synopsis of the centrality and significance of the Word important? First, it answers the concern of a "bias" against weekly Communion expressed by Gunn.⁵⁴ Second, it shifts the focus of the debate from the limited scope of the significance and nature of the Sacraments to the wider and fundamental issue of its relationship to the Word. Third, it places the emphasis of the Christian life and worship on the Word of Christ just as the Bible itself does. This last point and the inferences that arise from it are

⁵³ In this manner, Paul appears to echo the Old Testament prophetic demand of obedience (to the Word) as over and against merely the ceremonies (sacraments) of the Covenant: Hosea 6:6; Psalms 51, etc.

⁵⁴ Gunn, page 8, "...but the demand for such evidence in regard to weekly communion evidences bias."

explored in the following sections on the means of grace, the sacraments, and worship.

The Word's Supremacy in Particular

Means of Grace

The supremacy and foundational nature of the Word is further amplified when understood within the context of the means of grace. Examining these means in their integration of the Christian life will be followed by analyzing the nature of the Word itself as the means of grace *par excellence*. Also the question of the frequency of the Supper will be placed into a larger theological framework which is missing in the myopic defenses of weekly Communion. If the Supper as a means of grace cannot be separated from the course of sanctification throughout the week (proper pre-Communion preparation), and if the Word is the basis of that spiritual life and validates the Supper, then arguing for weekly Communion based upon the benefits and objectivity of the Supper are no longer persuasive. Indeed, showing the characteristics and functions of the Word will demonstrate that it is the source of all the benefits found in the Supper. In short, many of the arguments more readily defend the supremacy of the Bible than weekly Communion.

As used in theological works and the Confessions, the means of grace are strictly limited as public and official elements of corporate worship. It is not simply any such action of a believer that is a means of grace in this stricter sense, but only the preaching of the Word, the Sacraments and prayer.⁵⁵ It can be argued that there is also a broader, private or unofficial means of grace in the lives of the Christians: Bible reading, study and memorization, daily prayers, fellowship, and private and familial worship.⁵⁶ Although neither public or official, the reason these could be called “means of grace” is found in the fact that they are tools used by the Spirit for spiritual growth. It is inconceivable that Reformed communities would

⁵⁵ Prayer is not considered a public means of grace in the Continental tradition (cp. Belgic Confession).

⁵⁶ LCQ 154 states that Christ's benefits are communicated in “all his ordinances” as well as the means of grace proper. This means that the Supper should not be so emphasized that the importance of the other means are lost.

downplay the significance of private and familial worship let alone Bible reading, Bible studies or private prayers. Thus, there must be some sense in which these are means of grace.

The importance of this distinction is discovered in the balance that it presents. If the public ordinances are emphasized to the neglect of the private ordinances, an unnatural Christian life develops. Among other problems, believers more readily become mechanical in their worship and less spontaneous in their private devotional lives. On the other hand, with a neglect of the public ordinances through a disproportionate emphasis on the private means (as demonstrated in many contemporary Evangelical circles), the public ordinances are relegated to a position between tradition and irrelevance. In short, both sets of means are needful for a healthy Christian life. They must be properly integrated.⁵⁷

The significance of the integrated Christian life is that it helps put into perspective the benefits of the Lord's Supper. It is not some mechanical method used by the Spirit for Christian growth regardless of personal perseverance throughout the week. Similarly, it is not such a means of grace that its objective nature exists at the expense of its subjective application. The mere fact that infants were not admitted to the Table in traditional Presbyterianism (nor in any major modern Reformed church) reinforces this point. The same Spirit who enjoins believers to partake of public prayers, preaching and the Supper also demands a consistency of life before and after public worship. This is noticeable in Larger Catechism questions 170-175 which explain the due mature examination before, during and after Communion. For instance, before Communion:

Q171: How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it?

⁵⁷ Pierre Marcel attests this view of the integration of public worship and weekly Christian living: "The graces received from the word when it is read in private are different from those received from the word when it is preached...these two aspects compliment each other." *The Relevance of Preaching*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), 65. Similarly, Cornelis Trimp states, "We may not isolate the sermon from personal pastoral care." "Preaching As the Public Means of Divine Redemption", *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10, (1999): 54.

A171: They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves....

Coming to the Lord's Supper is integrated with the life of the believer before and after the Supper. As the above question illustrates, the Christian should examine not simply whether he is a member of a Church or in good standing, but other factors as well. One should know the proportion of faith given by God, recognize sins and weaknesses, acknowledge others through charitable actions and perceive properly the appropriate efforts in their life toward obedience through "exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer."

Word Supremacy

However, as hinted at above, the means of grace (whether broadly or narrowly conceived) are not equally significant or especially used by the Spirit. In other words, they are not all equal in importance but hinge upon an order of priority and usefulness as found in the Bible. Of the various means of grace (Sacraments, prayer, family worship, etc.), only the Word of God inscripturated is the means of grace *par excellence*; it is the means of the Spirit upon which the other means depend. Any conscience event in the life of the believer (prayer, worship, fellowship, Bible study and all other means broadly considered) necessarily builds upon and requires the Word.⁵⁸ From it flows the efficacy of the Spirit: whether the Sacraments, public or private worship, prayer or any other means of Christian growth, the Bible as read, and especially preached, is the foundational and continuous primary instrument of spiritual growth.

This is manifested in the nature of the Word and its functions. First, the nature of the inscripturated Word is that it is the revealed will of God for the Church. It is the mind of God in written form

⁵⁸ Geerhardus Vos summarizes the integration of the *conscious* life of faith, covenant and Word: man does not have full participation of the blessing but a gradual appropriation and conscience realization. (This is why Adam was created mature; this is why the Reformed churches have not universally practiced child communion.) "Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 253.

and as such is infallible, inerrant and God-breathed (1 Tim. 3:15ff.). It abides forever (Is. 40:8); it is living, active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12); it is sanctifying truth (John 17:17); and it is spirit and life (John 6:63). These characteristics set it apart from the other means of grace. The power and energy of the Spirit is closely aligned with the Word. Indeed, faith operating in the environment of the other means, whether public or private, cannot exist without Christ as its object, and Christ is found nowhere else than in the truthful and inspired Word.

Second, the Word functions in a much broader manner than the other means of grace. Broadly it is profitable for every aspect of the Christian's life:

“All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Narrowly, as it contains the Law of God it convicts, restrains and guides. It exposes sin, holds back wickedness in society and shows the will of God for believers. As it contains the Gospel of God it calls men to salvation, converts the sinner, and strengthens believers in the Spirit of Christ.

The Spirit is the prime mover and energizer in the life-birthing and spiritual growth of Christians, but He is pleased to ordinarily utilize the Word as the foundation of the believers who were “born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...” (1 Pet. 1:23). The Word convicts sinners and calls them to repentance, and it places Christ and Him crucified vividly before the sinner as the object of faith and conversion (1 Cor. 1:18ff; Gal. 3:1). Within this context regeneration by the immediate hand of the Spirit marvelously transpires. Moreover, the Word continues its function through initiation into the covenant by the Spirit who seals with the Word (Eph. 1:13). The Church, by Christ's power, is sanctified and cleansed by “washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26). The Bible as used by the Spirit of Christ guides believers into a closer walk

with God (Prov. 3:1ff). Pointing out the depths of sin and the wiles of the devil, it lightens the path of godliness (Ps. 119:105, 130).

Word Preached

However, in its more specific function of preaching, the Word is especially powerful. Here the risen Christ speaks to His people words of joy and guidance. Here the voice of the preacher is, in some derivative yet significant sense, the voice of God. In today's visually saturated society and egalitarian Christianity, this assertion is most offensive, even to some within the Reformed community. Nevertheless, this is the testimony of Scripture. The office of minister is ordained of God (1 Tim. 3:1) for the special function of preaching (1 Cor. 9:16).⁵⁹ Not to hear him whom Christ sent is to not hear Christ (Luke 10:16).⁶⁰ As ambassadors representing Christ, it is no little offense to ignore the Gospel as uttered from them (2 Cor. 5:20): "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, *as though God were pleading through us*: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."⁶¹ Knowing that the words of Christ are life (John 6:63) and that those words are in the Bible, the centrality of the Word is established. Coupling this fact with the office of minister, it is shown that the preached Word is uniquely used of God for salvation and sanctification (Rom. 10:14ff.). As empowered by the Spirit, it demonstrates the Gospel most clearly (1 Thes. 1:5). So, the Reformed Church confessions stand true:

Q155: How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A155: The Spirit of God makes the reading, *but especially the preaching of the word*, an effectual means of...building them up in grace...[Larger Catechism, emphasis added]

The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God.

⁵⁹ 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word!" is but one example of the emphasis Paul placed upon preaching to impress young Timothy its importance and centrality to the ministry.

⁶⁰ Compare Matthew Henry's Commentary on this verse, vol. 5, (Hendrickson, 1991), 550. See also Turretin, vol. 3, p. 82, Topic 18, Question 11, Section 30.

⁶¹ See also 2 Corinthians 2:17, "For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, *we speak in the sight of God in Christ.*"

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful[Second Helvetic Confession, Chap. 1]

This testimony is consistent throughout the Reformed confessions.⁶² Nonetheless, the significance of the preached Word is further reinforced by a brief examination of Calvin.⁶³ All the leaders of the Reformation highly valued the preached Word.⁶⁴ Specifically, Calvin believed that the voice and presence of Christ existed where the Word was faithfully and lawfully preached:

The testimony of our salvation, when delivered to us by men whom God has sent, is not less worthy of credit than if His voice resounded from heaven....⁶⁵

Have we God's word? at leastwise have we it preached purely? Then is Jesus Christ *as it were* in the midst of us, and showeth himself *as it were* hanging upon the Cross, witnessing what he did for us, when he suffered death to reconcile us....⁶⁶ [emphasis added]

⁶² Read Dr. Venema's article for a fuller treatment: "Preaching in the Reformed Confessions," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10, (1999): 135ff.

⁶³ For a detailed and illuminating examination of Luther and Calvin's views, read J. Mark Beach, "The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Gospel," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10, (1999): 77-143. Read also Wallace's *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament* (Tyler, Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982).

⁶⁴ Many of the proof texts used by Calvin and others center on those men who spoke God's Word, whether prophet or apostle. This function of preaching, in Reformed thinking, is common in both the extraordinary office and the ordinary office of minister.

⁶⁵ *Harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Luke 10:16, *Calvin's Commentary Series*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books) Reprint, 1979, 31. Calvin notes that to insult them is to insult Christ.

⁶⁶ *Sermons on Galatians*, (Aududon: Old Paths Publications, 1995), 321. See also *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, "by the means of men...he will have us to receive his word with a great reverence, *as if* we hear him thundering from heaven," Sermon Fourteen, (The Banner of Truth Trust, Facsimile Reprint, 1987), 254, 256. Modernization of the English spelling added.

Calvin is contending that in some significant, yet non-corporeal manner, Christ is present in Biblical preaching. In an analogical manner of the prophets of old and the Apostles of the New Covenant, the ministers' preaching conveys Christ and His authority. Just as an ambassador speaks authoritatively and representatively, so too, ministers speak authoritatively and represent Christ and His Gospel (2 Cor. 5:20). Thus, from this understanding of the presence of Christ in the preaching, to argue for weekly Communion by highlighting Christ's real presence is to miss the forest for the trees. Christ is truly present in preaching already! The Supper seals but the Word conveys. There is a sense of Communion with Christ through preaching because any Communion with Christ involves the Word. As professor Beach summarizes:

Thus the Word, as Calvin conceives of it, is both doctrinal and sacramental. It both conveys theological information but also conveys...the presence of Christ himself—that is to say, Christ is acting in the words of the preacher....it is the instrument through which Christ is offered to us, with all of his “heavenly benefits,” his merits, righteousness, wisdom, and grace—all these “without exception.”⁶⁷

Not only is the Word's centrality proven by its nature and functions, but its close association with feeding upon Christ also demonstrates it. Given the centrality and foundational necessity of the Word as used by the Spirit in the life of the Church, the Bible's importance and relation to Christ is best illustrated by eating:

...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have taste that the Lord is

⁶⁷ Mark Beach, “The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Gospel”, *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999), p. 94. quotes Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.5.5. Note Beach's unique usage of *sacrament*, “Preaching, then, is part of God's saving presence; even more, it is *the vehicle* of that saving presence!...This is why preaching bears a sacramental character...God is pleased to work invisible grace through the audible word” (Ibid, 93, 123, emphasis original).

gracious (1 Pet. 2:1-3).

How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Ps. 119:103).

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. (Is. 55:2, 3a).⁶⁸

Physical eating is necessary for physical living; spiritual eating is necessary for spiritual living. Feeding upon Christ is so closely associated with the Word, that to eat the Word is to eat Christ. This, too, reinforces the fact that preaching conveys Christ. The classical passage arguing such is John 6. Here the relationship of the believer's life is tied to the life of Christ, and that life is conveyed through the instrument of His Word:

Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you...Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"...[Christ said] It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. *The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*⁶⁹ [emphasis added]

There is no real debate among Reformed scholars as to the meaning of these verses: to obtain eternal life, one must feed upon Christ; and to feed upon Christ means believing in Him, and belief in Him is never separated from the Word (Rom. 10:14ff.).⁷⁰ There is no

⁶⁸ Negatively, the necessity of the Word is portrayed in Amos 8:11, "'Behold, the days are coming,'" says the Lord GOD, 'That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD.'"

⁶⁹ John 6:52ff., NKJV.

⁷⁰ Leon Morris yields four decisive reasons that this passage does not refer to the Lord's Supper on page 285 (context, language, results, and culture) *New Testament Theology*, (Zondervan. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990) cp. Turretin, vol. 3, 19.28.10, p.511.

direct reference to the Lord's Supper.⁷¹ Nevertheless, John 6 enlightens understanding about the Supper, but it also enlightens understanding about the entire Christian life as well. All of the means of grace, whether official or unofficial, are given to believers for growth in sanctification; all of the means depend in a derived manner upon the Word read and preached; it is the means of grace *par excellence*. It was through this quickening Word of Christ that the prophets of old brought renewal to Israel and ushered in the new Israel. It was through this enlivening Word that Christ sustains the Church and sanctifies her (Jn. 17:17). Christ declared that it is not the physical act that brought life but His words. Neither the Sacraments *per se* nor any other physical act brings spirit and life but only the Words of Christ. Of course, all of the means, including the Word, depend ultimately upon the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Yet to create and sustain that union with Christ, one must believe in Christ as portrayed in the promises of the Word. So, when we pray, fast, fellowship or worship, we cling to Christ as found in the Word. He is not separated from the Word, but, as demonstrated above, is so closely related to it, by the work of the Spirit, that the Word is called milk, honey, bread and even life. Thus, the primacy of the Word is proven from the Word itself.

Nonetheless, it could be contended (and may be a hidden assumption in some of the arguments for frequent Communion) that Christ and/or His benefits are uniquely conveyed in the Supper.⁷² In other words, the need for weekly Supper is manifested in its unique feeding upon Christ.⁷³ This would be a strong argument for weekly Communion on two grounds: 1) if Christ is only (or mostly)

⁷¹ Calvin did not see it as referring to the Supper but to the essential union of the believer with Christ that occurs through faith alone and is sustained throughout the everyday life of the believer by the quickening Spirit, *Commentary on John*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 265. See below.

⁷² Mathison asserts that life is "In a *singularly unique way*" conveyed in the Supper (p. 294). What exactly this means or entails is not specified. (See below for more analysis). On the other hand, Horton acknowledges that the grace received in the Supper is the same as in the Word, 163.

