

The Lord's Supper and Our Children

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The children of believers by virtue of their membership in God's covenant, are to be given the sacrament of covenant reconciliation. Under the Old Covenant this sign was circumcision. All the members of the household of a believer were to be given the sign and seal of God's covenant. Thus, not only the children, but also the servants who were purchased by the believer were considered to be part of the household of faith and therefore to receive the sign of God's ownership. The same holds true under the New Covenant. All the members of a believer's household are members of the covenant by virtue of God's sovereign claim and as such, should be given the covenant sign of baptism to indicate this glorious reality.

But what are we to say about the second sacrament, the sacrament of communion, the Lord's supper? Both the Lord's supper and baptism signify and seal to us the benefits and blessings of God's covenant. Presbyterians have historically insisted this in regard to baptism. The children of believing parents are given the sign and seal of God's covenant upon their birth and are joined to the living God in covenant union. This union is an objective reality. By virtue of God's covenant, they are joined to Him like branches to a vine. There is a real, vital union—one which ought to produce fruit and one in which the members may be judged if they are barren. By virtue of God's gracious covenant, men not only have a covenantal union with Christ, but enjoy covenantal communion with Him.

It is because of this reality, that God's people are not only given the sign and seal of covenant union (circumcision/baptism) but are also given the sign and seal of covenant communion (Passover/Lord's Supper). If children are members of God's covenant, then should they not be given the signs and seals of that covenant? If being in covenant means being in covenant union with Christ, then is it not proper to give the sign and seal of that covenant union to all who are in covenant with Christ? This is why we give baptism to our children.

But, is it not also true that covenant union implies covenant communion? How can there be one without the other? Any branch in union with the vine enjoys communion with that vine. If there is no communion, there is no union. This is the principle followed in our church discipline. What is the last step in Church discipline? Excommunication—the cutting off from the communion table of the Lord. Communion is the unmistakable mark of union. Where communion is cut off, there is no union with the body. If we are to give our children the sign of covenant union, then should not we also give the sign and seal of covenant communion? It seems to me increasingly clear that such is the Bible's teaching.

Now, here we run into a problem. The historic Reformation creeds and confessions acknowledge the legitimacy of covenant baptism but deny the legitimacy of covenant communion. Should we dare to differ with revered confessions?

I am well aware of the seriousness of disagreeing with any confession of faith that has received the approbation of the Christian Church. To disagree with a historic creed is no small thing. But the men who wrote the confessions and creeds also acknowledged the primacy of the Scriptures. The Westminster Confession of Faith (for example) begins with a chapter on the Scriptures. There the framers acknowledge that it is not the pronouncements of men or of Churches which are the rule of faith, but the word of God only. We dare not ignore the wisdom of the Church—but neither may we ignore the scriptures, if we believe them to contradict our confessions of faith.

The reader should understand at the outset that the position I advocate was the nearly unanimous position of the Church for the first twelve centuries. This view has been held throughout history by one branch of God's Church or another and is still the view of the Eastern branch of the Church today. It was acknowledged as the orthodox position by the council of Macon in 585, at the council of Toledo in 675, and by the Gelasian Sacramentary of 425. You must realize that this position is not novel or unusual in the

history of the church though it has not always been held by the majority of the Church (at least since the twelfth century to the present).

History however, is not our rule of faith and practice. The issue always is, “What saith Scripture?” I answer by giving two basic lines of argument: 1. Children were admitted to the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant (including Passover). and 2. Children are no where excluded from participating in the sacramental meal of the New Covenant (the Lord’s Supper). Let’s begin a consideration of the first in this chapter:

Children were Admitted to the Sacramental Meals of the Old Covenant on the Basis of Their Membership in the Covenant Congregation.

There were numerous covenant feasts under the Old Covenant. Preeminent among them however was the Passover which was the meal that signified the deliverance from the slavery of sin that would be accomplished by God’s Son (the Lamb) and the judgment which would fall on all the impenitent and unbelieving. All who trusted in God for salvation would be delivered and made victorious over the consequences of sin and disobedience.

Without the atoning sacrifice for their sins (the shedding of the blood of the Lamb) they would suffer the condemnation that was about to fall on God’s enemies. One can easily see the analogy between the Passover and the Lord’s Supper:

The Passover pointed to the fact that God would provide a substitute (the Passover lamb) to suffer and die for His people to deliver them from the curse of their sins.

The Lord’s Supper points to the Lamb of God (Jesus, who is called by Paul “Christ, our Passover”) who shed His blood for His people to deliver them from the curse due to them for their sins.

In both cases, the eating of the lamb and drinking the wine or the eating of the bread and drinking the wine signifies the trust in the Savior for life and salvation. If children are not to be allowed to the Lord’s Supper, we should expect them to be excluded from the Passover. The question thus becomes, who was allowed to eat the Passover? If we see how the sacrament was administered under the Old Covenant, we may see how it ought to be administered under the New Covenant.

The teaching of the Scriptures is that the children of believers were admitted to the first Passover (if they were physically capable of eating solid food) by virtue of their covenant membership.

1. The lamb chosen was to be eaten by everyone in the house or family (Exodus 12:3-4). All who were physically capable of eating were commanded to eat the Passover. Verse 4 is even more emphatic when translated literally, “every one according to the mouth of his eating.” The lamb was to be enough for every mouth present to eat. You were to have enough for everyone present (everyone who had a mouth with which to eat) to have a portion. Someone may object, “But the command only has reference to the adult males of the household!”

This phrase is used only in one other chapter in Scripture (Exodus 16:16,18,21) which concerns the gathering of manna by the children of Israel in the wilderness. Exodus 16:16 reads, “This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it according to each one’s need.’” Here the phrase clearly refers to every member of the covenant congregation. Obviously, here children were included since there was nothing else to eat but manna. If only the adult males ate the manna, all would have perished of starvation.

Christian Keidel (in his article, “Is the Lord’s Supper for Children?” The Westminster Theological Journal, vol. XXXV2, Spring, 1975, Number 3) asks a most important question at this point, “Why should not the same phrase, by the same writer, referring to the same action not mean the same the same thing?” The only prerequisites for participation are membership in the covenant and the ability to eat.

2. Note also Exodus 12:47: The whole congregation was commanded to eat the Passover.
Now that naturally leads us to ask, “Who was considered to be part of the congregation of Israel?” Again, the scriptures are clear (Deuteronomy 29:10-12). The congregation consisted not only of men and women who had “come to years of discernment” but of “infants and children” (see also Joel 2:16). Thus, when God commands the congregation to eat the Passover, He is commanding all the children of the congregation if they are physically capable of eating to eat.
3. Some would object by pointing to Exodus 12:26-27. The youngest child present was to ask the question of the father, “What do you mean by this service?” Those who object to this teaching say that this implies some ability to understand the significance of the ceremony, an ability to discern the Lord’s body in all this, if you will. Until the child could “discern” the significance of the Passover, he was not allowed to eat or so they contend.

The question must be asked in response: “Was this a requirement for participation, some sort of rite of admission, or was God simply commanding His people to take advantage of the Passover as an opportunity to give faithful instruction to their children?” It seems plain that the latter was the case. Notice:

Nothing indicates that children were not allowed to participate until they could ask this question or understand the answer. In fact the Talmud instructed the son (or the youngest child) to make the inquiry; and if the child was too young or incapable, the father was to do it for him. [Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 240].

What we have here is analogous to God’s directives in Deuteronomy 6:20-25. Are we to think that the statutes and judgments of the Lord were not enforced until the children could understand the reason for them? Can the language here possibly imply that the law did not apply to children until they were of “years of discernment”? Were they not allowed to participate in the times of instruction until they were old enough to ask this question? Of course they were! Deuteronomy 6:6-7 implies that these things were taught and enforced from earliest infancy. Children enjoyed the covenant privilege of instruction in God’s law long before they understood the full significance of it. These privileges were not withheld from them but given them freely by virtue of God’s covenant relationship with them and the covenant obligation God enjoined upon the parents.

The understanding and discernment of the child was not an excuse for withholding this covenant privilege. Thus, when they got older, they would be asking about the things they had participated in all their lives.

We do the same thing today don’t we? Christian parents teach their children to pray, to obey, and to worship and love the Lord long before they have any indication that their children know or understand the full significance of these things. On what do we base our actions?

Do you not know that the prayers of the wicked are an abomination? Do you not realize that unbelievers cannot obey God acceptably? Are you not aware that the worship of the ungodly is an offense to God? You are? How then can you teach your children to do these things before you see in them evidences of true repentance and faith?

You do it because you know that the basis for teaching, training, and the admission to these covenant privileges is not this child’s intellectual development, or his ability to discern the full implications of all that you do, but the fact of God’s covenant promise. We know that our children have an obligation by virtue of their covenant union with God to repent of their sins and believe in His Son, to love, worship, and obey. We know that we have a covenant obligation to them to teach them and train them up in His ways and that they will best learn these things by practicing them and participating in them.

It was no different in regard to the Passover. The privilege of eating the covenant meal was the children’s by virtue of God’s sovereign promise and claim and not their ability to understand. As they grew, they would grow in their understanding of the significance of the ceremony.

Thus the question which God commands to be asked, was an opportunity to explain the glorious significance of the ceremony, not a ritual of admission to the ceremony. That this is the case is illustrated further by the fact that even pagan slaves who had been purchased by God's people were to be circumcised and admitted to covenant privileges by virtue of being members of the covenant household (Exodus 12:43-45). Note that this was done at God's command without the consent of the slave (Genesis 17:13). Conceivably some of these would not even have known the language much less understood the covenant promises (see James B. Jordan, "Theses on Paedocommunion," *The Geneva Papers*, special edition, 1982). The basis for their admission was not their knowledge and discernment, but their membership in the covenant signified by their circumcision (Exodus 12:48).

The ignorant slave who had been purchased in his ignorance and brought into covenant with God was admitted to the covenant privileges. In this sense the child is like the slave as Paul notes in Galatians 4:1: "Now I say {that} the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all." Ignorance was no ground for exclusion though rebellion and disobedience were, for these would constitute covenant-breaking. Thus, the man who neglected the Passover was excommunicated from the covenant congregation (Numbers 9:13: "But the man who {is} clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the Lord at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin."). The one who forsook the Passover, was turning his back on the covenant itself.

To say that children ought to be admitted to the covenant meal by virtue of their membership in the covenant rather than their knowledge, is not to say that we should be unconcerned about their knowledge and understanding of God's dealings and His covenant mercy. In fact, the understanding of the children is encouraged and nourished by their participation. The significance of the sacrament is much more easily grasped that it would be otherwise.

Their inclusion in the covenant meal indicates the realities of God's mercy toward them. They are claimed by God apart from who they are and what they have done. They have been nourished by the Lord long before they knew Him. He was their life even in their ignorance. This is a wonderful picture of God's grace in the covenant.

The fact that children were included in the congregation and enjoyed the privileges and blessings of the congregation because of God's covenant has tremendous significance according to Paul (I Corinthians 10:1-5). The people were in covenant with God, united together in Moses, under the glory cloud, ate the holy meals and drank the holy drink. When they ate the manna and drank from the rock, they were communing with Christ. They all ate and drank of Christ, even though most of them later proved to be unbelieving covenant breakers (v. 5).

The fact that our children may later prove to be covenant breakers does not annul the reality of their covenant membership now. They are in covenant with God by virtue of His sovereign claim. We have no grounds to withhold the sacrament which signifies covenant communion until they "prove" they are worthy. They have nothing to prove! They are in covenant with God and shall remain in covenant with Him until they renounce Him. This reality is indicated in Genesis 17:14:

"And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." The child who is not circumcised is cut off from the congregation because "he broke the covenant"—clearly implying the covenant relationship prior to circumcision.

To withhold either of the sacraments from our children is in effect, to annul the reality of the covenant itself. How can we give our children the sign of union and withhold the sign that confirms and demonstrates the reality of that union? How can we call them members of the body and withhold the covenant meal God gives to the body? As members of the Church, our children are nourished by Christ (Ephesians 5:29). As members of the covenant they are blessed by Him (Mark 10:16). They are branches in

the vine! Does the Church have the right to withhold the sign and seal of such covenant nurture and blessing?