⁷³ How this could be defined and defended as well as harmonized with the confessions is not clear.

conveyed in the Supper;⁷⁴ 2) and if the conveyance of Christ was *ex opere operato*. The latter option is not consistent with the Reformed confessions. The first option is also not tenable. Even Calvin acknowledged the fact that believers feed upon Christ outside the Supper:

The ancients fell into a gross error by supposing that little children were deprived of eternal life, if they did not dispense to them the eucharist, that is the Lord's Supper; for this discourse [John 6] does not relate to the Lord's Supper, but to the uninterrupted communication of the flesh of Christ, which *we obtain apart from the use of the Lord's Supper*.⁷⁵

...daily he [Christ] gives it [His body] when *by the word of the gospel he offers it for us to partake*, inasmuch as it was crucified...⁷⁶ [emphasis added]

Feeding upon Christ is not narrowly restricted to the Supper.⁷⁷ Calvin's contemporary, Peter Martyr, expressed the same idea.

“Moreover, we receive the body and blood of Christ *no less* in the Word of God than in this sacrament. What else are

⁷⁴ More precisely, one could believe it conveys a unique aspect of Christ and His work not conveyed in preaching or reading of the Word.

⁷⁵ *Commentary on John*, verse 53. Also compare his statements, p. 157, “A Short Treatise on Our Lord's Supper”, “We have already seen that Jesus Christ is the only food by which our souls are nourished; *but as it is distributed to us by the word of the Lord*, which he has appointed an instrument for that purpose...”[emphasis added].

⁷⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.5.

⁷⁷ Note also, “We next proceed to say, that the effect of the spiritual blessings which the sacraments figure is given to believers without the use of the sacraments. As this is daily experienced to be true, and is proved by passages of Scripture, it is strange if any are displeased with it.” “Exposition of the Heads of Agreement,” *Selected Works of John Calvin*, Vol. 2, Tracts Part 2, Ages Library, Vol. 1, p. 221; see also page 157. Compare the Geneva Catechism where he states: “**M.** Do we obtain this communion by the Supper alone? **S.** No, indeed. For by the gospel also, as Paul declares, Christ is communicated to us. And Paul justly declares this, seeing we are there told that we are flesh of his flesh and bones of his bones — that he is the living bread which came down from heaven to nourish our souls — that we are one with him as he is one with the Father, etc. (1 Corinthians 1:6; Ephesians 5:30; John 6:51; John 17:21).”

sacraments, by Augustine's description, than 'visible words'?...Reason itself also persuades us: for whatever fruit or grace bread has in the sacrament, *it has it through the Word*. Besides this, words both express and signify the nature of a sacrament more plainly than do symbols”⁷⁸ [emphasis added].

Furthermore, Calvin, in a consensus document, the *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549, designed to align the second generation Zwinglians with Geneva, summarizes the same point that “in the Supper Christ communicates himself to us, though he had previously imparted himself, and perpetually remains in us...”⁷⁹ Turretin, Hodge and Bavinck testify of this truth as well.⁸⁰ Specifically, Bavinck's insightful analysis approaches the issue from another direction:

There is neither a special baptism grace nor a special Lord's Supper grace. The content of Word and sacrament is absolutely the same; they both contain the same Mediator, the same covenant, the same benefits, the same salvation, the same fellowship with God. . . . They differ only in the *forma externa*, in the manner, in which they offer the same Christ.

The mystical union...exists not only in that moment in which one participates in the Lord's Supper. *According to Eph 5:30, John 6:51 and John 17:21 we are one with Christ and remain one with*

⁷⁸ Vermigli, *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies*. Vol. 56. *The Peter Martyr Library. The Oxford Treatise and Disputation on the Eucharist*, 1549. Translated and edited by Joseph C. McLelland. (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2000), 254. This last point about the superiority of Words over lesser symbols is a sub-theme in this debate.

⁷⁹ In like manner, the Second Helvetic Confession states: “Eating Necessary for Salvation. And this eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood of the Lord is so necessary for salvation that without it no man can be saved. But this spiritual eating and drinking also occurs apart from the Supper of the Lord, *and as often and wherever a man believes in Christ*. Sacramental Eating of the Lord. *Besides the higher spiritual eating* there is also a sacramental eating of the body of the Lord....” [emphasis added].

⁸⁰ *Institute of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 3, 19.2.6, 10 and 5.9; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 20.16, p. 639ff.

*him outside of the Lord's Supper...The sacrament adds nothing new to the Word, and it is nothing without the Word.*⁸¹ [emphases added]

Christ is in the midst of the people when the Word is in the midst of the people. The Church feeds upon Christ when the Word is fed to the Church. Feeding upon Christ in the Supper is not such a unique event that it must occur weekly.⁸²

Again, Christ and the Scriptures, especially preached, are closely integrated.⁸³ Gleason summarized Bavinck's analysis thusly:

The Word of God is the means of grace *par excellence*...the sacraments are subordinate to the Word.... Even the Word, occupying the first and most important place in the means of grace, can never be disjoined from the person and work of Christ. The reason is that the benefits which the Word and sacraments give are one and the same Christ.⁸⁴

In conclusion, the Spirit uses the means of grace, both public and private, in an integrated manner so that the Sacraments do not stand alone without daily sanctification, nor does this growth properly suffice without the public means of grace. Thus, stressing the “objective” side to the Supper is precluded. Moreover, both the

⁸¹Bavinck, Herman, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Reformed Dogmatics). Vol. 4. (Kampen: Kok, 1876), 4.457. qtd. in R. N Gleason, “Calvin and Bavinck on the Lord's Supper” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, (Fall 1983), 281; second quote: Bavinck, *Kennis en leven opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), qtd. also in R. N. Gleason, 295.

⁸² Does this nullify the use of Sacraments? Indeed, this cannot be for, as Turretin rightly points out, “Although the word and Holy Spirit testify of the grace of God and also seal it in their own way, it does not follow that this also does not belong to the sacraments...The effect is common to both causes, but the manner of effecting is diverse,” *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 19.5.9, p.353. The Word is certain; it is our faith that needs encouragement.(p.353, 19.5.12.).

⁸³ But this statement is not meant that the Word functions *ex opera operato*; the Spirit is free to work as much or little as He desires in the means He ordains. It is the ordinary function that is examined.

⁸⁴ Gleason, 281.

Sacraments and the everyday means of grace are integrated with the Word such that it is the means of God underlining all other means. As such, the grace and growth in the believers' life through all the means of grace are not qualitatively a different grace and growth than that which arises from the Word. There may be less or more growth, but all of it is within the environment of the Word read, memorized, studied and preached. Christ and His benefits are not uniquely tied to the Supper, but rather to His Word, especially preached. It is there that Communion with Christ begins and continues for believers to enjoy. The Word is necessary for everyday sanctification; as preached it is necessary in every worship service. The Supper is not on the same plane of necessity.

It is in this atmosphere that the plant of Christian life grows in the soil of Christ: the Word plants, waters and feeds, but God increases. Understanding this groundwork, a cursory review of the nature of the Lord's Supper as well as the principles of worship, will further reinforce the thesis precluding weekly Communion.

Lord's Supper

Our Covenant God deigned to provide not only that most excellent instrument of the Spirit, the Bible, but also other means of grace that are more tangible. The Sacraments were already alluded to in the previous section where it was shown that they, as well as the other more subjective means of grace, are dependent upon the Word as the source, foundation and environment in which they operate by the Spirit. After having explained this, it is more proper to summarize the nature of the specific Sacrament in question, the Lord's Supper. Horton contends that not only does the nature of the Supper play "no small part in determining frequency," but suggests "the indivisibility of nature and frequency."⁸⁵ It is important to note that the nature of the Supper will affect, to one degree or another, the question of frequency. To that end, its definition, nature and effects will be explained while interacting with relevant theologians and the Confession. Then, a summary of the *Consensus Tigurinus* will demonstrate a balanced view of the Supper.

⁸⁵ Horton, 156.

The Communion of the Lord is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace. Following the Westminster Confession, it is evident that as a Sacrament, the Lord's Supper signifies and seals the benefits of the death of Christ for the elect:

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace...to confirm our interest in him...to put a visible difference...[from] the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word. [WCF 27.1]

Specifically, the Supper is:

for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice...the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers...and, to be a bond and pledge of their Communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body. [WCF 29.1]

Presumably, all parties agree (assuming the substantial continuity with the other Reformed confessions).⁸⁶ The Supper is not merely a memorial; it is more. It is not merely a sign; it is more. As a seal firmly confirms upon our conscience (1 Pet. 3:21) the truth of the content of the letter, so the Supper confirms the truth of the Word. It is sometimes described as a hug or a kiss that shows “I-really-mean-it”—a token of that Communion already enjoyed through the Word.⁸⁷ The significance of this Sacrament is not found in the presence of Christ or the enjoyments of His benefits as such, but in its sealing aspect that “makes us more certain of the trustworthiness of God's Word.”⁸⁸ This central aspect of the Supper is highlighted because some emphasize the grace conveyed (i.e. feeding on Christ)

⁸⁶ Wilson, Gunn and Mathison are of the Westminster tradition; Horton is of the Continental tradition.

⁸⁷ Thus, compared to the Sacerdotal view, the Lutherans and Roman Catholics argue that the Reformers have no need for the Sacraments. Turretin and Calvin alike argue that: 1) God commands it; 2) It is confirmation for our weak faith. Neither argues that it should be exercised because of a special grace (or the like) separate from the Word.

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.6, p. 1281.

to such an extent that this truth appears obscured.⁸⁹ In other words, such argumentation (as noted when expounding the centrality of the Word) misses the point. Calvin places the issue in proper perspective: “Whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word: whether we are to be confirmed in faith, or exercised in confession, or aroused to duty, there is need of preaching.”⁹⁰ In no uncertain terms, while denouncing a magical view of the Supper, Calvin also proclaims: “Any man is deceived who thinks anything more is conferred upon him through the sacraments than what is offered by God’s Word and received by him in true faith.”⁹¹

Moreover, as over and against Anabaptistic theology, the Meal of the Lord not only seals the benefits of redemption, but it also spiritually feeds the believer. This latter point is further explained in section seven, chapter twenty-nine of the Confession:

Worthy receivers...do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death...yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses (WCF).

⁸⁹ It seems as though Gunn likens it to the necessity of eating—hence, he rhetorically asks if the Supper is special like a birthday (infrequent) or “special because of its necessity”? (p.20); quoting the Heidelberg Catechism Q75, Wilson stresses the nourishment of the Supper (again, which arises from the Word proper) (p.19). Perhaps a better analogy will explain the relationship. Feeding upon Christ is instrumentally through the Word; thus, weekly believers are given a well-prepared, tasty and nutritious meal by the pastor; throughout the week they take home these “leftovers” and with daily reading feed upon Christ; the Supper, then, would be akin to desert. So, the Lord invites us to a meal every week: preaching. And at times prepares a special dessert or a special meal (a tuxedo dine-out) to especially remind us of His love.

⁹⁰ *Institutes*, 4.17.39.

⁹¹ *Institutes*, 4.17.39, p.1416; 4.14.14, p.1290. Note also that assurance of salvation does not depend upon the sacrament *per se*: “[A]ssurance of salvation does not depend upon participation in the sacrament, as if justification consisted in it. For we know that justification is lodged in Christ alone, and that it is communicated to us no less by the preaching of the gospel than by the seal of the sacrament, and without the latter can stand unimpaired.” (p. 1290).

Again, presumably all parties agree with the Confession. “All the benefits of his death” are given to believers through the instrumentality of faith and the “body and blood of Christ” are spiritually present through the instrumentality of faith. Hence, there is a real, but spiritual, presence of Christ. Whether or not this is faithfully and consistently taught by Reformed churches is another issue. The fact remains, that as a confessional issue, the Lord’s Supper is aptly summarized therein.

Objective & Subjective

Wilson contends the Supper is a means of grace used by the Spirit to bring spiritual growth: “these benefits come not just by our self-discipline in using a tool the Lord has given us...they come above all by the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit.”⁹² Likewise, Gunn argues, “God uses the Lord’s Supper as an instrument for spiritually nourishing His people....”⁹³ In a similar manner, Mathison reasons that since we commune with Christ and receive life thereby, we should celebrate it weekly.⁹⁴ Since the Spirit and the benefits of the Supper are focused upon,⁹⁵ it appears that the underlining assumption in these arguments, although never expressed in such a manner, is best expressed by Horton: “Once more, Holy Communion...is chiefly an objective affair and it is

⁹² “On Weekly Communion...” p. 19. Likewise, on page 19, “...if the Lord’s Supper truly is a means of grace, then we don’t have to work up our own renewal.”

Similarly, Horton opines, “It is inspection, not introspection...” (p. 167). This appears to be the major concern behind the emphases on objectivity. Yet, within the Confessional & Biblical framework, the significance of examination (pre-worship & pre-communion) cannot be so easily bypassed. Without such examination the application-character of preaching is minimized; this creates the distinct possibility and danger of missing Christ in the worship service, let alone in Communion. Furthermore, the answer is not to stress objectivity but to re-educate people as to the proper balance as expressed in the Confession.

⁹³ Gunn, 20.

⁹⁴ Mathison, 294.

⁹⁵ With such an emphasis on the objectivity of the Supper, some questions need answers: Is there a grace in the Supper not received in preaching? Is the Supper a more effective or constant way of receiving grace than the Word alone? Horton answers the first question: no. The second question is not clearly answered by any of the authors.

something that God does for us, not something that we do for God.”⁹⁶ Thus, the true issue comes forth: the Supper is an *objective* means of receiving grace; therefore, it should be exercised frequently (weekly).⁹⁷

This premise, apparently hidden in other authors’ papers, is explicit in Horton. He expresses the idea of ‘objectivity’ as a two-poled tendency within the Reformed faith variously described as: distinguishing the sign and the thing signified versus maintaining their union; human-response orientation versus God-initiation orientation; conditional versus unconditional.⁹⁸ Admittedly, he acknowledges that this is not a true either-or dilemma but a question about the tenor, tendency or emphasis.⁹⁹ However, from a Confessional standpoint there is no choosing of emphases. Within this framework the objective and the subjective are both brought to the forefront.

Accordingly, those in the Westminster tradition wishing to stress the objectivity of the Covenant of Grace should: 1) define what is meant by this “objectivity” and 2) defend why Larger Catechism questions 170-175 are not relevant in this issue. In the first instance, how does this objectivity differ from groups such as the Federal Vision?¹⁰⁰ Further, how *objective* is “objective”? From an orthodox standpoint sacerdotal-objectivity is not allowed. More narrowly, this objectivity cannot be such that infants/young children are included in the Supper. In such a view, the objectivity of the Supper is such that a conscious and mature faith is so minimized that the benefits are present and the judgment virtually absent. In contrast to these types of objectivity, a different objectivity, along

⁹⁶ Ibid, 167.

⁹⁷ See the *Refutation* section for a detailed rebuttal of this logic.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 155.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 155.

¹⁰⁰ Some essays and lectures on the doctrines of the Federal Vision can be found at http://denverprovidence.org/html/npp_ns_fv.html#Storm. For a brief explanation of some of the proponents views on the centrality of the sacraments see Guy Waters’ *The Federal Vision And Covenant Theology* (P&R, 2006), chapter six and seven. Note especially page 212ff. where Lusk is quoted to the effect that some grace is imparted in the sacraments (“life”) not found solely in the Word (“truth”). Perhaps Mathison is following the lead of Lusk?

with a subjective dimension of understanding, is summarized in question 173:

Q173: May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, be kept from it?