Objections

There are a number of objections to the position set forth in the last chapter. It is important not to ignore these serious arguments from opponents to covenant communion:

OBJECTION #1: The first Passover was not normative but unique. Later, when God set down more permanent directives for the observance of the Passover, it was required that only the men participate (Deuteronomy 16:16: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty handed.”). Thus, (it is argued) normally men only participated in the Passover.

This would explain the presence of men exclusively at the Passover observance the night before our Lord was crucified—there were no women or children present when the Lord’s Supper was instituted. Thus under the normal Passover, only men partook together with those male children who had reached an age of discernment (as Jesus whom, Luke notes, was twelve years old when he attended his first Passover). There are a number of things that must be noted in answer to this objection:

1. It is quite likely that children participated in the second and third Passovers, at Mt. Sinai (Numbers 9:1ff) and at Gilgal (Joshua 5:2-12). In both instances, all the “children of Israel” kept the Passover. In both accounts the whole nation is commanded to participate.

Apparently, Israel did not celebrate the Passover in the wilderness after their rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea. Circumcision (the sign of covenant union with Jehovah) was necessary for partaking the Passover. Since the children had not been circumcised, the Passover had not been kept (as a chastisement upon the rebellion of the nation). If God had allowed the Passover to be kept during this time, the children would have been excluded (i.e., the discipline would have fallen upon the wrong parties since it was the parents who sinned and not the children).

Yet even in the midst of their rebellion, God still supplied the manna and water from the rock which testified of His continued covenant faithfulness and actually was communion with Christ (I Corinthians 10:1-5). [Notice that Paul expressly mentions the order of baptism first then communion. All who were baptized communed.]

These extraordinary sacraments were substituted during the time the ordinary sacrament was kept from them. Significantly, when the Passover is re-instituted in Gilgal (the return of the ordinary sacramental means of grace), we read the manna ceased (v. 12)—indicating that the ordinary means was now to be resumed with the renewal of the covenant.

Thus, we must first note that there is indication that the Passover continued to be observed essentially in the same manner after the original observance in Egypt. This is further substantiated by a second point:

2. The other recorded incidences of the Passover imply that all the congregation participated. The Passover under the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30:2,25), the Passover under the reign of Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:13,17-18), and the one observed after the return from exile (Ezra 6:21). It appears that even with the stipulations of Deuteronomy 16, children were not excluded from participation in the Passover meal.
3. It seems plain that God only required the adult males to participate in the three feasts because of the peculiar provisions of the Old Covenant in which God required worship to be performed at a specifically designated place. This requirement for males to attend the Passover had nothing to do with the inability of children to understand the significance of the Passover, but was the result of

making the Passover conform to the new form of worship centering around the tabernacle and temple in the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 12:5-7).

No longer would it be permissible to offer sacrifices anywhere (as apparently it was in the day of Noah and Job). Now, with the blessing of the land, God would choose a particular place and cause His name to rest there in a special sense.

4. The requirement of males to attend, does not imply the absolute prohibition of women and children from participating. They were obviously allowed to attend (and to take part in the service) but were not required on pain of excommunication. This was so apparently because of the peculiar requirement to worship in a central location which would require pilgrimages to the place God designated—first Shiloh and afterwards, Jerusalem. Women and children would not always be able to make such journeys and thus, only the covenant head was required to do so.
5. Women and children normally participated in the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant. The males were required to attend not only the Passover, but also the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles at the place God chose (Deuteronomy 16:16). Were women and children prohibited from these other two feasts since only males were required to attend? No. The preceding verses describe the celebrants as, “your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst...” (Deuteronomy 16:11,14). Women and children had the option of attending but were not required to attend. You see this in operation in I Samuel 1:3ff as Elkanah, the husband of Hannah, took his entire family to the yearly feasts in Shiloh.

God required that families participate in the other sacrificial meals:

Deuteronomy 12:4-7,11-14—All the offerings were to be made in the place where God designated and the entire family was to participate.

Deuteronomy 14:22-26—The “festival tithes” was to be eaten at the central location (unless it was too far) and again, all the family is to participate.

Deuteronomy 15:19-20—The offering of the firstborn animal was to be observed in the central location and all the household was to participate.

In each case, though the heads of households were responsible for the proper observance of the ordinances, the entire family is allowed to participate. Membership in the covenant is the determining factor. Leviticus 22:12-13 may be illustrative of this point. The priest’s daughter was not allowed to eat the holy offerings if she broke covenant by marrying a stranger. However, if she were widowed or divorced and had returned to her father’s house “as in her youth” she was allowed to eat. The implication is that she was allowed to eat “in her youth” by virtue of being the priest’s daughter. But no outsider [i.e., no one who was not a member of the covenant community] was to eat.

If this was the normal way of observing the sacrificial meals, we would expect special instructions if the Passover was to be observed differently. Yet, there are none.

In fact, the indication is that what was true of the other “sacramental meals” was also true of the Passover. The Talmud allowed that “if a child can eat an olive size of roast meat, the Paschal Lamb may be slaughtered on his behalf, as it is said, ‘According to the eating of every man’” (quoting from Exodus 12) [the Gemara, Sukkah 42b]. An earlier reference states, “Our Rabbis taught: ‘a lamb for a household’: this teaches that a man can bring (a lamb) and slaughter (it) on behalf of his sons and daughters, if minors...” [Aboth 5:21, quoted in Keidal, “Is the Lord’s Supper for Children?,” op. cit., p. 314] It should be noted that in Luke 2:41-42, Luke records that both Mary and Joseph were accustomed to attending the Passover. This apparently was not at all unusual.

The only members of the covenant community prohibited from participating in the Passover were those who were “on a journey” or ceremonially “unclean” for one reason or another. Family members were free to participate—though, because of circumstances and geographical limitations, they were not required to do so.

The Father as the covenant head, was to offer the sacrifice and all who were able in his household were to eat it. The Passover was the only sacrifice that could be made by every covenant head whether priest or not. This sacrifice anticipated the New Covenant privilege of the priesthood of believers.

OBJECTION #2: If this is so, why is it that Jesus first attended the Passover at the age of 12? (Luke 2:40-50) Why does Luke mention that Jesus was 12 years old when he went to Jerusalem? Doesn't this indicate that the children had to be of years of discernment to partake? And doesn't the fact that he was apparently catechized by the priests while in Jerusalem show that this was the common procedure?