A173: Such as are found to be *ignorant* or scandalous...may and ought to be kept from that sacrament...until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation. [emphasis added]

The Supper is not so objective in nature that either ignorant or scandalous candidates may partake of it; rather, a certain level of intelligent discernment and moral attainment must precede Communion. This level of understanding and moral achievement is expressed in the Westminster tradition (Communion tokens) and the Continental tradition as well: Calvin enacted pre-Communion interviews.¹⁰¹

Given the absence of these Catechism questions in the arguments for weekly Communion by those of the Westminster tradition, it appears that the objectivity viewpoint of these authors virtually excludes any subjective dimension. What these observations, thus far, point out is the fact that simply arguing for “objectivity” (either explicitly or implicitly) without a proper and clear definition creates confusion. And when they are sufficiently defined, do not take the whole of the Confession into consideration. Hence, this idea of objectivity should be clearly defined in terms of the Confession.

As for the proper view of the “objectivity” of the Supper, the Confession connects the presence of Christ with faith. That is, even though there is a real presence of Christ and a real eating of his flesh and blood (i.e. objective), it is spiritually exercised by an active faith (i.e. subjective). Where there is no active faith there is no benefit from the Supper. This proper view of objectivity retains the minimal level of spiritual feeding occurring in the Supper as question 175 reflects:

¹⁰¹ Schaff, vol. 8, p.374. In fact the Huguenots and Scots used Communion tokens. If such a practice were enacted today, weekly Communion would not be as readily embraced.

...but if they find no present benefit [after due reflection], more exactly to review their preparation to, and carriage at, the sacrament; in both which, if they can approve themselves to God and their own consciences, they are to wait for the fruit of it in due time: but, if they see they have failed in either, they are to be humbled, and to attend upon it afterwards with more care and diligence.

If one does not find “quickenings and comfort” from the Supper, one needs to further examine oneself. If one in good conscience attended properly to the Supper (both as to spiritual preparation and spiritual participation—the subjective dimension of the Supper), then he should patiently “wait for the fruit of it in due time” (the objective nature of the Supper). This precludes any paradigm that includes an idea of automatic grace given at the time of the Supper. It also precludes any approach that accents the objectivity at the expense of the subjective dimension of the Supper. It means that one may not find immediate benefit in the Supper, but that, after due examination, one should wait on the timing of the Lord. Moreover, this Catechism question implies that one who is a member in good standing, may not even receive grace through the Supper, “but, if they see they have failed in either [preparation and carriage], they are to be humbled, and to attend upon it afterwards with more care and diligence.” This objective-subjective nature of the Supper must be considered in any argument concerning the frequency of the Supper.¹⁰² It is not simply that the church should “emphasize” the objective while silently admitting that both dimensions are true. Rather, the objective and the subjective are equally present in the Catechism’s presentation.

In a similar manner, Calvin’s treatments of self-examination

¹⁰² Again, note the level of “subjectivity” in Q174: What is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper in the time of the administration of it? A: It is required of them that...[they] *diligently* observe the sacramental elements and actions, *heedfully* discern the Lord's body, and *affectionately* meditate on his death and sufferings, and thereby *stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise* of their graces....” [emphasis added]

parallels the Confessional view: he must “descend into himself,” rest in Christ, confess Him, aspire after godliness and love the brethren in word and deed.¹⁰³ Along similar lines, Berkhof contends for a level of moral discernment that excludes children and acknowledges the relevance of the spiritual condition of the recipient.¹⁰⁴

This objective-subjective balance is further illustrated in that means of grace *par excellence*, the Bible read and preached. It is true that the Word is objective, but that is only part of the picture. Again, the Westminster Catechism emphasizes both the objective and subjective (preparation) dimensions of reading and preaching as manifested in questions 155 and 160 of the Larger Catechism.

The Word of God, on which the Sacraments depend upon and from which the whole life of the believer grows from, is used of the Spirit in proportion to the faith of the believer. There is small faith and great faith and all levels in between. But the fact that the Word is *objective* should not encourage Christians to attend unto it with sloppiness. They should appropriate it through a living and active faith. So, too, the Supper, although objective, should not be attended unto with moral sloppiness.

Furthermore, the other part of the Confessional viewpoint missing in these papers is the dangers of the Supper.

Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament; yet, they receive not the thing signified thereby; but, by their unworthy coming thereunto, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. [WCF 29.8]

The Meal of the Lord is not so objective as to always benefit Christians who receive it. It is not only a source of grace but also a source of judgment; it is not only a source of judgment to unbelievers but a possible source of judgment to those within the Covenant. This is why Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 11:30 that “For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” This echoes Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:31ff. as well as the Old Testament example of the punishment given to those who

¹⁰³ *Institutes*, 4.17.40, 41.

¹⁰⁴ *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 656ff.

partook of the Passover without proper purification (2 Chron. 30:18-20). This is the side of the equation completely missing in the rationales for weekly Communion. The Westminster Confession forbids the ignorant from the table lest they bring judgment upon themselves; thus, proper examination is required “lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, Calvin withheld the Supper because of the scandalous and ignorant lifestyles of the Genevans.¹⁰⁶

Calvin’s doctrines takes the idea of judgment seriously: “We see that this sacred bread of the Lord’s Supper is spiritual food...On the other hand, it is turned into a deadly poison for all those whose faith it does not nourish and strengthen....”¹⁰⁷ In his shorter work, “A Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord”, he states:

Whoever approaches the sacrament with contempt or indifference, not caring much about following when the Lord calls him, perversely abuses, and in abusing pollutes it....[n]ot without cause then does St. Paul denounce such heavy condemnation on all who take it unworthily.¹⁰⁸

None of this explanation should detract from the gracious nature of the Supper. Christ calls through the Word, worthy, though weak, receivers to the table to sup with Him. It is a visible means to encourage our faith and seal into our conscience God’s commitment to us. It is for those weak of faith:

Q172: May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's supper?

A172: One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof....

This objective-subjective matrix is a narrow path walked by the

¹⁰⁵ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q97.

¹⁰⁶ Schaff, Vol. 8, p. 360

¹⁰⁷ *Institutes*, 4.17.40.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, Tracts Part 2, 165.

Confession, but a true path nonetheless.

Such arguments that rely heavily upon the objective nature of the means of grace (to the practical exclusion of the subjective) should be reconsidered in light of the Confessional environment in which these rationales are created. It is not mostly objective and partly subjective, but both should be expressed, and expressed with a proper balance.¹⁰⁹ Within such Confessional bounds the question is not about objective or subjective, nor what type of each is entailed, but whether the Confessional view of the Supper necessarily leads to weekly Communion. Given the level of subjective-investigation called for in the Catechism, as well as the real possibility of judgment, weekly Communion is no longer an option.¹¹⁰

Calvin & Zwingli

Another argument for weekly Communion is closely related to this previous contention. Horton (and Wilson and Mathison to a lesser degree) believes that one's view of the Supper within Reformed orthodoxy is either Zwinglian-like or Calvinian. And since the nature is so intimately tied to frequency, argues Horton, infrequent Communion (apparently quarterly) is closely aligned with Zwingli and frequent Communion (weekly) aligned with Calvin.¹¹¹ And what Reformed person would not want to be faithfully Calvinian?

Yet such a dilemma is more apparent than real. First of all, scholars, such as Berkhof, Hodge, and Hoeksema point to

¹⁰⁹ Calvin's own definition of the Supper maintains a objective-subjective paradigm: "it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will...and we in turn attest our piety toward him..." (*Institutes*, 4.14.1, p. 1277).

¹¹⁰ It is still viable insofar as churches, such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, have not closed the door to child-Communion. Allowing children (for instance a seven-year old) admittance to the Supper necessarily implies that a low level of discernment is allowed. In such an instance, the objective level of the Supper is greater than the subjective level. In light of Catechism questions 170-175 it is questionable whether child-Communion attains that level required by the Confession.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 156. Also, it should be noted that frequency does not *necessitate* a particular view of the Supper. The Disciples of Christ practice weekly Communion upon textual ground, not upon their view of the Supper. See Appendix B for a summary of different churches that practice weekly Communion.

substantial evidence that Zwingli held to a more sacramental view of the Supper. For instance, some quote the First Helvetic Confession:

“These, being tokens of secret things, do not consist of bare signs, but of signs and things also...In the Lord’s Supper, bread and wine be the signs, but the thing is the communication of the body of Christ....”¹¹²

Secondly, Peter Martyr, influenced by Calvin, while differentiating himself from the Roman Catholics and Lutherans, asserts: “For I know for a fact that in his books Zwingli considers the signs in this sacrament to be far from empty or useless, as we said above....”¹¹³ Thirdly, and amazingly, Calvin, in the opening preface to the *Consensus Tigurinus*, simply asserted:

[I]f the two excellent doctors, Zuinglius and Oecolompadius, who were known to be faithful servants of Jesus Christ, were still alive, they would not change one word in our doctrine.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Quoted in Herman Hoeksema’s *Dogmatic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1976), 719. Translated by Ronald Hanks. Also, Berkhof, p. 653. Hodge deals with Zwingli at length, p. 626, with more evidence.

¹¹³ *The Oxford Treatise...*, 121. For more on Zwingli, cf. *A Comparison of the Lutheran, Zwinglian and Calvinian Doctrines of the Supper*, Rev. Shawn C. Mathis.

¹¹⁴ 198, “Mutual Consent...” [Consensus Tigurinus]. Other statements defending Zwingli include: “I had said, that Oecolompadius and Zuinglius were induced by the best of reasons, nay, compelled by urgent necessity, to refute a gross error which had long before become inveterate and was connected with impious idolatry, but that while intent on this one object, they, as often happens in debate, lost sight of another. This passage Westphal endeavors to blacken, as if I had said, that they contended for the empty symbols, without thinking that the reality was combined with them. This is the reason why he asks pardon for using my own testimony against me.” (286, Tract Part 2: “Second Defense Of The Pious And Orthodox Faith Concerning The Sacraments, In Answer To The Calumnies Of Joachim Westphal,” *Selected Works of John Calvin*. Vol. 2, *Tracts Part 2*. Albany: AGES Digital Library, 1998.) “When Westphal invidiously says, that Zuinglius left nothing in respect of substance but bread and wine, it is easy to answer, that he was only contending against a carnal presence, which we are determined to oppose with our last breath” (287).

Clearly, Calvin had a more charitable opinion of Zwingli.¹¹⁵ Fourthly, and more importantly, even if Zwingli had a memorial view of the Supper that over-emphasized the subjective element, there is a third alternative to the Calvinian view, which is any approach that maintains the objective and efficacious dimensions as expressed in the Confessions. Even Calvin admitted as much:

Meanwhile it should satisfy us...that all agree in so far as is necessary for meeting together...that on receiving the sacrament in faith [we receive Christ's body and blood]...*How that is done some may deduce better, and explain more clearly than others...*on the one hand...we must raise our hearts upwards to heaven, not thinking that our Lord Jesus is so debased as to be enclosed under some corruptible elements...on the other hand, not to impair the efficacy of this holy ordinance, we must hold [its efficaciousness by the Spirit]....¹¹⁶ [emphasis added]

In short, one does not have to explain the Supper in the same manner or detail as Calvin to maintain, as Hodge does, a Reformed view of the Sacrament. One could “explain more clearly than others” the specifics of this doctrine. Horton concedes that Calvin’s submission of the *Consensus Tigurinus* “reflects some degree of capitulation on both sides.”¹¹⁷ Obviously, Calvin would not “capitulate” on principle. Hodge considered this document as a fine explanation of the Sacraments. And, presumably, Hodge and Calvin agree upon its contents.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ After outlining the history of debate between Luther and Zwingli, Calvin contends that Zwingli’s true view of the Supper was obscured by his focused attack upon anything that hinted at sacerdotalism: “The other party [Zwingli] also offended, in being so bent on declaiming against the superstitious and fanatical opinion of the Papists...that they labored more to pull down what was evil than to build up what was good; *for though they did not deny the truth, they did not teach it so clearly as they ought to have done.*”¹¹⁵ [emphasis added] “A Short Treatise...”, Tracts Part 2, 184.

¹¹⁶ “A Short Treatise...”, Tracts Part 2, 185ff.

¹¹⁷ “At Least Weekly,” 154.

¹¹⁸ Hodge notes two distinct dissimilarities in Calvin’s explanations (faith vs. eating (p. 644) & an “influence from the glorified body of Christ in heaven”), p. 646. Neither of which change the substantial agreement found in the *Consensus Tigurinus*.

Consensus Tigurinus

A short presentation of key points in the *Consensus Tigurinus* will further explain the nature of the Supper. It will also supply more reasons for the traditional frequency of the Supper. The relevant highlights of this document show that the grace of the Lord's Supper is: 1) dependant upon the promise it is annexed to; 2) sealed by the Spirit with the Word; 3) not a unique or special grace unobtainable outside the supper; 4) and not tied to the time of the event.¹¹⁹

As for the first point (in article 10, "The Promise Principally to Be Looked To in the Sacraments"), Calvin specifically stresses the importance of the promise as found in the Word for the meaningfulness of the Supper:

To guard against superstition, we said, in the first place, that those act foolishly who look only to the bare signs, and not rather to the promises annexed to them....that the elements become sacraments only when the word is added, not because it is pronounced, but because it is believed....If the sign be not seasoned with the promise, being insipid in itself, it will be of no avail...What will the whole company of the faithful gain by tasting a little bread and wine, if the voice does not echo from heaven that the flesh of Christ is spiritual food and his blood is truly drink?¹²⁰

In other words, it is the presence of the Gospel promise found in the Word that validates the Sacraments. It is not looking at the elements

¹¹⁹ The Consensus can be found in "Mutual Consent In Regard To The Sacraments," *Selected Works of John Calvin*. Vol. 2, *Tracts Part 2*. Albany: AGES Digital Library, 1998.

¹²⁰ "Mutual Consent..." Tracts Part 2, p. 213ff. He also declares in the same place: "Certainly if a man only brings his eyes and shuts his ears, they will differ in no respect from the profane rites of the heathen." He further states, "And the reason why our Savior pronounces the apostles clean is because of the word which they had heard from him, not because of the baptism with which they had been washed. For if the visible figures which are introduced as sacraments without the word are not only jejune and lifeless elements but noxious impostures, what else is gazing upon a sacrament without waiting for the promise but mere illusion?"

that one finds Christ. One must hear and believe the Gospel. To argue that a faithful exercise of the Supper compensates for a poor sermon is to misunderstand Calvin. Elsewhere Calvin summarizes:

Accordingly, when we hear the Sacramental word mentioned, let us understand the promise, proclaimed in a clear voice by the minister, to lead the people by the hand wherever the sign tends and directs us [to what the Gospel promises of Christ].¹²¹

The bread and wine are mute without the preached Word. They convey nothing meaningful unless explained by the Word. For Christ's words are life (John 6:63) and not the physical actions of the Sacrament.

The second point (article 15) clarifies that the sealing of the Spirit is not by virtue of the Sacrament *per se*, but as the Spirit Himself comforts and confirms the Word to our weak faith. Ephesians 1:13 closely relates the Word with the sealing: "In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...." Again, sealing is accomplished by the Spirit primarily and ordinarily through the Word.

The third point (article 19) highlights the freedom of the Spirit and the subordination of the Sacraments.