We should look carefully at the language of Luke 2. All it says is that on this particular occasion, Christ was twelve. It does not say this was the first Passover He attended.

Even if one insists that this was the first Passover for our Savior, it does not solve the problem for the anti-covenant communionists, for the Jewish law required that a son be thirteen before he was required to take the Passover.

Why then would Mary and Joseph let an underage son attend if they knew it was improper according to Jewish tradition? If anything, Jesus' presence at the Passover at age twelve tends to prove the very point we are making—i.e. that it was permissible though not required that women and children attend.

Further, the text indicates it was Jesus who was asking the questions of the Priests, not the other way round (vv. 46-47). If this was a catechism class, Jesus was the one doing the catechizing! No one argues that children should not be catechized or taught to grow in their understanding of what God has done. This issue is rather, is this the basis for their admission to the Lord's table?

It is most likely that Jesus had been to the Passover before unless the circumstances in his family prohibited him from making the trip to Jerusalem (remember that he did have a rather large family—at least two brothers and two sisters). It is too much to insist that this incident teaches the prohibition of children from the table. At most all one could prove is that Jesus was concerned to fulfill the law (which required all adult males—all those over the age of accountability—to attend the Passover. Yet still the problem is not avoided because he was still “under age.”

OBJECTION #3: Doesn't all this demonstrate that under the Old Covenant, men were admitted to the sacrament purely on the basis of physical membership in the covenant and not on the basis of repentance and faith? The Old Covenant (it is contended) did not require faith and repentance for right participation, the only requirement was circumcision. Now the requirements are different.

Is this true? Were faith and repentance were not required by God for acceptable worship under the Old Covenant? Of course they were! God has not changed. It was never sufficient to worship Him without faith and repentance. NOTE:

Isaiah 1:10-17—Here God expresses His displeasure with Israel's worship (He is sick of it vv. 10-14). He hates their appointed feasts (including the Passover). But notice why it is that He hates them (v. 15 “When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.”) They were participating in the appointed feasts with impenitent hearts. He thus calls them to repent (vv. 16-17) and warns them (just as Paul would warn the Corinthians later) that if they didn't, they would perish.

True repentance and faith were always required for acceptable worship (Leviticus 23:27-29; I Samuel 15:22,23; Psalms 51:16,17; Jeremiah 14:10-12; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8). God has never been pleased with anything less than “spiritual” worship (John 4:23-24).

Over and over, God requires repentance and faith for acceptable worship. Men have always been required to comply with the terms of the covenant. Right participation always required repentance, faith, and obedience, yet this was not the basis of admission to the sacraments. In spite of this, children were admitted to the table until and unless they rebelled against God and refused to repent and believe.

If covenant children were admitted to the Passover and the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant, they should be admitted to the Lord’s table. If it is wrong to admit undiscerning, baptized children to the table under the New Covenant, it was wrong to allow undiscerning, circumcised children to the meals of the Old Covenant.

No Exclusion

We are now ready to consider the last point in the argument, which is that the New Testament nowhere excludes covenant children from the sacramental meal. The rule we follow in seeking to determine whether an Old Covenant practice is carried over into the New Covenant is to see if that practice is changed in the New in one of three ways: 1) by explicit command of God, 2) by necessary inference from that which God has commanded, or 3) by apostolic example. Where there is no explicit exclusion of children from the covenant (and consequent covenant privileges) they should continue to enjoy the same privileges they enjoyed under the Old Covenant. This is what I would have us consider in this chapter.

The New Testament does not Forbid Children to Participate in the Lord’s Supper

Covenant children under the New Covenant are still viewed as members of the covenant community with all the privileges and responsibilities of that community. Paul addresses them as members of the church and includes them among the number of the “saints.” He gives them covenant commands and sets before them covenant promises. There is no indication that their position and privileges under the New Covenant are any less than what they were under the Old. In fact, we find, as we would expect, that their covenant privileges are even greater (Thus, for example, it is now the case that both males and females are allowed to have the covenant sign of reconciliation [baptism], and now they may enjoy weekly covenant meals, unlike the Old Covenant). No where is there the slightest hint that covenant children lose the privilege of communing with the congregation that they enjoyed under the Old Covenant.

At this point many would say, “You’re wrong! Paul’s instructions in I Corinthians 11:28-29,34 clearly exclude children from the Lord’s table. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner are to be able to “examine themselves and discern the Lord’s body.” This requirement clearly excludes children. We must consider the passage carefully before jumping to this conclusion.

The Context:

Any passage or verse must be interpreted in the light of the context. What is the problem in Corinth to which Paul was addressing himself? There were of course many problems but one of the major ones was the divisions that existed among the people (Note: 1:10; 3:3; and here in chapter 11 the specific issue of the passage revolves around the divisions that exist—11:18).

This division was particularly manifested by their failure to observe the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in the manner in which it was ordained. They were, by their ignoring of the covenant significance of the

sacrament, making no distinction between communion and regular meals (11:20-22). Note: This was so bad, Paul tells them that they are not observing the Lord's Supper (v. 20).

As a body, the church was denying the reality of their covenant union with Christ and with one another and thus, denying the true significance of the Lord's Supper altogether. They were denying the covenant reality that by virtue of Christ's work they had been united to Him and with one another.

Note well: The problem here is not that they didn't understand or were ignorant of the significance of the sacrament, the problem is that they were ignoring what they knew to be true! Paul had instructed them in the significance of the Lord's Supper (v. 23). The problem is not ignorance or a need to grow in maturity so that they can understand the significance of the Lord's Supper but sin and rebellion! They were rebelling against the truth and ignoring and trampling underfoot the glorious realities of the sacrament. It's not that they didn't have enough knowledge, they were sinning against knowledge!

The problem concerns the specific sin of failure to show forth the death of the Lord (i.e. the covenantal fruits of that death). The sin here was a corporate one—one in which they all had a part. It affected the entire body. They were ignoring the special nature and true significance of the Lord's Supper as a covenant meal with Christ which signified their common interest in His salvation and in one another. As a result, they are despising the Church of God (v. 22). By their self-centeredness, they were denying the significance of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is not a private ordinance. It is to show forth the union of the entire body, not merely your individual relationship with Christ. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith prohibits the private administration of the sacrament. This is not a private ordinance but a corporate one. The congregation is to participate in this together because it is to reflect the unity of the body of Christ. In v. 26, the "you" is plural (thus properly translated "y'all"). Thus, when Paul says, "you do show forth the Lord's death," he is describing not an individual confession but a corporate proclamation.

Paul's concern is not to set forth the qualifications necessary for one to be admitted to the Lord's table but to bring these brethren to repentance and warn them of God's judgment if they didn't repent. So let it be noted that the context plainly shows that this passage is not concerned with excluding children but instructing and rebuking rebellious adults! It wasn't the children who were getting drunk! Just as it had been in the wilderness, so it would be now. It was not the children who were causing the problem in the wilderness but their parents.

The exhortations given:

1. To whom are these exhortations addressed? Was it every member of the congregation or merely the adult members who were capable of repentance and holy judgment? Commonly this passage is taken to refer to every member of the congregation. "After all" say the oponents of covenant communion, v. 27 says "whoever," v. 28 says "let a man," v. 29 says "he who," v. 34 says "anyone." These terms have unlimited application they are all-inclusive!

First, these terms do not always have unlimited application: "Whoever" (v. 27) is also used in Romans 10:13. Is Paul saying that no one will be saved who does not self-consciously "call" upon the name of the Lord? Is it not possible for one to be saved who cannot "call" on the Lord? What about infants who die in infancy or in their mother's wombs? If one says that "whoever" refers to everybody then you must deny the possibility of the salvation of those who are incapable of doing this and yet are capable of being saved (David's baby, John the Baptist). This we cannot do because Luke 18:15,16 ("Of such is the Kingdom of heaven") clearly implies that God has His elect among infants too.

Obviously, Paul's command is given to those who are capable of calling upon the Lord. The same is true of the other words:

“a man” is used in Romans 3:28 (“a man is justified by faith”). This is not unlimited; “He who” is used in John 3:36 (“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life”).

“anyone” is used in 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Is this “anyone” unlimited?

If so, infants should not be allowed to eat. Ditto for the infirm, the elderly, and the physically incapacitated. Everyone interprets this verse covenantally. No one seeks to apply it to those physically incapable of working. Physical incapacity is not a reason for discipline or punishment. This command and others like it, is given to those who are capable of such actions as are required.

If these terms are used in other passages with a limited reference, why can they not be used in the same way here? Paul is not setting forth requirements which children must meet for admission to the table, he is speaking to those who are capable of discernment and examination to exercise their abilities for the glory of Christ.

Secondly, Paul is not addressing children who had not come to “years of discretion” but wicked, rebellious adults. He is not saying, “You folks need to be instructed in the significance of the Lord’s Supper before you can enjoy the blessings of it.” Rather, he is calling upon them to repent so that they will no longer bring down God’s wrath by their rebellion. His concern is not for the children but for those adults who by their conduct had brought their profession and covenant standing into doubt.

2. What is being said? Let’s consider what Paul is saying:

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of {that} bread and drink of {that} cup.” (v.28). Here Paul is not saying that they should spend time contemplating whether they have sinned. Paul has already declared that to be the case. There is no need to consider whether or not they are in sin—they are! In regard to what are the Corinthians to examine themselves? Obviously, this issue of the right participation and proper observance of the Lord’s Supper. They are to realize how they have abused the sacrament.

“For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” (v. 29). What does it mean to “discern the Lord’s body?” What is the Lord’s body? The body of Christ is the Church. It seems from the context the meaning is that they were to realize afresh the covenantal significance of the Lord’s Supper as it relates to the body of the Christ (the church). They were to discern the glorious reality that Christ, by His death, had purchased them to be joined in union with Himself and with one another. They were his body, his temple, they needed to understand the glorious significance of this!

“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.” (v. 31). If they faithfully and soberly judged themselves (condemning themselves and repenting of their sins and purposing after new obedience) they would not be judged—i.e., they would not feel the chastisements of Christ nor those of His church (v. 32).

Thus, note the conclusion: “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.” (v. 33). If the purpose of this passage was to set forth the qualifications necessary of admission to the sacrament, we would expect Paul to exhort them not to allow anyone who is unable to remember, discern, and examine themselves. But what is the exhortation? They must wait for one another.

Paul exhorts them to conduct themselves in such a way that their behavior reflects the covenantal reality signified by the sacrament. They must acknowledge by their conduct the reality of the covenantal union which exists among them. “Either observe the sacrament properly, or die as covenant breakers under God’s judgment like Old Israel.”

That Paul does not have the exclusion of children in mind here should be evident in light of what he has just said in the previous chapter (10:1-5). The entire congregation communed with Christ but not every one ate and drank in a worthy manner. The congregation of Old Israel was not faithful and therefore ate and drank judgment to themselves. The only ones who did not bring judgment upon themselves by communing with Christ were the children of that generation! The children did not eat and drink in an unworthy manner—even though many were not of “years of discernment.”

If the children of covenant-breaking Israel could commune with Christ without condemnation, how much more can the children of the faithful commune with Him now?

You see, Paul’s requirement of repentance and faith was not a new thing. It does not indicate a “higher standard” for worship under the New Covenant. He was simply re-iterating God’s requirements from old. Men have always been required to comply with the terms of the covenant. Right participation has always required repentance, faith, and obedience, yet this was not the basis of admission to the means of grace. It is rather the basis for continuing in communion with God’s people.

That is, children are to be admitted upon their baptism, but if or when they demonstrate disdain for the covenant and God’s people (the Lord’s body), they are to be suspended from the table, and exhorted to repent. If they persist in their rebellion and refuse to live faithfully, they are to be excommunicated from the covenant congregation—they have cut themselves off from the body of the Lord. Until that time comes, they are rightly viewed as members of the covenant congregation and should be given the signs and seals of that membership.

If this is the proper understanding of the passage, nothing here necessarily excludes children from the Lord’s table because they are ignorant of the full significance of the Lord’s Supper or cannot articulate their understanding. Children very often understand far more than they can express. They recognize you as their parents, long before they can tell other people who you are! It is many times no different in regard to their recognition of Christ. They very often understand that Jesus saves and keeps them and that when they eat at His table, He is expressing His love for them and they are expressing their love for Him—long before they can explain this reality to others!