Believers Before, And Without The Use Of The Sacraments, Communicate With Christ....so without their use believers receive the reality which is there figured....So in the Supper Christ communicates himself to us, though he had previously imparted himself, and perpetually remains in us....[original capitals retained]

The Sacraments do not convey a grace different than what is obtained elsewhere. As noted earlier by Calvin,

We have already seen that Jesus Christ is the only food by which

¹²¹ *Institutes*, 4.14.4.

our souls are nourished; *but as it is distributed to us by the word of the Lord*, which he has appointed an instrument for that purpose, that word is also called bread and water.¹²²

The fourth point (article 20) explains that the “advantage which we receive from the sacraments ought by no means to be restricted to the time” at which they were administered.¹²³ In short, the timing of the Supper is not highly significant. Partaking of the Meal of the Lord does not automatically entail appropriation of grace, as Calvin explains: “Nay, no greater affront to the sacred symbols can be imagined than to hold that their reality is in force only at the time of actual exhibition.”¹²⁴

This last point is especially relevant to the question at hand. Since the benefits of the Supper are not tied to the timing of the event, then weekly Communion is not required. Contending for an increase in the time-frequency of the Supper to weekly makes better sense if the argument relies upon tying the actual event of the Supper to the grace conveyed, a proposition specifically refuted by Calvin. It is a proposition that limits the freedom of the Spirit and undervalues the preaching of the Word. The strength of these arguments for weekly Communion will only be fully appreciated if something was obtainable in the Supper not obtainable outside the Meal. If the benefits and sealing of the Supper were peculiar or unique from that which is obtained by the Spirit through the Word, then such reasoning would necessarily lead to frequent—bi-weekly, weekly, indeed, daily—Communion. If Christ, his benefits and sealing *only* occurred—or even *primarily* occurred—in the Supper of the Lord, then weekly, indeed, daily, frequency would necessarily follow. But only Mathison’s view closely resembles such reasoning; the other proponents simply use arguments relying upon the force of such reasoning without explicitly subscribing to the

¹²² “A Short Treatise...”, Tracts Part 2, 158, emphasis added.

¹²³ Article 20, “...And it may sometimes happen that the use of the holy Supper, which, from thoughtlessness or slowness of heart does little good at the time, afterwards bears its fruit.” Thus, lack of proper communion preparation will yield little good for church members.

¹²⁴ “A Short Treatise...”, 222.

arguments themselves.

In brief, the objective nature of the Supper does not tend toward weekly Communion because the Supper is both subjective and objective in implementation. The false dilemma of choosing between Calvin and Zwingli does not tend toward weekly Communion because a third option, as summarized in the *Consensus Tigurinus*, is at hand. And highlighting the benefits of the Supper, without due consideration of the freedom of the Spirit in communicating those benefits without the Meal, only confuses the real issue. A Confessional view of the nature of the Supper does not lead to weekly Communion, but supports the traditional view of its frequency.

Integrating the doctrine of the means of grace as rooted in the Word, the centrality and necessity of the Word, and the presence of Christ in the Word preached, with the complete dependence of the Supper upon that proclaimed Word, demonstrates that the Word must be preached frequently and the sacrament ought not be placed on the same level of frequency. The nature of the Supper should not be confused with the nature of the Word. The arguments for weekly Communion are properly rooted in the Word preached and actually defend frequent preaching rather than weekly Communion.

Moreover, the moral examination required in the Supper, as expressed in the Confession, is further illuminated by examining the Old Testament worship.

Worship

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Glorifying God entails obedience to His will and proper and due worship. Worship is broadly conceived as encompassing all of life through submission to God and is narrowly conceived as a formal, public and official assembling before Him. This former signification of worship easily falls under the previous explanation of the informal or private means of grace; the latter is readily recognized as belonging to public worship and the public means of grace.

The Word of God, as defined in the practice and doctrines of the Reformed churches, strictly regulates the realm of public

worship. This doctrine, called the Regulative Principle of Worship, asserts that any element of worship must be prescribed by the Word (either through explicit text, good and necessary consequence or divine example):

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself...that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men...or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. [WCF 21.1]¹²⁵

However, this doctrine does not preclude arranging certain incidentals that are not essential parts of worship but are common to all men, “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies....” Such circumstances include the place of worship, the time of day for worship, the types of chairs or the amount of sitting and standing entailed. The question then becomes: does the frequency of the Supper properly belong to the first or second category? Is the frequency of the Supper a matter of circumstances common to all men or is it regulated as much as the elements of worship? This question is implicitly acknowledged by those authors attempting to derive the weekly practice from Scriptural passages, but it is only explicitly stated by Horton: “...whatever is not commanded is not required of all churches.”¹²⁶ If the frequency of the Supper is dictated by the Word of God, then this frequency will be discovered in an explicit text, by good and necessary consequent (deductive syllogism), or by proper divine example.

The closest to divine warrant given by proponents of weekly Communion are the New Testament passages, Acts 2 and 20 and 1 Corinthians 11. If this question is not positively and fully answered by an appeal to these passages (and it is not),¹²⁷ then the answer

¹²⁵ This principle is rooted in such passages as Deut. 4:15ff., 12:32; Matt. 4:9ff., Ex. 20:4-6, etc.

¹²⁶ Horton admits that Christ’s words are not a command, 163.

¹²⁷ Horton: “Of course, this is not necessarily equivalent to a command for weekly communion.” Specifically, he is referring to the Lord’s command “as often as you do this” [“often” as pointed out by Dr. Grossman, (“Theses...”) does not mean “do often,” p. 8.]. These passages are evaluated below.

must be sought elsewhere: either by deduction of Biblical principles or by proper divine example. Contrary to Gunn's implicit assertion,¹²⁸ no one has established a deductive syllogism establishing the rate of frequency for the Supper. If Gunn had established this fact, then it would be just as binding as every other element in worship. As for proper divine example, the proof texts noted earlier would be the closest to defending this view. Wilson's appropriation of Leviticus 9 would also fall under this category (as will be demonstrated below, this is insufficient evidence as well).

What remains when taking the question of frequency outside the realm of command? Does it necessitate a position of indifference?¹²⁹ First of all, a circumstance of worship is not only common to man; it is "to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (WCF 1.6). Christian prudence and specifically the general rules of the Bible (the nature of the Supper) can help limit the range of this question to a possible minimal and definitely a maximal frequency of the Meal.¹³⁰

This means that although frequency is a circumstance of worship, it is obvious that the Supper is unique in comparison to other "human actions". It is this uniqueness of the nature of the Supper that will help narrow the range of answers. Secondly, it must be recognized that making this partially an issue of circumstance does not negate the possibility of excess. Just as some of the other circumstances of worship may be abused (calling a suburban church to worship at six in the morning; having people stand an entire two-hour service; etc.), this could be abused. It could

¹²⁸ "We universally deduce from Scripture...[that] every [other]...element of worship should be taken advantage of every Lord's Day. Why is communion the exception...?" p.1.

¹²⁹ Presbyterian John Courtas takes a similar view insofar as he does not tie the question to a specific answer. In particular, John contends that the frequency question is decided by the session based upon the spiritual condition of the church. And if the church were in such a high spiritual state as the Apostolic church of Acts 2, then a higher frequency would be warranted (*Frequency of the Lord's Supper or A Letter Addressed to the Community of Old Dissenters...*, Reprint, Still Water Revival, (Glasgow: 1797), 77.)

¹³⁰ See the chart in Appendix E.

be the case that weekly Communion, under this consideration, may be excessive.¹³¹ From a maximal frequency limit, the arguments for a weekly Supper does not follow from the centrality of the Word as *the* means of grace portraying Christ and all His benefits, the nature of the Supper as dependent upon this Word, and the requisite examination involved. Examining the holiness of God as expressed in public worship will further reinforce this maximal limitation.

To determine how frequent the Supper should be administered, it is important to understand public worship. Just as the Gospel, Covenant and Church government¹³² are interpreted and applied in light of the Old Testament; so, too, worship and the sacraments must be interpreted accordingly. In a day when the value of the Old Testament is undervalued or regulated to inconsequential platitudes or its principles are hidden through excessive Christo-typology, this assertion needs some proof. In short order, simply perusing the New Testament's constant quotes, references and allusions to the Old will readily demonstrate the Apostle's dependence upon the older dispensation.¹³³

It would seem that within a Confessional framework, such an approach would be obvious; yet, there are some who focus on the New Testament, forgetting the background and essential oneness of the covenants. It is beyond the scope of the thesis to extensively defend a Biblical appropriation of the older covenant, but for the purpose of the paper, it is instructive that various Reformed

¹³¹ See section below, Refutation, Theological.

¹³² Edmond Clowney rightly states, "In church order, therefore, as in doctrine, we must begin with the Old Testament revelation," p. 45, "A Brief for Church Governors," *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers*, ed. Mark Brown, Classic Presbyterian Governmental Resources, Duncansville, PA: 1993. For a fuller Biblical-theological development of church officers, see Dr. Leonard J. Coppes' *Who Will Lead Us?* (Pilgrim Publishing), www.denverprovidence.org.

¹³³ For example, it is instructive that Paul founded his argument for providing material well-being of New Covenant ministers upon Old Covenant precedence. His quote not only employs case-law, but ceremonial passages as well: "...do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:8-13). Compare: Matt. 5:17; Acts 24:14; 25:8; 1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 3:12ff, 4:1ff; Heb. 4:1ff. etc.

theologians defended this approach.¹³⁴ For instance, Calvin states:

But God formerly made use of the ceremonies as temporary aids, of which, although the use has ceased, the utility still remains; because from them it more clearly appears how God is to be duly served; and the spirit of religion shines forth in them. Therefore the whole substance is contained in the precept, but in the external exercise, as it were, the form to which God bound none but His ancient people.¹³⁵

Worship Pattern

As related to the nature of the Supper, there is one major principle that is immediately relevant: moral purity. Leviticus 11:45 summarizes, “You shall therefore be holy; for I am holy.” Naturally, since all believers are priests before God (1 Ptr. 2:9), this text is immediately applicable to them: they are to be morally spotless in everyday life, striving against sin by the power of the Spirit within them (Rom. 8:4). Naturally, the priest of old had to obey God everyday, but they especially prepared themselves before each sacrifice (worship). More precisely, as a kingdom of priests, we have access to the holy of holies, just as did the high priest of old. By virtue of union with Christ, we enter before the Ark of the Covenant and “have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Heb. 13:10). Coupling this fact with the moral seriousness of the Supper, the possible judgment (1 Cor. 11:30-31) and its equation to eating upon altars (1 Cor. 10:18), this level of mature examination is properly expressed by the Confession as shown above.¹³⁶

Nevertheless, as God was merciful to the Church of old in

¹³⁴ See Appendix D for extended quotes and a summary defense.

¹³⁵ *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, vol. 2, Deut. 18:19, Judicial Supplements. Compare also the Fourth Commandment, Leviticus 23, etc., p. 457, 462 and 472 where Calvin gives the moral sense of some of the OT feasts. Compare also Institutes 3.4.11 and Calvin’s appropriation of the priestly confession of sin.

¹³⁶ 2 Chronicles 30:18-20 is a striking example of poor prior examination (cleansing) before the Passover. Some were sick because of this. It is instructive that the divines quoted this passage in relation to preparing for the Supper (LCQ 171); it is also quoted in the OPC proof-texts as well.

granting a special priest-ministry for Israel to minister in place of the people (for they were all priests before God [Ex. 19:6]),¹³⁷ so, too, God only asks for the minister of the New Testament Church to be full-time priests. In a similar vein, the daily whole burnt offerings, given evening and morning, represent the full dedication of life and that continually. These offerings, given twice a day, represent the entire day. They are tokens representing the fact that every moment of our life is to be in consecration to God. Similarly, the tithe represents the fact that all our possessions are owned by God and consecrated to Him. Carrying this principle further, the weekly Sabbatical holy convocations, by God's mercy, represent the entire life that should be lived in worship (as it will be in heaven). God only asks for one in seven days, even though He owns all the days and all our time. So, although purity is demanded daily, it is especially demanded for the Sabbath; as it is demanded for the Sabbath, it is especially demanded for the weekly convocation (public worship); and as it is demanded for worship, it is especially demanded of the Supper.¹³⁸

The Church throughout the ages has recognized this truth and exercised this weekly worship pattern. This pattern was especially established and explained in the Reformed doctrine of worship. The original Westminster Confession of Faith references Leviticus 23:3 (LC 117) as proof of weekly public worship. And it recognized the holiness of this convocation by its doctrine of the Sabbath, which demands preparation, both for the day in general (for rest) and worship in particular (WCF 21.8, LC 160). This being an ordinary holy convocation, it is a pattern most appropriate to the history of redemption from the creation of the world (wherein the Sabbath is set apart) until the consummation of the heavenly Sabbath (Heb.

¹³⁷ Numbers 8:16, 19 notes that God used the Levites instead of every first-born male to do the “work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting.” In grace, He substituted some for all—a token (part for the whole) of all of Israel.

¹³⁸ Thus, this shows the underlining continuity of everyday worship and purity, yet maintains the distinction of the Sabbath, public worship and the Supper (all expressive of the Regulative Principle of Worship). This differs sharply with the Evangelical mindset that makes no distinction between everyday worship and Sabbatical worship.

4).¹³⁹

Taking this clearly applicable Old Testament pattern, it becomes apparent that in the New Testament era the Church should worship on a weekly basis.¹⁴⁰ Since the weekly public worship is the same in substance to the New, it is relevant to the question of weekly Communion. If, as Wilson apparently alleges, the peace-offering represents Communion, and Communion is found in the Lord's Supper, then its absence in the Old Testament weekly worship service pointedly argues against weekly Communion. On the other hand, realizing that the sacrificial system portrays and acts out the Person and Work of Christ, it is more appropriate to equate preaching with the sacrifices (whether weekly or not). In the Older Testament, the Church was in her infancy (Gal. 4:1ff.), and she was given many visible forms to manifest the Gospel; its lesser level of revelation and sanctification necessarily involved vague and imprecise explanations of the Gospel.¹⁴¹ Now, in the Gospel age, preaching portrays Christ more clearly than sacrifices. Calvin hints at this connection:

“Formerly the sacrifices were taken from the flocks and herds; but the Apostles and other priests of Christ slew men themselves, and offered them as a living sacrifice to God by the Gospel. Paul testifies that he discharged the office of the priesthood, when he

¹³⁹ The other holy convocations (feasts) are more extraordinary because of their duration, frequency, membership and pattern of worship. Edersheim notes that the Sabbatical holy convocations included the Israelites assembling, renewal of the showbread and additional burnt-offerings (with associated meat- and drink-offerings); Edersheim, A. *The Temple*. electronic ed., Libronix Digital Library System, p.138 in book. (Num. 28).

¹⁴⁰ Calvin highly prized public worship: believers have no greater help than there (4.1.5); it should be taken seriously by showing us our “unworthiness” as we stand before God (4.1.5); “Believers were bidden of old to seek the face of God in the sanctuary, as is oftentimes repeated in the law for no other express reason than that for them the teaching of the law and the exhortations of the prophets were a living image of God, just as Paul asserts that in his preaching the glory of God shines in the face of Christ” (4.1.5).

¹⁴¹ See Calvin's point about Word and symbols in the section on *Consensus Tigurinus*. Eventually, the Synagogue pattern accompanied the Temple pattern and helped form the New Testament worship that climaxed in preaching.

slew men by the sword of the Gospel, ‘that they might be an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit’ (Romans 15:16).”¹⁴²

Thus, every worship service needs preaching.¹⁴³

However, another lesson might be learned from the ceremonial law. The feast days (as celebrations) suggest a minimal frequency of the Supper. They are similar in terms of both their celebratory aspect and their membership (which is not the smaller family unit but multiple families). Granted, they are not exact equivalents to the Supper, yet it is instructive that Christ partially built upon this pattern, especially the Passover. Paul also builds upon the desert-meals (1 Cor. 10). What this suggests is that if God only required attendance to three of the several feast-days for the younger Church (Deut. 16:16), then the New Testament (as an age of greater grace) should ordinarily not have it any less frequent.¹⁴⁴ From another perspective, comparing the level of revelation reinforces this truth. Horton’s allegation that since we have weak faith, we should have weekly Communion, does not hold true.¹⁴⁵ For if there is greater grace in the New Testament, then there is greater faith (overall); if there is greater illumination, there is greater responsibility and judgment (Heb. 12:25); so, if God, knowing the weakness of the faith of the saints of old, did not require weekly meals (either feast-days or peace-offering) for the strengthening of their faith, then how much more in the New Testament age? Therefore, weekly Communion is not a viable option.

¹⁴² *Calvin’s Commentaries* Vol. VIII, Isaiah 33-66, 66:20ff., p. 635ff.

¹⁴³ If everyday activities are sanctified by Word and prayer, how much more worship (1 Tim. 4:5)? (Compare Dr. Grossman, p. 7). Further, if the Supper depends upon the Word for explanation, then those sacrifices of Old cannot primarily point to the Supper (to whatever degree), but primarily to Gospel preaching; in this manner—Christ portrayed in the Word—the Supper is related to these sacrifices, but only indirectly.

¹⁴⁴ The eschatological dimension of the Supper also argues against weekly communion. We are in a shadow compared to eternity in heaven when all and only the elect of the church will fully and perpetually participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Thus, our place in redemptive history precludes a full participation of the Supper extensively (children are barred) and intensively (it is not enacted weekly).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 163.

Rebuttal

Of the various authors defending weekly Communion, only Wilson and Mathison spend any significant amount of space on the Old Testament precedence. They rightly acknowledge this sacramental background in analyzing the Supper.¹⁴⁶ In particular, Wilson attempts to tie the frequency issue to the general contours of Old Testament worship: “The Lord revealed this pattern in Old Testament worship.” Consequently, he quotes Leviticus 9:15-22 as an “example of an old covenant worship service.”¹⁴⁷ This example yields a pattern: calling, cleansing, consecration, Communion and benediction.¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, there are four important observations that display the weakness of this evidence. Firstly, the passage is not a typical Old Testament public worship service. It is the consummation of the consecration and first-time ordination of the Aaronic priesthood.¹⁴⁹ The extraordinary characteristic of this event is also illustrated by the special presence of God manifested in the supernatural fire that consumed the offering. As to its relation to the ordinary daily worship of the priests as well as the weekly Sabbath holy convocation, it is extraordinary in relation to the kind and order. There are no peace-offerings for the weekly worship service nor is the order the same. God thought it sufficient for the Israel of old to assemble for a holy convocation twice a week on the Sabbath without the peace-offerings. Secondly, if this is the pattern of public worship, then it does not argue for weekly Communion but argues

¹⁴⁶ Mathison, after acknowledging that the whole ceremonial system presents Christ and His work, focuses (without any apparent reason) upon the peace-offering as it relates to the Supper, p. 197ff. He also quotes Malachi 1:11 as further evidence of the centrality of the Supper. In contrast, Calvin rightly points out (contrary to the contention that this verse alludes to the Romish mass or the Lord’s Supper) that one should not focus too much on the details of prophecy. Further, why are not any of the following used as a worship pattern? Is. 19:19; Jer. 17:26; Jer. 33:17; Ez. 43:18; Is. 66:21; Zech. 14:16, etc.

¹⁴⁷ Wilson, 17.

¹⁴⁸ It is not clear if Wilson is contending that this is a pattern *commanded* by God. If it is, then it is binding on all churches; if not, then to what extent is it binding? What is exactly useful or not?

¹⁴⁹ The NIV commentary calls it the beginning of the priests’ ministry.

for implementing the Lord's Supper in *every* public worship service. If this is the pattern of worship, and the New Testament is to follow this pattern, then the Supper is supposed to be celebrated in every public worship service.¹⁵⁰ There is nothing in the argument lessening the impact of this conclusion; it is mere assertion to declare that this pattern is limited to once-a-week-Communion. Thirdly, it is not explained why this service should be considered a pattern to follow. Finding a pattern and establishing its use for weekly Communion are two different things. Besides arguing for a worship pattern based upon the weekly Sabbath, one could argue along the lines of the feast-days. Fourthly, and closely related to the previous, why cannot the Old Testament weekly Sabbatical pattern be followed instead? This pattern is expressive of public worship for both the priests and the people of God. It includes the morning and evening sacrifices, but does not include the peace-offerings.

Furthermore, besides the Leviticus evidence, there appears to be an assumption that the peace-offering is *equivalent* to the Lord's Supper, "...the offerings fell into three basic categories—sin offerings (for cleansing), whole burnt offerings (for consecration), and peace offerings (for communion with God)."¹⁵¹ There are a few problems with this approach. First of all, it is not explained why this should be the case, since, for one example, the New Testament "equates" (insofar as it overlaps) the Supper to the Passover.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ However, if the confessional distinction between the usual parts of worship and the occasional parts (the sacraments) were maintained as in the current OPC Directory of Public Worship (2006), the logical conclusion of every-worship Communion can be readily avoided (see appendix A for more detail).

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 17. More precisely, the NIV study Bible states that "the procedure was *usually* as follows" [emphasis added]. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* lists this view of the peace-offering (שְׁלֵמִי)—that it is a "concluding sacrifice"—as only one of three alternatives to explaining the function of peace-offerings. It also states that the offering "usually" comes last in a list (vol. 2, Moody Press: Chicago, 1980, p.932). Interestingly, 1 Chron. 16:1 includes peace-offering without a sin-offering. Furthermore, Num. 7 does use this sequence, but only for the special event of dedicating the altar (but begins with oblations). Numbers 6:13ff. almost has this sequence (imbedded amongst other activities), but occurs within a text about the Nazirite vow—a unique event. To argue without due consideration of these and other verses is special pleading.

¹⁵² It is also "equated" with wilderness meals (1 Cor. 10) and every other meal of the OT.

From this “equation” one could argue for annual Communion. This is the overall problem with trying to tie the frequency question to any one given sacrifice: which one should be chosen? Secondly, in a related manner, communion was also expressed in the annual feasts. If ‘communion’ is the operative word, then one could argue for less than weekly on the feast pattern. Indeed, the feasts more readily fit not only the idea of fellowship, but also the celebratory elements of the Supper as well as the inclusion of all of Israel instead of smaller family units. Thirdly, the use of the word ‘communion’ is equivocal. As demonstrated earlier in analyzing the centrality of the Word and worship in particular, believers have communion with Christ through the Word by the power of the Spirit. This communion is experienced daily, but more particularly in weekly public worship. There through the Word preached, Christ is vividly portrayed and communion especially experienced. Thus, the Lord’s Supper is not especially needed to experience this communion unless one believes there is no true communion without the Supper—a questionable assertion at best. Likewise, if the pattern is cleansing, consecration and communion and the Lord’s Supper is that communion, then any worship service without the Supper is a public worship without communion. Surely, the author does not desire this conclusion! Yet, for want of clarification, as well as the force of the assertion, what other conclusion is there? For instance, if the peace-offering has such a signification, what of its absence in the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16)?¹⁵³ Is there no communion with God on one of the most holy of days in the Older Testament? However, if the service is Word-centric, then all three elements exist by virtue of the Spirit and the Word: it brings cleansing to us (Eph. 5:26); it brings consecration to us (Jn. 17:17); and it brings communion to us (Jn. 6:63). Fourthly, as in the previous argument, this equation of Communion and peace-offering does not prove or even suggest weekly Communion but proves the exercise of the Supper in every worship service (granting this pattern). It suffers the same problem as do all of the arguments. There is no passage or pattern of weekly

¹⁵³ Heb. 13:10 focuses, not on the peace-offering, but upon the Holy of Holies, an altar where the priests did not eat, but an altar where we can eat (thus creating a new image from the older patterns). 1 Cor. 11:30-31

Communion. No passage states: “Communion should be once a week, but another service without the Supper is acceptable.” And of the passages brought forward for weekly Communion (if binding per the Regulative Principle of Worship), they prove either the Supper in *every* service or prove implementing public worship *only once* a week and that with the Lord’s Supper.

In short, it is not at all clear why Leviticus 9, and the peace-offering in particular, should be evidence for partaking of the Supper weekly. On the surface, these arguments appear to defend this proposition, but upon closer inspection, this is not the case. The argument is not sufficient to establish the case or it proves too much or it does not take into consideration other factors and verses. On the other hand, the weekly pattern of public worship on the Sabbath makes more sense theologically, chronologically and psychologically as a pattern for the New Testament Church. In such a pattern there is no weekly Communion pattern, but there is a weekly communion pattern insofar as all worship through the Word involves communion. Moreover, examining the Old Testament showed that the Holy God of the Covenant demanded moral purity—just as is demanded today. This purity is demanded in everyday life and particularly in public worship. And this purity in public worship is especially demanded in the Supper of our Lord. As priests of the New Covenant, it is no little thing to come into His presence.

Thus, weekly Communion was never practiced in the Reformed faith. On the other hand, the suggested minimal exercise of the Supper to three times a year is expressive of a lesser revelation, and the New Testament church can do no less.

Chapter 4: Exegesis

The passages brought forward as evidence of weekly Communion are few. Those texts are insufficient to establish a principle of weekly Communion. In all of these instances, the real question, as propounded Presbyterian John Courtas, is: “Was it so frequently administered to the same persons?...and except this be proven, nothing is proven at all.”¹⁵⁴ For, indeed, if it were granted that the Supper was frequently offered, it may have been so due to the circumstances of the times, the people not able to attend worship at a regular basis (i.e. slaves, traveling merchants, etc.). Thus the same individual would not have had the Meal on a weekly basis. Nevertheless, each passage will be analyzed in turn. First the Lucian passages will be examined before expounding the Pauline text.

Acts 2:42-46

This passage is the text used by almost all modern advocates for weekly Communion.¹⁵⁵ However, this assertion is not defended; it is merely assumed that either verse 42 and/or verse 46 is sufficient to prove the case or strongly suggests its implementation. A simple set of questions reveals that this is not the case.

- 1) What does “breaking bread” mean?
- 2) Does it have the same referent in verses 42 and 46?
- 3) Does anything in these verses necessarily entail weekly Communion?

First of all, an examination of the Lucian usage of “breaking bread” (λαβων αρτον) in verses after the Last Supper shows an inconsistent usage of the phrase. It is acknowledged by advocates of weekly Communion that the presence of this phrase is not sufficient to establish the existence of the Lord’s Supper.¹⁵⁶

Logically, if Acts 2:46 refers to Communion, then the

¹⁵⁴ *Frequency*, 10.

¹⁵⁵ Horton, p.163, Wilson, p.15, Mathison, p. 225.

¹⁵⁶ Gunn, p. 9. Compare Luke 24:30ff. and Acts 27:35 for non-communion usages.

Apostles would have had to administer the Supper in a multitude of homes within one given day. With three-thousand souls saved in one day and only twelve apostles administering the Wine and Bread, the logistical considerations alone would not only be a nightmare, but would be physically impossible.¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, if it refers to a general state of affairs (daily Communion at various houses and not all of them at once) then it does not prove weekly Communion.

In the second place, the question of the relation between verses 42 and 46 is in question. Some quote this whole passage as though both verses refer to the Supper. Others refer to only the first verse.¹⁵⁸ In such an instance, it appears that there is no consensus on this text. Alford and Meyer maintain a consistency of content in verses 42 and 46. Alford's Greek Testament commentary suggests that the breaking of bread in Acts 2:42 refers specifically to the *agape* feast commonly practiced and associated with the Lord's Supper.¹⁵⁹ Meyer concludes in a similar vein.¹⁶⁰ Gunn notes, "The best explanation for this apparently diverse usage [vs. 42 as the Supper; vs. 46 as common meals] in such close proximity is that the early church combined the sacramental meal with a fellowship meal

¹⁵⁷ The Bible actually says they broke bread from house to house, thus compounding the logistics problem beyond the incredible idea of feeding 3000 people everyday in a central location. Giving the Lord's Supper to every household or groups of people in a house could be calculated as follows: given the size of Jerusalem and the likely fact that the believers' homes in the city were spread out from each other, traveling by foot would make for a long day. Further, enacting the Supper in all those places would involve an entire worship service at the house. Thus, at least an hour of worship (with a short sermon?) would be practiced at each home every day, assuming they could attend at the same house everyday given the long work days. Granted, the Apostles could coordinate twelve services in twelve homes at the same time (thus, saving time): $12/3000 = 250$ people per worship service—this would mean finding 12 locations that could seat 250 people. None of these calculations include the busy ministry of the Apostles in diaconate work and prayer (Acts 6), outdoor preaching, ruling over disputes (Acts 5), healing people and fellowshiping with the saints.

¹⁵⁸ Wilson and Horton only mention verse 42; Gunn contends that verse 42 is the Supper while 46 is a common meal (p. 9); Mathison focuses on verse 42 and 46 (p. 226).

¹⁵⁹ *The Greek New Testament—with a critically revised text...and a critical and exegetical commentary*, Vol. II. (London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1856), 26.

¹⁶⁰ *Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, Acts, Vol. IV.* trans. Venables. (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1980), 68.

or love feast.”¹⁶¹

In contrast, Calvin understands verse 42 to refer to the Supper and 46 to refer to normal meals, “...some do think that in this place, by breaking of bread is meant the Holy Supper, it seemeth to me that Luke meant no such thing. He signifieth, therefore, unto us, that they used to eat together, and that thriftily.”¹⁶² Likewise, Kistemaker explains:

Daily they come together in their private homes to eat bread and confirm the unity they possess in Christ. Of course, eating bread at home is hardly newsworthy, for this is customary and expected. However, Luke parallels the unity and harmony of the believers at the temple with their togetherness at common meals in private homes... Accordingly, we should distinguish the common meal from the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (v. 42).¹⁶³

What is clear from the above commentaries is that there is no definite answer to this question. However, given the thrust of verses 44 and 45 (common sharing amongst the saints), it is likely verse 46 refers to the overall fellowship experienced not only in the Temple but also in every house. Nevertheless, it is not good policy to base church practice on unclear passages of the Bible.¹⁶⁴

In the third place, even if the position of Gunn is taken, it does not logically lead to weekly Communion. As Gunn himself

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁶² *Commentary of the Book of Acts*, 132.

¹⁶³ Kistemaker, S. J., & W. Hendriksen. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*. New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, elect. Ed. (Logos), 1953-2001), 113. Both Wilson, Gunn and Kistemaker assert that v.42 refers to the Lord’s Supper because the other elements within the list are part of worship. It is not clear why ‘fellowship’ would be an element of worship, strictly speaking. Some commentators suggest that the prayers may have been the Jewish prayer times. Even so, simply quoting verse 42 will not prove weekly Communion but only a Communion that was ‘steadfastly held’ (προσκατεροῦντες-present participle) by the Church.

¹⁶⁴ Kistemaker notes that determining this question in relation to verse 42 is “difficult”.

recognizes it leads to *daily* Communion.¹⁶⁵ The text argues for more than is desired. Further, a natural question arises whether or not the pattern of the early Church is always and everywhere binding. If it is, then daily attendance at the Temple should be enacted and Christians should have “all things in common.” As Gunn rightly observes, the early Church existed during an extraordinary time with extraordinary activities.