The issue here in I Corinthians 11, is not a lack of understanding, but sinful rebellion. The requirements here would apply to children only insofar as 1) they are old enough to be able to exercise holy judgment or 2) they express disdain for the covenant body of God’s people. Until and unless wicked rebellion against God is manifest, they should continue to be allowed to participate in communion. Thus, apart from any other scripture which would clearly exclude covenant children from the sacramental meal, we must assume that they continue to have this privilege as they did under the Old Covenant.

If one insists on forcing Paul’s exhortations in I Corinthians 11 to require faith and repentance before one is admitted to the table, the same logic could be (and it seems to me, ought to be) applied to Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38,41 as our Baptist brethren do. Since children cannot repent and believe, they ought not to be baptized.

But how do we (covenant theologians) answer this objection to paedo-baptism? By understanding these words to apply to unbelieving, covenant-breaking adults. Once they believe and repent, they receive the promise and the sign together with their children. It is the same in regard to the Lord’s Supper. Think:

1. To exclude children from the Lord’s Supper because of a lack of knowledge or discernment is to confuse physical immaturity or incapacity with sinful rebellion. Physical immaturity is not a ground for discipline. No one disciplines a baby because he or she can’t quote the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* or read *War and Peace*. If they throw a fit however, it is a different matter. There is a difference between inability which is the result of physical immaturity and an unworthiness which is the consequence of sinful rebellion.

2. If we require a full “understanding” of the sacrament before being admitted to it, who could be admitted? Does any one of us fully understand the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper? The question of “How much understanding is necessary?” follows unavoidably.
3. To insist upon intelligent understanding and articulate expression of that understanding is to make admission to the Lord’s table more difficult than entering heaven itself. Covenant children who die in infancy or before the normal age of responsibility are regenerated and saved as are mentally incapacitated covenant children. Should these who are admitted upon their deaths to the literal communion with the Lord in heaven be denied sacramental communion with the Lord here on earth?
4. It is not knowledge that makes us worthy receivers of the blessings of God, or of the signs and seals of those covenant blessings, it is the sovereign, gracious claim of God. In the same way, it is not knowledge which gains us admission to the means of grace, it is rather the means of grace that are used of God to grant us true wisdom and discernment.

To withhold the sacrament until there is discernment is like withholding food until there is strength and understanding. What would you think of the man who refused to feed his children until they proved they were growing up strong and healthy and understood who they were? We feed them so that they can grow in wisdom and stature! So it is here. The Lord’s Supper is one of the means by which we are enabled to grow in knowledge. To withhold it until there is knowledge is covenantally absurd! And potentially deadly for our children. Would you keep a new convert from the table? If new converts need the nourishment and encouragement of the table, so do our little ones.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says, the sacraments “put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world” (Chapter XXV2). Do we believe our children to be rightly members of God’s church? If so, why banish them from the sacrament as if they are rebels and strangers? We dare not confuse intellectual immaturity with sinful rebellion and covenant breaking.

To exclude covenant children from the table, is, effectively, to nullify the covenant. This is why in most Presbyterian churches children are not viewed as members of the church until they make public profession of their faith and are admitted to the Lord’s table. Everyone talks of them “joining the church” when the reality is that they were made members by their baptism!

But do you see, we realize the reality in spite of our practice, that if one doesn’t commune with us, he is not one of us. Unless there is communion there is no union. Don’t think that this is not communicated to our children as well. Every time they are forbidden to partake the family meal, they are told “You are not one of us.”

Brethren, this is one of the chief reasons there is so little true understanding of the covenant in the Church. We gut the covenant of its substance and are left to wonder “What good is it anyway?” How much better and more glorifying to the Lord to be able to testify to our children, you were united to Christ in covenant long before you knew Him, now you must love Him with all you heart because He first loved you.

That is the true message of the Covenant. God didn’t choose us because we were wise and great, strong and mighty. He didn’t save us because we were the smartest people, but simply because He loved us (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). This is the message that we must give to our children so that they look away from themselves unto Him and be saved.

Children Admitted

God in His grace and mercy has included the children of believers in His covenant. Because of this, the children of believers are rightly given the signs and seals of this covenant—baptism and the Lord’s supper. Children should be admitted to the Lord’s table because of their membership in the covenant community

and not because of their understanding or discernment of the theology of that community as important as that is. Children were admitted to the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant and there is no indication that this has been altered under the New Covenant.

It is important that we see both the advantages of this position as well as consider some misconceptions this position brings to the minds of many. That is the purpose of this chapter. First, we will consider the misconceptions.

Misconceptions Answered:

1. To say that baptized children should be admitted to the Lord's table is not to say that we must presume our children to be among the elect or regenerate.

The basis for all our actions is not to be what we hope or think might be true but what is certainly true. The basis upon which we admit our covenant children to the sacraments must not be something that is unknown or uncertain. We are never to base our actions upon the "secret will" of God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

I do not know for certain that my child is among the elect, nor can I know for certain that he or she is regenerate. Though both of these are possible, I cannot know either with certainty. What I do know without any doubt is that they are in covenant with God by virtue of His sovereign, gracious claim—and, as a consequence, they are to be viewed and treated as those who have a real, legal, objective relationship with Him.

It is upon this clearly revealed, objective reality that the Church may admit covenant children to the sacraments with a clear conscience. We do not base our position upon presumption, assumption, or inference. We base it upon the clearly revealed will of God as it speaks of the nature of the covenant relationship we and our children bear to God.

2. To say that covenant children ought to be admitted to the Lord's table apart from a profession of faith, is not to say that they do not have to repent and believe or that their understanding of the gospel is a matter of little or no importance.

Obviously, it is the obligation of everyone in covenant with God to repent of his sins, believe in Christ for salvation and live faithfully. Without repentance they shall perish like the unbelieving Jews of old. Without faith, it is impossible to please the Lord (Hebrews 11:6). If they refuse to submit to God's word and obey it, they are covenant breakers and shall be cast into Hell just like old Israel.