Acts 20:7

As in the previous text, similar questions as in the proceeding section need answering. First of all, “Breaking bread” in and of itself does not necessitate the Lord’s Supper (cp. Acts 26:46), as mentioned previously. As for the second question, Alford and Meyer believe that both verses refer to the same *αγαπαι*-Communion.¹⁶⁶ Calvin believes it refers to the Supper as does Kistemaker. Specifically, Kistemaker maintains that verse 7 is an introductory sentence presenting the general idea before detailing the events:

Often he [Luke] introduces an incident or action which he explains in the succeeding context...Similarly, Luke’s remark that the Christians in Troas came together to break bread (v. 7) probably is introductory. The comment that Paul broke bread and ate refers to the actual celebration of the Lord’s Supper and the partaking of the love feast....¹⁶⁷

Given that this passage is written about the Lord’s Supper, does it necessitate weekly Communion? The intended purpose of this event is for celebrating the Lord’s Supper and preaching. Paul has traveled far to encourage the believers. This broader section of Acts focuses on the activities of Paul and his travels. The larger idea is

¹⁶⁵ In fact, if taken thusly, pastors should travel from home to home administering the Supper to each family!

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 206; Meyer, 386.

¹⁶⁷ Kistemaker, 718.

not to present a snap-shot of worship *per se*.¹⁶⁸ Worship was weekly practiced, but the Supper was especially practiced when Paul arrived. Calvin elaborates: “Therefore, I think thus, that they had appointed a solemn day for the celebrating of the Holy Supper of the Lord among themselves, which might be commodious for them all.”¹⁶⁹

In other words, it was not a weekly event. Quoting verse 7 only establishes that it occurred; and even if regularly occurring¹⁷⁰, the frequency is not mentioned.¹⁷¹ The fact that it happened on Sunday is questionable if verse 11 is the actually eating of Communion. In such a case, then, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated on Monday (after midnight). Moreover, the text simply states the purpose of this particular visit (being unique since Paul was there as Calvin noted). More evidence is needed to establish that weekly Communion occurred than appealing to silence or asserting that its existence in Holy Writ is sufficient evidence. This passage does not support the weekly Communion proposition.

However, this passage can be taken as a general indicator that the Church worshiped on Sunday. The number of times they met on that day, how long the services were, etc., are not definitively answered here. What it does not establish is the frequency of the Supper.

Additionally, if it establishes a regular Communal service, then it is questionable whether it is a divine precept to be followed. If it is, then Gunn has not only established a text *suggestive* of weekly Communion, but has established a text that is *binding* for the Church. Of course, the very question then becomes whether all

¹⁶⁸ Gunn asserts that since the Spirit inserted this section, it’s most likely for the purpose of promoting weekly Communion. Yet, verse 16, through similar reasoning, may argue for the continuation of Pentecost.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 236, verse 7.

¹⁷⁰ The verb, συνηγμένων, is a perfect-passive participle used as a circumstantial. A present-active would better reinforce the weekly Lord’s Supper thesis. Courtas’ translates it “having been collected together”. He maintains that the passive implies an official call to gather and since it was not in the present it was not a regular occurrence (*Frequency*, 13).

¹⁷¹ Regular occurrences could be quarterly, compare Lee’s *Quarterly communion At Annual Seasons*.

actions by the early Church and Apostles are *de facto* binding. Further, if it establishes a Communion service, then it establishes the Supper with *every* worship service (not just once a week) if this text exemplified the normal practice of the Church. On the other hand, it could also establish *only* one public worship service in the evening, and that with the Supper. This pattern would preclude additional services since there is no example of two worship services on the Lord's Day in this passage. Similarly, this divine example would encourage long sermons with services lasting into Monday. Logically, then, the text has too many questions unanswered and if answered in line with Gunn's reasoning, leads to a one-public-worship-service-a-week paradigm with the Lord's Supper practiced late into the next day.

1 Corinthians 11:17ff.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17 and following, Paul states:

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together [συνερχεθε] not for the better but for the worse...¹⁸For first of all, when you come together [συνερχομενων] as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it...Therefore when you come together [συνερχομενων] in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper...³³Therefore, my brethren, when you come together [συνερχομενοι] to eat, wait for one another. ¹⁷²

It is contended by some of the authors that this participle, *συνερχομενων*, implies weekly Communion. However, at best, it only suggests the possibility. It does not strongly nor necessarily lead to the desired conclusions. Neither Alford, Meyer, Calvin nor Kistemaker alludes to the question of frequency in this passage. Contextually, the purpose of Paul's writing is to admonish the Corinthians. Specifically, Paul simply states that when coming together for the purpose of eating the Meal, then they should wait. It does not say "whenever you come to weekly worship, then partake

¹⁷²*The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Co 11:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

of the Supper.” Rather, Paul limits the circumstantial clause to the eating of the Meal: “therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (v. 33). Besides, if the Meal were specifically tied to the occurrence of public worship, the text would prove the partaking of the Supper in *every* worship service not in only one weekly service. There is no command for once-a-week Communion.

In summary, none of the passages brought as evidence for weekly Communion stand up to close scrutiny. If these passages prove anything (granting that they must be followed as divine patterns), they prove either daily Communion, or only once-a-week worship (and no more) or every-worship-service Communion. Such propositions are beyond the pale of Gunn and Wilsons’ intended purposes; but the third proposition is closer to Horton’s and Mathison’s defense of *at-least-weekly* Supper.

Chapter 5: Refutation

Logical

There are a number of theological and logical arguments presented by the authors to defend the practice of weekly Communion. To a large degree many of the stronger arguments have already been analyzed and found wanting. Consequently, this particular section will scrutinize some secondary arguments.

At the outset, some underbrush needs to be swept away so that the true differences may be illuminated. First of all, the constant use of the word *frequent* to describe the weekly Communion position is misleading. It is not only historically misleading (since the Reformers reacted against the annual practice of the Roman Church, then even quarterly would be frequent) and semantically ambiguous (*frequent* is a relative term), but it also poisons the well of theological discussion—loading the theological discourse with such implications, expressed or hidden, as “Who would not want more grace?” For example, since the word *frequent* is ambiguous, those advocating a monthly practice could easily claim that their observance was frequent compared to a quarterly practice. Furthermore, all the arguments arrayed for weekly Communion can, with equal force, be used for monthly, bi-weekly, twice-a-week or daily Communion. There is no compelling reason given establishing why *weekly* Communion should be the stopping point. Interestingly, those arguing for the Supper *at least* once-a-week can easily argue against *only* once-a-week Communion. Is Christ objectively present in the Supper? Then why not observe it twice a week? Does the Supper benefit the partakers? Then why not observe it two or three times a week? Why not offer it daily? Why not observe the Supper at every worship service so that Christ is *always* proclaimed, bad sermons are *always* ameliorated, fellowship with God *always* central, and the objective benefits and sealing are *always* there to convey grace. As for the question of frequency, there is no end to the possible conclusions of such logic.

Furthermore, to what should the term *frequent* be related? Wilson and Gunn point out in the beginning of their articles that the

Supper as related to the other elements of worship is practiced infrequently. Yet baptism is an element of worship, and compared to quarterly Communion, it is even more infrequent. In comparison to thanksgiving and ordination services, quarterly Communion is frequent.¹⁷³ More importantly, since the elements of worship are positive law, they are independent of each other. It is totally at the discretion of God what and how often the elements of worship are enacted.¹⁷⁴ And as noted previously, a weekly practice would be infrequent compared to twice a week: Sunday morning and Sunday evening. This would be a *doubling* of the Supper's frequency. Why not argue for such frequency? There is no limitation in this argument to observe the Supper merely or only once a week.

Historically, Calvin's plea for frequent Communion should be understood in light of the high frequency of his preaching and teaching. He preached twice on Sunday and catechized as well. During the week he preached many times and lectured every third day (besides other pastors who preached and taught).¹⁷⁵ From this Word-centric perspective weekly Supper would yield at least a 6:1 ratio of Word to Sacrament. Thus, involving a church in this level

¹⁷³ With respect to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the elements are labeled "ordinary" (21.5). When this word is examined elsewhere in the Confession it clearly refers to the nature, not the frequency, of the object in question. Thus in the first chapter, Christians may through the "ordinary means" understand the Bible (1.7). This is in contrast to the extraordinary means used by Christ and the Apostles that, during their ministries, were exercised *frequently*. 'Ordinary' refers to nature not frequency. (Note in this regard the OPC's current (2005) DPW in which this distinction is consistently carried out by labeling the sacraments as "occasional" elements, cf. Appendix A).

¹⁷⁴ What should be noted is that the elements of worship are positive law not moral law. It is true that the worship of God is commanded of God upon all men (Ex. 20:3; Rom. 1:18ff.), but the form of worship has changed over the course of redemptive history. The sacrifices became increasingly complicated and multiplied until the time of Moses. This complexity was reduced in the New Testament. However, what stayed constant were the centrality of the Word and physical expressions of worship, although these physical expressions changed. In other words, the other elements of worship, as rooted in positive law, are no indication of the frequency or placement of the Supper. God chose them and determined their respective frequency.

¹⁷⁵ Schaff, vol. 8, 445, 478. Fifteen sermons a week for 12,000 Genevans and up to three opportunities a day in Strassburg. James Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 29, 59.

of instruction and preparation makes weekly Communion more proportionally balanced and feasible. In contrast, the typical church with two worship services (which appears to be on the wane) and a Bible study would yield a 3:1 ratio. Approaching the frequency question from this 6 to 1 angle is enlightening insofar as it places the emphasis on the correct element.

Similarly, those advocating weekly Communion are not promoting Communion tokens. Calvin's practice (and the French and Scottish churches as well) indicates a serious view of the Supper. Without a token, a church member could not partake of the Meal. Such a practice flies in the face of the modern arguments for a weekly Lord's Supper. Consistency would demand that those desiring to follow Calvin follow him thoroughly.

The next theme echoed throughout most of the authors is that the nature of the Supper requires weekly partaking by the congregation. In other words, a simple *modus ponens* is used: if *p*, then *q*; if the Supper is important, then it should be exercised frequently.¹⁷⁶ By *modus tollens*, negating *q* would then negate *p* meaning that those without frequent Communion do not consider the Supper as important.

The logic of this argument (which is never clearly presented, explained or defended) appears to be based upon a broader concept of relating frequency directly to the significance of the moral means or event in question: if event *p* is important, then it should be exercised frequently. Expressed in this form, it is readily apparent that although the form is valid, the premises are false. Many important events in the life of believers are not practiced frequently: public worship (only one day in seven), celebrations, birthdays or other significant events. In other words, this approach is not specific enough. Moreover, some of the terms are vague. What does 'important' mean? What exactly does 'frequent' mean? It means whatever the author desires it to mean.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ 'Frequent' is used instead of 'weekly' because, as noted in the Introduction, some of the authors desire more than weekly Communion (cp. Horton and Mathison).

¹⁷⁷ For instance, Horton quotes Deddens' work, *Where Everything Points to Him*, for more practical and ecclesiastical evidence in favor of weekly communion. Yet, Deddens' section on the Lord's Supper does not specify weekly Supper but suggests a

It could be contended that *important* should not be used but rather, “beneficial for spiritual growth.” Stated thusly: if event *p* is beneficial for spiritual growth, then it should be exercised frequently. However, many events are beneficial for spiritual growth: all of the means of grace broadly conceived (prayer, family worship, etc.)—and they are exercised more frequently than weekly Communion! A variation of this approach contends that since Christ is fed upon in the Supper, it should be practiced every week. Yet this simply intensifies the phrase from “beneficial for spiritual growth” to “greatly (importantly) beneficial for spiritual growth.” In other words, the nature of the problem has not changed. If lesser means of grace are practiced more frequently (such as prayer) than this “greater” means of grace, it clearly shows that this syllogism does not deal adequately either with the matter of frequency of observance or with the reality of the Christian life. It is through the daily activity of believing in Christ as proclaimed in the Word preached (weekly) and read (daily) (or even memorized) that, foundationally speaking, one feeds upon Christ and His benefits (Jn. 6:63).¹⁷⁸

No doubt, then, the event will be narrowed to public means of grace: if event *p* is a public means of grace, then it should be exercised frequently; the Lord’s Supper is a public means of grace; therefore, it should be exercised frequently. This is the very debate in question: should the fact that the Lord’s Supper is a public means of grace (conveying grace by the Spirit) entail a greater frequency? There is no Scriptural proof for this logic other than the fact that the Supper conveys grace. The preached Word conveys grace—Christians grow by the power of the Spirit through the Word, yet no one is arguing for daily preaching services. Furthermore, Baptism is a public means of grace, yet God saw fit to enact it only once in the life of the believer. In regards to the Westminster tradition, prayer,

“frequent” practice that, against the opening sentences of his section, does not necessarily lead to weekly communion but only to a frequency greater than the “four to six times a year common in many Reformed churches...” (p. 90).

¹⁷⁸ See the previous sections on the *Means of Grace and Worship* for a fuller explanation. Further, our union in Christ is ever-present in the Christian life, Roms. 6:2; Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:3, 6, 7, 13; 2:6; 1 Jn. 5:11, Heb. 3:14.

as a means of grace, is enacted more frequently than the Supper. Moreover, this form of the argument depends upon the premise that the Supper, as a public means of grace, is uniquely beneficial for spiritual growth, which was previously shown to be erroneous.

Frequent is a vague term that masks various approaches to this question about Communion. By the same token, the explicit or implicit argument that the importance, benefits or nature of the Supper necessitate weekly Communion either falls short of the intended goal or proves too much (every-worship-service Communion). Moreover, none of this logic deals with the preparatory and judgmental dimensions of the Supper. Some specific arguments made by the various authors will be examined next.

Theological

Secondary Arguments

Mathison begins his section intending to determine if Calvin is right in seeking “at least” weekly Communion. Part of Mathison’s rationale focuses on the “singularly unique way” Christ is fed upon in the Supper.¹⁷⁹ What exactly does he mean by the assertion that “in a *singularly unique way*, the life of the true Vine is communicated to the branches in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper”? It is not clear to the reader what the significance of this sentence is. If he simply means that it is a unique event insofar as it is a physical act peculiar to Christians in public worship (the breaking of bread and drinking of wine), then the assertion does not promote weekly Communion. However, if he means that a different type of grace is enacted in the Supper, this proposition needs to be defended Biblically and reconciled with the Reformed view.¹⁸⁰ Given the previous Biblical

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 294. Since this and other assertions were not fully developed, they are considered secondary arguments.

¹⁸⁰ However, in light of Mathison’s contention that he is defending the supposedly lost doctrine of Calvin, it could be he is referring to the distinction between eating and faith. Even so, Calvin’s statements must be dealt with: “for this discourse [John 6] does not relate to the Lord’s Supper, *but to the uninterrupted communication of the flesh of Christ*, which we obtain apart from the use of the Lord’s Supper” [emphasis added]. Also compare his statements in the section above, *Consensus Tigurinus*. Read Appendix C.

and confessional arguments against a unique grace in the Supper, Mathison bears the burden of proof and needs to prove this assertion that there is a “unique way” in which the “Vine is communicated to the branches.”

Immediately following the previous declaration (the “unique way” of feeding upon Christ), Mathison asserts: “Why would any Christian not want this Communion with Christ to be part of *every* worship service? (emphasis added).¹⁸¹ It appears that his true convictions are showing. Consequently, Mathison needs to prove that (granting his position) if the Supper is to “be part of every worship service,” then God is pleased with observance of the Supper only once a week in churches that enact two or more services.