It is the obligation of everyone in covenant with the Lord to repent, believe, grow in love, grow in their understanding, discernment, and faithfulness and persevere in all these to the end. If they refuse to do this, they break the covenant and suffer a greater condemnation than the world. Once joined publicly to God's people by their baptism, they are bound to continue faithful to Him who claimed them. The Lord's Supper points to this very obligation—they must continue to feed upon Christ as their only hope of salvation and life all their days.

The issue here is not, should the children be taught, or should they grow in knowledge, love, and discernment. Of course they should! My point is this: Should we withhold one of the very means God uses to increase our knowledge, love, and discernment until they show these things? No. Though we will emphasize the importance of living faith in Christ and growth in knowledge and love as much as anyone, though we will be the first to acknowledge that having baptism and the Lord's Supper is not enough to save and will in fact, be as anchors to sink the souls of unbelievers deeper into the Lake of Fire, we will not make them the basis of admission to the covenant signs and seals. The sacraments are means of grace not "rewards" of grace. They are means by which our faith is nurtured, not the rewards of mature faith.

Thus, anyone who thinks that admitting children to the table apart from a profession undermines the necessity for faith and repentance and growth in knowledge and discernment is mistaken. We insist to the contrary, that it will promote faith and repentance, knowledge and discernment.

3. To say that baptized children should be allowed to the Lord's Supper is not to say that they should be allowed to vote or exercise judgment in the congregation.

Here is one of the chief objections in the minds of many to this teaching. How can we admit very young children to voting privileges in the congregation? Would it not be dangerous to do so? Indeed I believe it would. And further, I believe the Scriptures forbid such a thing altogether.

Even though discernment and a particular level of theological understanding and spiritual maturity are not required for admission to the sacraments, they are obviously required in order to exercise judgment or leadership in the congregation. In those areas where judgment and maturity are necessary, covenant children should be excluded on the basis of their immaturity.

This is why they are excluded from the eldership. An elder is to be one of mature godliness and wisdom to the degree that he manifests the characteristics of I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Clearly, elders ought not to come from children or new converts. But is it not equally clear that if elders are to have the characteristics of I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, that those who vote ought to be of sufficient years and maturity to be able to discern these traits (or the absence of them) in the candidates set before the congregation for election to this office?

There is a great difference between eating with the congregation and making decisions and exercising judgment in the congregation. For this reason we should insist that in matters that require mature spirituality and godly discernment, children may be rightly excluded. It would be perfectly proper for a session or congregation to establish requirements for admission to voting privileges within the congregation. It seems to me that this is the place for a careful theological examination to determine sufficient discernment to exercise this grave responsibility.

It may be that covenant communion would force the Church to rethink the whole matter of voting privileges. In our radically democratic age, we have assumed that the Bible teaches "one man, one vote"—assuming that every member ought to be a voting member. Biblically, this was not the case. Head of household voting seems to be a better means of exercising judgment in the covenant family. But however that is resolved, we may say that nothing in our teaching of covenant communion threatens the peace and purity of the Church if the elders establish requirements for voting privileges.

The Advantages of Covenant Communion

1. This position takes the covenant seriously.

When our children are admitted to the Lord's table on the basis of their baptism, the covenant becomes more than a vague theological concept. It becomes (in their minds and in ours) a concrete, substantial reality. There is little question that the exclusion of covenant children from the table has undermined the glorious reality of the covenant which is that our children have a real, legal, objective relationship with God. It is a relationship that exists until they break it by rebellion and unbelief.

One of the reasons why the glory of the covenant is not realized by our children (or by us) is the fact that the visible sign and seal of this reality is withheld from them. The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal and thus the confirmation of the covenant union established with Christ and His body at

baptism. By withholding this, we undermine the significance of baptism and introduce great confusion into the minds of our children.

On the one hand we acknowledge them to be in covenant with God (by baptizing them). But then we turn around and effectively deny their covenant union with Christ by excluding them from the Lord's Supper. We say they are in covenant when we baptize them, then treat them as if they are outside the covenant when we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Rather than exhorting them to be faithful to the obligations of God's gracious covenant, we end up exhorting them to get into covenant with God. "Oh, but," someone says, "aren't we to be concerned that they repent and believe?" Yes! But you don't have to deny the objective reality of their covenant relationship to do that!

In the Scriptures, those in covenant with God are warned against breaking the covenant that has been established by God. The reality of the covenant relationship is gloriously held forth and men are exhorted to beware of breaking this covenant by impenitence and unbelief. God doesn't deny the objective nature of His covenant, He rather upholds the reality and the gracious privileges which the covenant has given to His people and on the basis of this, calls them to repent and believe and warns them of judgment if they don't.

We find this throughout the Scriptures. (And without this understanding we will never interpret certain passages correctly.) Look at a few of them:

Matthew 21:42-45—Jesus warns the unbelieving Jews, "The Kingdom of God will be taken from you." Here, the objective reality of their covenant standing is acknowledged and on that basis, the warning is given that unless they bear the fruit of covenant faithfulness, they are going to lose that standing.

John 15:1-2,5-6—The branch is truly joined to the vine but is broken off because of unfruitfulness. How can there be "union" with Christ that is not saving? This is a reference to the objective covenant relationship that the Jews had with the Lord. But they were "broken off" and thrown into the fire because of their unbelief.

Romans 11:16-24—The Jews were part of the tree of salvation but were broken off because of unbelief.

Hebrews 10:28-29—Some who are "sanctified by the blood of the covenant" are yet lost. (see also Hebrews 6:4ff). How so? Again, this does not imply that they were partakers of the saving work of God (for once a man is regenerated, the Lord keeps him in life and upholds him so that he never falls away). Rather, here again, the apostle is referring to the covenant relationship the Jews had with the Lord. The blessedness and wonderful privileges of this relationship are described in Hebrews 6:4ff.

2 Peter 2:19-22—Some who "escape the pollutions of the world" are ultimately lost. They were "sanctified" or "set apart" from the world by virtue of their covenant standing, but because they refused to repent and believe in the Son of God, they are lost.

Revelation 3:5—The only possible way to interpret this is covenantally. This is not referring to God changing the number or the identity of His elect, but refers to those who break covenant with God and are cut off (see also Exodus 32:31-33).

There are many other passages besides which show the objective reality of the covenant. This must not be denied in regard to our children. They are as much in covenant with God as Israel of old. We must not undermine this reality by excluding them from the sacrament which confirms this reality.

2. This position takes the sacraments seriously.

The Larger Catechism points to the significance of the sacraments (Q. 162: “A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in His Church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those who are without.”) A number of things should be noted in this definition:

First, both sacraments are necessary to reveal these truths adequately. One without the other is in danger of becoming a meaningless ritual. Baptism demands the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper unavoidably requires Baptism. Baptism signifies our ingrafting into Christ, our union with Him. Union necessarily implies communion. Where there is no communion, there is no true union.

To give Baptism but to withhold the Lord’s Supper, is to make baptism (in effect) a meaningless dedication service (which is how most people view it). It is the Lord’s Supper which “fleshes out” the glorious reality baptism signifies. To separate the two is to give a distorted view of the reality of salvation (i.e., you may be united to Christ but not nourished by Him nor dependent upon Him) and it diminishes the fullness of God’s covenant. Indeed, it forces us to invent a new creature: the “non-communing” member. How can you be a member of Christ’s body and not have communion with Him?

Second, the present practice inadvertently pits the sacraments against our theology. The sacraments are the visible signs and seals of the gospel preached. In the theology of the Bible, God always is the initiator and man is the responder. The Word comes to man—God comes to man and man responds. Thus the sacraments picture primarily the sovereign grace of God and not the response of man.

But in Arminian theology, man comes to God. And thus, the sacraments signify man’s initiation. Man must respond before the sacraments are given. To withhold the sacraments until there is a faithful response is to reverse the Biblical picture of salvation. Biblical theology demands that both sacraments be given to those in covenant with God prior to their faithful response—to emphasize the grace of God and His impartiality. He does not love us because we first loved Him, but We love Him because He first loved us (I John 4:19).

3. This position guards our children from crippling temptations and errors.

Admitting children to the Lord’s Supper forces the child to focus his confidence and trust in the sovereign grace of God rather than upon his own knowledge or experience. Do you see? The present practice unintentionally (but no less really) focuses on the knowledge and experience of a child and very often leads to a false assurance or “faulty” assurance.

Children are given a false assurance. They assume that because they have passed the “test” of the elders, that they truly have repented and believed. Rather than being constrained by the overwhelming reality of God’s grace and driven to glorify and please Him, all too often they are merely relieved that this issue of salvation is over and done with!

Children have a “faulty” assurance—i.e., an assurance focused not upon the grace of God but on their own knowledge or experience. Covenant children often have great problems with assurance simply because they grew up faithfully and have had no conscious conversion experience which is often made a necessity for admission to the table.

As a result, they end up either fabricating an experience which will satisfy the elders, or wonder whether they have ever been saved because they have not had such an experience. This is in part at

least, a consequence of our present practice where we imply some special “conversion” is necessary after baptism. Growing up faithfully is suspect without this special experience. Far better to impress upon our children the covenant obligations for which God will hold them responsible.

This prevents us from identifying clear articulation with understanding and thus unnecessarily keeping children from the sacrament. The present position (of admitting children to the table based upon their profession of faith) forces elders to act upon some degree of uncertainty and presumption rather than the clear, objective truth of God. We are forced to judge the state of the heart on the basis of the profession made.

It must be noted that the basis of our judgment becomes not the level of understanding of the child, but the ability to articulate theological propositions. That is, the child who for one reason or another, is unable to articulate clearly the truth about Christ’s redemptive work and the nature of repentance and faith, is rejected—not because of a lack of understanding (which he could possibly have) but because of his inability to articulate clearly (to the satisfaction of the elders) what understanding he may have.

Clear articulation may reveal a clear understanding and true faith. But it may, on the other hand, simply reveal the response to good teaching on the part of parents and Sunday School teachers. It is possible to articulate orthodox truth apart from any real understanding of that truth much less belief of it. The idea that truth faith is manifested by clear articulation of that faith, is not true in every case.

Conversely, it is equally true that a child may understand something quite well and yet not be able clearly to articulate his understanding. Babies know a great deal but are unable to tell us what they know. The same is often true of children with Downs Syndrome. Could it be that the requirement of a clear articulation of the faith has kept many faithful children from the sacraments unnecessarily? I think so.

4. This position greatly assists the church in preserving its purity and peace.

Under our present practice, our children are made members of the Church by baptism (see for example, the Presbyterian Church in America Book of Church Order 56-4). But they are not admitted to the Lord’s table—thus we have to invent a new category of people—“non-communing” members. What happens if these children grow up and never request to be admitted to the Lord’s table? The Book of Church Order (28-3) says that we are to cherish them and use “every means to reclaim them.” But what are the means God has given us to reclaim wayward sheep?

Again the Church Order (following the Scriptures) lays them out. They are: Admonition, Suspension, and Excommunication. The question is how can we suspend or excommunicate someone who has never been a communicate? Our present practice denies to our children the very means necessary for their safety, protection, and reclamation. There is no discipline that can be given them under the present form of government. Effectively, the reality of the covenant is denied. Our children are not really members of the church at all. Their membership is basically meaningless.

Sadly, this is the way many children view the church. Since they have always been treated as outsiders, they begin to act like outsiders. If we exhort them and warn them they will have to be taken off our rolls if they do not repent, they mock at us. What do they have to lose? They have never been treated as members ever!

When children are admitted to the Lord’s Supper by means of their baptism however, their membership is meaningful. If they rebel, they have a great deal to lose. Their rebellion in and of itself becomes a very big deal indeed!

Think of what would happen under covenant communion. A child rebels against his parents. The father notifies the elders of this and the child is suspended from the Lord's Supper—but that's not the end of it! Then the child must meet with the elders after worship to explain what he has done and face the confirmation of his parents' judgment. The covenantal implications of breaking the fifth commandment are most serious (Proverbs 30:17: "The eye {that} mocks {his} father, and scorns obedience to {his} mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.") and that is brought home when there is covenant communion.

We could go on to talk about the great encouragement this would be to our children, the beneficial effects it would have upon the Church to recognize more consistently the covenant membership of children (maybe the end to Children's Church?). But more than all this, we must consider the glory that will be brought to God! He is truly a God to us and to our children after us. He is astoundingly gracious (2 Samuel 7:18-29).