Furthermore, Mathison, in a previous section of his book not explicitly arguing for weekly Communion, asserted: “...neither the preaching of the word nor the observance of the sacrament is superfluous or optional in *regular* Christian worship (cf. Acts 2:42). *Biblical worship includes both*” (emphasis added).¹⁸² Such a bold declaration has already been dealt with throughout the body of this thesis. There is no Biblical evidence for such a declaration. It does not properly deal with the level of preparation needed, and it does not properly appreciate the Old Testament worship pattern. In short, these three incredible assertions of Mathison contend for observance of the Supper in every worship service, effectively placing all non-weekly Communion churches and denominations in violation of the Bible.

Another case for weekly Communion challenges that since it portrays the death of Christ, it should be exercised every week.¹⁸³ This is simply either a *non sequitur* or an insertion of a hidden premise such as: whatsoever portrays the death of Christ should be in all public worship services. This premise needs more defense. It is an argument related to Wilson’s contention that the Supper helps

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 294.

¹⁸² Ibid, 270. These statements were given in a short section on the relation of the Word and Sacrament.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 295.

him “keep Jesus Christ central.”¹⁸⁴ Dr. Grossman rightly points out that such reasoning downplays the breadth of doctrine that should be preached.¹⁸⁵ Either the sermon will gravitate to the specific topic of the atonement or what is said in the sermon will be eclipsed by the symbolic and sacramental significance of the Supper. It is not for trivial reasons that homiletic courses teach that sermons should focus on a single topic, the “big idea.” Psychologically, it is normally difficult for people to focus on more than one serious theological topic (note the shrinking of sermons lengths). On a more fundamental level, this assertion misses the fact that the Supper is mute without the Word. It only portrays Christ insofar as it is attached to the Word. The Word is what most clearly portrays Christ. Similarly, Mathison queries, “we wonder why any Christian wouldn’t want to receive all that God offers.”¹⁸⁶ Incredibly, it appears that Mathison is contending that those without weekly Communion are rejecting “all that God offers.” Besides being a loaded statement that encourages the reader to be on the side of “all that God offers,” this argument suffers from the similar analysis about the means of grace in general. Christ is fed upon wherever and whenever faith and the Word are joined.

Lastly, Mathison contends that since the Supper is a complimentary element in worship, there is no reason why it should not be given more frequently. Yet, since the Old Testament did not have a weekly meal in the holy convocation of Israel, does that mean it did not have a complimentary view of Word and Sacrament? Additionally, the fact that the elements of worship are rooted in positive law means that no one part of worship determines the frequency of another part of worship. Also, fasts, vows and thanksgivings are complimentary to worship, yet they are occasional parts of worship (WCF 21.5).

Gunn’s other arguments are also classical examples of confusing an intended purpose (primary) with an accidental purpose

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 18. Furthermore, he says that ideally every sermon should so “proclaim” Christ that it would “naturally” lead to the Lord’s Supper. So, why not have the Supper in *every* service then?

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 294.

(incidental, occasional or inappropriate).¹⁸⁷ One could conceivably list fifteen uses for a wrench (such as breaking a window) and be wrong on all accounts because the uses are not relevant to its original purpose. On the other hand, one could list fifteen uses and only really have five uses because the other ones are only variations on a theme. An example of the first error is found in Gunn's claim that the Supper has an "evangelical challenge" to unbelievers;¹⁸⁸ yet, Biblically or confessionally there is no evidence of this because the intended purpose of the sacrament is a sign and seal for the Body of Christ. An example of the second error (listing too many uses) is found in Gunn's claim that participation in the Supper: 1) will mark "the Christian off from the world"; 2) will "publicly identify with God's...people"; 3) will "publicly testify...faith in Christ"; and 4) will "publicly rededicate" one's life".¹⁸⁹ The first two claims express the same thing from two different angles: to identify with God's people is to be set apart from the world. The last two claims overlap in content: if weekly Communing is testifying faith in Christ, and weekly (re)testifying Christ involves dedicating oneself to Christ, then weekly testifying is weekly rededication. Moreover, such reasoning rests on a premise that these claims must be enacted in worship services. But no Biblical evidence is offered that all these claims (i.e. an "evangelical challenge") should be exercised in every worship service. Furthermore, such reasoning also suggests that those churches without weekly Communion are missing opportunities to "challenge," "rededicate," and the like.

Overall, the various secondary arguments manifest the same logical weakness. There is no reason why these arguments cannot be used for implementing the Supper in *every* worship service. Or they are also weak arguments. For instance Gunn's assertion, that the Supper "distinguishes the church" from other institutions fails to consider the existence of cults that observe the Supper. All, the secondary arguments fail under similar scrutiny.

¹⁸⁷ Institutes of Elenctic Theology, vol. 3, 19.3.15, p. 341.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 19.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 18.

General Observations

Although the various authors are to be commended for their zeal and concern for the body of Christ (Horton rightly attacks excessive introspection), their solution is questionable. And although the respective writers specify a desire not to exaggerate the significance of weekly Communion, some of the language reveals a strong commitment to this view. For instance, in responding to those who reason that weekly Communion would lessen the meaningfulness of the Supper, Wilson, while acknowledging their sincerity, gently rebuffs them: “To be honest, this argument also exhibits *a subtle form of practical unbelief*.”¹⁹⁰ Similarly Gunn’s rhetorical questions, as quoted at the beginning,¹⁹¹ disclose a level of commitment unexpressed until the end of his paper. Clearly, Mathison’s quotes show such a level of commitment to implementing the Supper weekly, that it appears he is arguing that every worship service should contain the Meal of our Lord.¹⁹² From these sentiments, it could be concluded that those not practicing weekly Communion express some form of unbelief, neglect God’s ordinances, and breach the “integral and necessary” connection of the Supper and public worship. Moreover, the undue focus upon this issue has created claims that implementing the Supper weekly will help foster inter-church unity, resolve the “worship wars,” and promote revivals.¹⁹³ Negatively, non-weekly practice promotes division in the church, encourages altar calls, and may even create doubting Christians.¹⁹⁴ The authors may have confused the cause and the effect. As Courtas boldly asserts:

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 19, emphasis added.

¹⁹¹ “What will we say when our Lord asks us why we deliberately neglected a primary means of grace in most Lord’s Day worship services?”

¹⁹² The Church should see the Supper as an “integral and necessary part of the worship of the new covenant communion,” 294.

¹⁹³ Horton, 165; Wilson, 20.

¹⁹⁴ Mathison bluntly states: “In fact, it is not beyond possibility that the infrequent observance and corresponding devaluing of this sacrament has contributed to the ongoing division and strife in the modern church”(295); Gunn notes a correspondence between quarterly communion, altar calls and doubting Christians (19). Interestingly, many of the Federal Vision proponents practice or endorse weekly Communion yet such a practice has not fostered unity. On the flip side, for a list of non and anti-Reformed churches that practice weekly communion, see Appendix B.

I would be as absurd and preposterous to talk of frequency reproducing grace, as of child begetting its own parent—Besides, I observe, that it is a gross mistake that the sacrament is the great mean [sic] of destroying carnality...It is the word that is every where represented in scripture, as the great mean of sanctification, and destroying carnality.¹⁹⁵

As much as some of the authors wish to distance themselves from overstressing the significance of weekly Communion, they have fallen short of their intended goal.

Besides using loaded language and rhetorical questions, their writings point to a strong underlying commitment to weekly Communion. What are the practical consequences of this? Dr. Grossman correctly observes: “changed practice virtually always leads to changed theology to justify that practice.”¹⁹⁶ If practice is normally expressive of doctrine, then it is instructive that the Reformed Church for over 450 years has not practiced weekly Communion. Practicing the Supper weekly more closely parallels other non-Reformed traditions, which have theological reasons for such a practice.¹⁹⁷ The Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran traditions practice at least weekly Communion because of their view of the Supper.

Some laymen have asked about the relationship between the Meal of our Lord and the preached Word. What exactly is this relationship? Is one more important than the other? Their relationship is one of necessity and privilege. Since feeding upon Christ occurs outside the Lord’s Supper in the act of belief through hearing of the Word, then this event can be compared to every day eating. Eating is necessary for life. In this imagery, both the hearing of the Word and the observance of the Supper are eating-events. However, the Meal is an occasional special meal wherein

¹⁹⁵ *Frequency*, 42. Many of these benefits cannot be found in the churches today. In this writer’s experience of such churches practicing thusly, such blessings have not been consistently found and at times sorely lacking (such as inter-church unity).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁹⁷ See Appendix B.

God calls us to pay particular attention to Christ's death. Just as one eats meals everyday with their family (and eats it properly and not slovenly), so on occasion, the family has a special "going-out" meal wherein everyone pays special attention to their attire and manners. And not unlike the parable of the feast, those without proper attire are not allowed in.

So, too, preaching and reading the Word is a necessity of everyday life, but the Meal is a special occasion of the Word and Sacrament. The Word is necessary for conversion, sanctification and growth. Thus, everyone is invited because of its basic requirement for spiritual life. Not even unbelievers are turned away from the preaching of the Word. However, the Lord's Supper is not so. It is a privilege that only admits "worthy receivers", excluding infants and children and those under discipline of the church. It is not so necessary that all members of the church must attend it regardless of their spiritual condition before the church.

On a practical level, it may be that some members or officers will discover the inherent weaknesses of these arguments and demand more than weekly Communion.¹⁹⁸ Or it may be that other members, especially in those churches and denominations where growth has occurred by adding those without Reformed backgrounds, will simply perceive the Supper in purely mechanical terms (either Memorialism or Sacerdotalism) since the preparatory and judgmental dimensions of the Supper are undervalued. Specifically, given that all churches are comprised of believers of various degrees of sanctification and spiritual walks of life (in terms of struggles with sin, levels of Biblical knowledge, etc.) it would be better to not implement weekly Communion, especially in light of the stringent requirements of self-examination detailed in the Catechism, the judgment that might entail (1 Cor. 11:30ff.), and the increased possibility of finding "no present benefit" from the Supper at all (LCQ 175). Implementing weekly Communion assumes that all communicant members are all equally at such a level of sanctification. This problem is further compounded in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church where in the last ten years there has been a rise

¹⁹⁸ With the new revision up for vote in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, an increase in Communion frequency may be a real possibility with future generations.

in new converts to Reformed Theology, presumably from visual and experienced-centered Evangelical churches which take the Supper less seriously. Preparation is deeply insisted upon in the OPC: “it is *imperative* that believers meditate beforehand upon the teaching of the Word of God [germane to the Supper for worthy participation]...”¹⁹⁹ The required level of preparation (as proven before), in light of the highly active lives of communicant members, is decidedly unlikely in the vast majority of Churches today.

¹⁹⁹ *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, IV.A.1, p. 143, 2000 edition; emphasis added.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

After having examined the primary arguments for celebrating the Supper on a weekly basis, it has been proven that the arguments either prove too little or prove too much. This arises out of vague definitions, arguments and differing reference points. On the one hand, they prove too little because the logic can be used to defend monthly or bi-weekly Communion (if the moral necessity of the arguments are loosely maintained (i.e. liberty of conscience) or if the equivocal word 'frequent' is used). There is no compelling reason why such arguments (either the primary or secondary) must lead to once-a-week Communion. They could be used to argue for once-every-three weeks in comparison to quarterly. On the other hand, they prove too much because all of the logic necessarily leads to celebrating the Supper in every worship service (if the moral necessity is rigorously maintained). If Christ and His benefits are objectively conveyed in the Supper (in the sense set forth by these authors), then there is no compelling reason why it should not be celebrated in every service. If the Old Testament pattern of worship includes the Supper (as asserted in the claims that the peace-offering is a pattern to be followed), then there is no compelling reason why it should not be celebrated in every service. In fact, such reasoning would lead to daily Communion. Using arguments that prove more than what is asserted is not a stable foundation upon which to rest a practice. Furthermore, the texts brought to defend this position (if the activities of the early Church are always binding, and they are not) either prove daily Communion, or *only* worshipping once a week (with the Supper), or enacting the Supper in every worship service. There is no reasonable argument for exercising the Supper once a week and not exercising it at the other worship services. Since the burden of proof for this new practice is placed upon these proponents and the fact that neither the arguments, Old Testament patterns or verses used by the authors defend weekly Communion, it can only be concluded that the traditional approach is still valid and preferred.

Also, positive presentation has shown that there are various reasons for retaining a non-weekly approach. First of all, the

Spirit's use of the Word as the means of grace *par excellence* reinforces its centrality in worship and the secondary and derivative nature of the Sacraments. Secondly, the benefits of the Supper are not uniquely found therein, but arise from the Word. Thus, any contention or focus on the benefits of the Supper is misdirected. Thirdly, since the Supper is a seal of the benefits conveyed by means of the Spirit working through the Word, the benefits of the Supper are especially found in the preaching of the Word. It is here especially that Christ's presence is found and His grace given. Fourthly, the nature of the Supper is such that it is both objective and subjective. Weekly Communion necessarily emphasizes the objective dimension at the expense of the preparatory and judgmental aspects of the Supper. The Supper's nature is such that neither its sealing nor its grace is fixed to the frequency of the event. Believers feed upon Christ both before and without the Supper.

Fifthly, the Old Testament pattern also reveals the necessary holiness required before entering into the Holy of Holies (Heb. 13:10). This holiness is demanded for all of the participant's life, yet God through His infinite kindness only required focused preparation for the weekly Sabbath; and of that preparation, it is especially for public worship; and of that worship, it is especially for the Lord's Supper. The Supper is a token of that communion we experience in everyday life and in worship in particular. Accordingly, being only a part of the whole, it need not be exercised weekly. Sixthly, the Old Testament pattern of weekly holy convocations is continued in the Church today. In that pattern, there is no weekly communion meal, and therefore does not support observing the Lord Supper weekly. As a matter of fact, the sacrifices prefigured Christ through shadows. But now the body is manifested and Christ unmistakably proclaimed through the ministry of Gospel preaching. It is the Word that is central. As even Schaff recognized: "Here lies a cardinal difference between the Catholic and Evangelical cultus: in the former the sacrifice of the mass, in the latter the sermon, is the center."²⁰⁰ Therefore, weekly Communion is not a viable Biblical pattern.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, vol. 3, 512.

After perusing the defenses for celebrating the Supper weekly, it appears that there is a myopic examination of this token of our fellowship with Christ. It is as though the ring of marriage, the kiss of love, and the hug of a Father have become the focal point, confusing the token for the relationship. The Church's focus should be upon the Word, for it is there that Christ and His Gospel are most clearly manifested. Many, even in the Reformed faith, need to return to a Word-centric universe. They need to focus on the public worship of God as centered in the Word not only in what they say but also in what they do, thus, properly preparing themselves to meet and hear Christ in joy and reverence.

Feeding upon the body and blood of Christ is first and foremost accomplished by the Spirit and the Word through the mouth of faith. Communion with Christ is primarily through His Words, for they are spirit and life. What is necessary in public worship is the power of the Spirit working through the Word preached so that the Church may see by the eyes of faith Christ and Him crucified.

Appendix A: Current Denominational Statements on Frequency 2005 AD

Denomination	Reference	Frequency of the Supper
United Reformed Church in North America	Article 46	The Consistory shall ordinarily administer the Lord's Supper at least every three months in a service of corporate worship, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. ²⁰¹
Protestant Reformed Churches	Article 63	The Lord's Supper shall be administered at least every two or three months. ²⁰²
Presbyterian Church in America	Chapter 58	1. The Communion, or Supper of the Lord, is to be observed frequently; the stated times to be determined by the Session of each congregation, as it may judge most for edification. ²⁰³
Reformed Protestant Church of North America	Chapter 3	8. ...The Sacrament, therefore, is to be observed at stated intervals, as often as the session may decide. ²⁰⁴
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	Chapter IV	A. 1. "In order that the sacraments, as occasional elements..." 2. "The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated frequently...[as] determined by each session..." ²⁰⁵

With respect to the OPC itself, it is instructive to note that: 1) the sacraments are not listed in Chapter III, "The Usual Parts of Public Worship"—hence, the sacraments are not considered "usual" parts of worship; 2) the sacraments are named "occasional" in Chapter IV—hence, whatever "frequent" may mean in paragraph 2, it cannot contradict this description of the Supper as "occasional"; 3) The word "occasion" is also used with respect to elders addressing the congregation. This clearly does not mean that elders can exhort on a weekly basis! One cannot take the allowance of the session determining the frequency to trump these three facts. Logically, the session's decision must be limited by their adherence to the Directory;

²⁰¹ <http://www.covenant-urc.org/urcna/co.html#Ecclesiastical%20Functions%20and%20Tasks>

²⁰² http://www.prca.org/church_order.html#doctrines

²⁰³ <http://www.pcanet.org/BCO/> The following is appended to the Directory of Worship: "*Temporary statement adopted by the Third General Assembly to preface the Directory for Worship: The Directory for Worship is an approved guide and should be taken seriously as the mind of the Church agreeable to the Standards. However, it does not have the force of law and is not to be considered obligatory in all its parts. BCO 56, 57 and 58 have been given full constitutional authority by the Eleventh General Assembly after being submitted to the Presbyteries and receiving the necessary two-thirds (2/3) approval of the Presbyteries.*"

²⁰⁴ http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/conv_constitution.html

²⁰⁵ Directory of Public Worship, 2005, p. 127.

and the Directory, by omission, does not consider the Supper “usual” and by positive affirmation labels it “occasional”. The word “occasional” is narrower in meaning than “frequent”; therefore, the frequency of the Supper cannot be weekly.

[As an aside: As far back as 1797, Presbyterian author Courtas notes that ‘ordinary’ means ‘usual’ so as “to distinguish between the usual mode God makes use of now in communicating these benefits of redemption, and some he had formerly used, such as in the calling of Abraham....”²⁰⁶ Courtas contends that the historical background of the language of ‘ordinary’ was developed in contrast with those Quakers and others who sought after the inner light and downplayed or rejected the ordinances of God.]

²⁰⁶ *Frequency*, 62.

Appendix B: Non-Reformed Traditions & Weekly Communion

In light of the assertion that the nature of the Supper indicates its frequency, it is noteworthy that the Disciples of Christ, Reformed Episcopal, Episcopal, Lutheran and Roman Catholic fellowships explicitly practice weekly Communion. Perusing the justification for these divergent denominations' common practice is beyond the scope of this paper. What does stand out is the fact that these mostly non-Reformed practiced weekly Communion from their inception in contrast with the Reformed tradition.

The Disciples of Christ, hailing from a split in the early 1800s, claim a purer worship by following the patterns of the Apostles in Acts.²⁰⁷ Their view of the Supper allows a sacramental view, even though the emphasis appears to be more memorial.²⁰⁸

Another memorialist group argued thusly:

“...we as believers are to 'Examine ourselves' and confess any sins that we have committed recently that might have broken our fellowship with The Lord....[therefore] [a] weekly observance of Communion makes sense, because matters are still fresh in our mind that occurred during the last week.”²⁰⁹

The Reformed Episcopal church was formed in the late 1800s as a return to a more Reformed basis. In their explanation of their more liturgical form they state that the Supper is central: “Our entire service points toward the Lord's Supper”.²¹⁰ Similarly, the Lutheran body asserts:

Now, forasmuch as the Mass is such a giving of the Sacrament, we hold one Communion every holy-day, and, if any desire the Sacrament, also on other days, when it is given to such as ask for it.²¹¹

In fact, recently the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod conducted a survey on this very question of frequency. Polling about 45 percent of all their churches, they concluded the following:

²⁰⁷ Winter, 436ff., vol.2. Winter references Nichols work, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*, which argues that John Glas and Robert Sandeman's congregational polity and over-emphasis on the priesthood of the believers as origins of their weekly communion practice.

²⁰⁸ <http://www.disciples.org/discover/communion.htm>

²⁰⁹ <http://www.gospelcenterchurch.org/weeklycommunion.html>

²¹⁰ <http://www.stlukesrec.org/worship.htm>

²¹¹ Augsburg Confession: XXIV.34. cp. Apology XXIV.1 “At the outset we must again make the preliminary statement that we **1**] do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it. For among us masses are celebrated every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved.”

- 1) Each Sunday service and weekly alternative 495 (19.8%)
- 2) Each Sunday in rotating services 403 (16.2%)
- 3) Twice monthly 428 (17.2%)
- 4) Twice monthly and fifth Sundays 153 (6.1%)
- 5) Twice monthly and major feasts 564 (22.6%)

So, not only is weekly Communion practiced (at least asserted in their documents), but more than weekly is allowed and encouraged.

Finally, the Roman Catholic church—labeling this year (2005) as “The Year of the Eucharist”—practices weekly and daily Supper.²¹²

Sunday, the "Lord's Day," is the principal day for the celebration of the Eucharist because it is the day of the Resurrection."²¹³

1166 " ...The Lord's Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet."²¹⁴

Since the frequency of the Supper arises partly from the doctrinal view of the Supper, it is quite instructive that these churches, with their different doctrines of the Supper (save perhaps the Reformed Episcopalians), practice weekly Communion while historically and consistently the Reformed churches have not practiced it.

²¹² Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine* Of The Holy Father John Paul II To The Bishops, Clergy And Faithful For The Year Of The Eucharist October 2004–October 2005

²¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: Part 2, Chapter 2, Article 1: 1193

²¹⁴ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s1c2a1.htm#III

Appendix C: Mathison's Assertions

Interestingly, Mathison's statements below are not clearly used to defend weekly Communion:

Without the word, the sacrament is merely an empty sign. Without the sacrament, the word is not properly sealed and does not have its full, intended effect"
...neither the preaching of the word nor the observance of the sacrament is superfluous or optional in regular Christian worship (cf. Acts 2:42). Biblical worship includes both."²¹⁵

Yet, it would be this argument, more than the others, that would properly argue for weekly Communion. Indeed, it would argue for the Supper in *every* worship service. Although this view is not elaborated upon, it plainly endorses such an integration of the Word and Sacraments that any worship service must include both. What else can his statement mean when he denies that this Sacrament is "optional" or he affirms that worship "includes both"?

Moreover, the assertion, "Biblical worship includes both" necessarily means that such worship without the Lord's Supper is not Biblical. It is unclear whether this means that such worship is void (most likely not) or that it is unhealthy and insufficient in the eyes of God. In light of the Regulative Principle of Worship, this statement clearly intends that the Bible commands Communion to be a regular element of worship; it means that the question of frequency is not regulated to matters of conscience or circumstances common to all men. It means that virtually all worship employed in the Reformed Churches—any public worship service without Communion—is unbiblical. This denunciation would include any church that practices Communion once a week while having one or more worship services without it.

Furthermore, it is not simply the constant integration of the Supper into every worship service that is unsettling. It is the basis upon which this assertion is presented: "Without the sacrament, the word is *not properly sealed* and *does not have its full, intended effect*" (emphasis mine). Why this must be so is not expressly defended. In light of the Word-centric nature of the Christian life and the primacy of the Word read and preached as the means of grace *par excellence*, it is unexplainable why the Word would be deficient in its intended function. As previously presented, expounded and defended, the preeminence of the Bible for the Church as a whole, whether privately or publicly, precludes such a presentation of the Lord's Supper. Such bold and amazing statements cannot stand alone. Mathison needs to Biblically and confessionally defend these claims. The burden of proof is on him.

²¹⁵ Keith Mathison, *Given For You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord Supper*, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002)270

Appendix D: Use of the Ceremonial Law

Why use the Older Testament in deciding ecclesiastical questions? In addition to Calvin's quotes in favor of the judicious use of the ceremonial law, other noted and well-trained men of the past have argued the same.

Sundry Ministers of London states:

...the laws of the Jewish church, whether ceremonial or judicial, so far are in force, even at this day, as they were grounded upon common equity, the principles of reason and nature, and were serving to the maintenance of the moral law..." (original spelling retained)²¹⁶

Also, Gillespie notes the various Older Testament proof-texts used by the Westminster Assembly:

Ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some public church office. Num. viii. 10, 11, 14, 19, 22,..."²¹⁷

In the *Christian's Reasonable Service*, Wilhelmus À Brakel argues:

The books of the Old Testament were given to the church as its regulative principle, and such is therefore true for the New Testament church as well. Even the ceremonies, which were instituted to be practiced only for a period of time, are applicable to us in the New Testament—not to be practiced as such, but for the purpose of discerning in them the truth and wisdom of God, and also for the attainment of a better knowledge of Christ from the details of these ceremonies.²¹⁸

Compare J. Barton Payne's appropriation as well:

It should be noted, however, that the typical force of the Lord's Supper in respect to Christ's future kingdom embodies some of the truths that were once conveyed by the feast of tabernacles and the year of jubilee, and that the moral and

²¹⁶ *The Divine Right of Church Government*, various authors, facsimile [1799] Still Water Revival Books, Edmonton, AB, 213.

²¹⁷ "Votes passed in the Assembly of Divine in Westminster, Concerning Discipline and Government", *The Presbyterian Armour*, Reprint, Still Water Revival Books, 3, 5

²¹⁸ a Brakel, W. (1996, c1992). *The Christian's reasonable service, Volumes 1 and 2 : In which Divine truths concerning the covenant of grace are expounded, defended against opposing parties, and their practice advocated as well as The administration of this covenant in the Old and New Testaments*. Published in electronic form by Christian Classics Foundation, 1996. (electronic ed. of the first publication in the English language, based on the 3rd edition of the original Dutch work.). Morgan PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications.

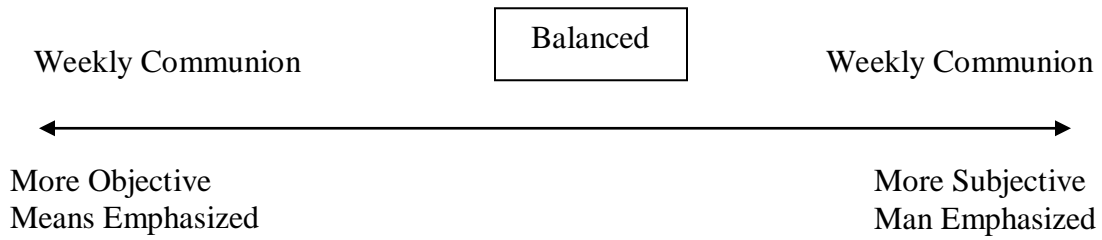
sacramental values of the other ancient feasts find a degree of correspondence in the practices of the Church, though not as divinely ordained parts of the church calendar.²¹⁹

Obviously, Christ fulfilled the older forms (Heb. 8-10). In doing so, however, it is not as though there is no longer anything to learn from these forms. For instance, if the nullification of the older covenant were taken in an absolute sense, then Paul's usage of the priesthood and altar as proof of the New Testament ministers' financial dependence upon the church would be meaningless (1 Cor. 9:13ff.). Accordingly, Fairbairn notes that one important principle of understanding the older testament is to recognize that the rites and ordinances were not simply types or outward forms but symbolic of spiritual truths and mindsets demanded of those involved.²²⁰ Thus, Paul can assert that our lives are a "sweet aroma" to the Lord (2 Cor. 1) and a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1ff.). Even the Old Testament proclaimed not only the Christocentric nature of the ceremonial law, but a personal moral application: "16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering.¹⁷ The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise."

²¹⁹ *The Theology of the Older Testament*, Zondervan, 410, fn. 26

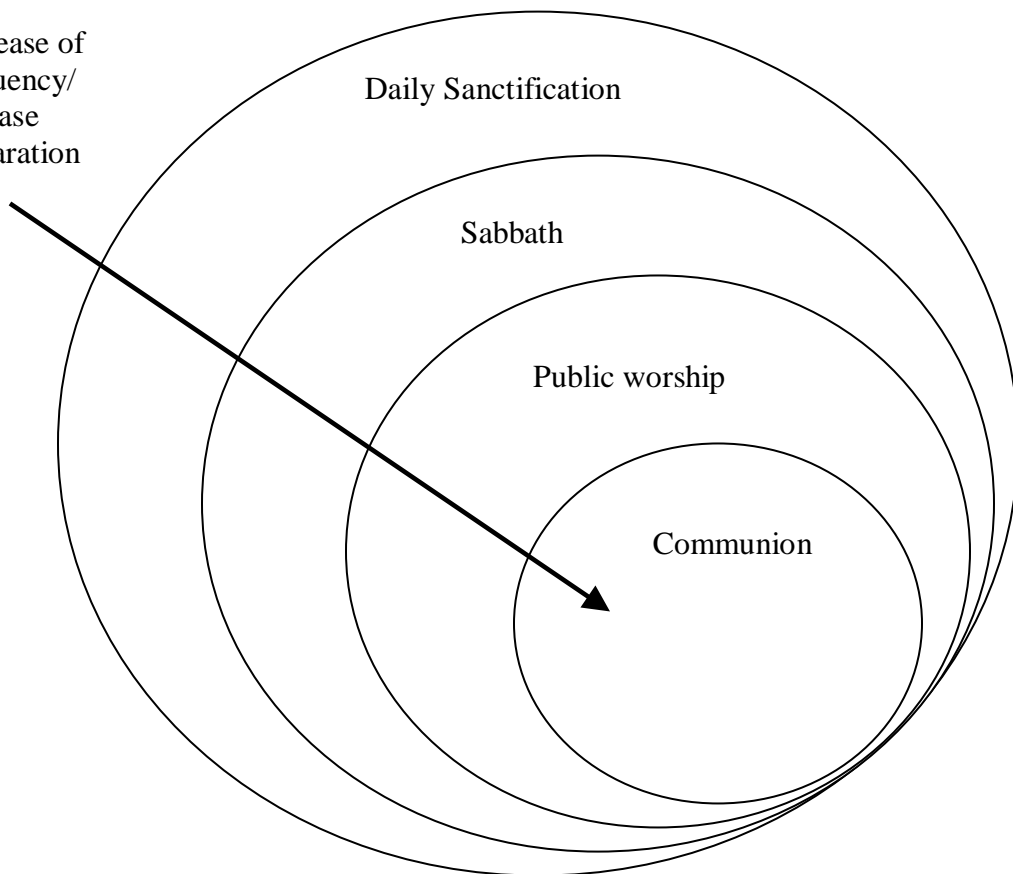
²²⁰ *Scriptural Interpretation*, Presbyterian Heritage Publications, Dallas, TX: 1994, booklet excerpt from *Hermeneutical Manual* [1858], p. 13. Compare Dr. Coppes' *Daddy, May I Take communion* for a detailed biblio-theological usage of the OT.

Appendix E: Helpful Charts



The above chart shows that when too much emphasis is placed upon the objective (means) or the subjective (man) elements of the Supper, then weekly Communion comes into practice.

Decrease of
Frequency/
Increase
Preparation



As the chart shows, the intensity of preparation and proper self-examination increases while the frequency decreases.

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