

“...even as the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, so [the Puritans], who had suffered violence, were motivated in society, church, and personal piety by the overwhelming conviction that King Jesus had conquered sin and death and would continue to do so.” (Joel R. Beeke, *A Puritan Theology*, 787)¹

I. DOUG WILSON CONDEMNNS BOTH THE AMERICAN PURITANS AND THE PREACHERS OF THE GREAT AWAKENING FOR STRESSING THE NEED FOR PERSONAL CONVERSION AMONG COVENANT CHILDREN, AND FOR REQUIRING A CREDIBLE PROFESSION OF FAITH PRIOR TO RECEIVING COMMUNION.

- A. “Contrary to the assumptions of many, the Half-Way Covenant was not the result of covenantal lethargy, but just the reverse — covenantal rigorism. Everyone had to be ‘born again’ in a highly visible, demonstrable way, but there were a number among the settlers who were not regenerate, along with a number of others who were regenerate but who were unable or unwilling to gin up a credible testimony. But these people believed in Christ, held to the truth of the Christian religion, and wanted their children baptized. They lacked a revivalistic tremens, but they wanted their children baptized. The Half-Way Covenant allowed for this, but maintained a high fence around the Table of the Lord. This was zeal run amok, not lethargy. Unfortunately, it was a zeal without knowledge.” (RINE, 188)
- B. “A century later, the Great Awakening reinforced this doctrinal assumption in the American mentality. As a result of the Great Awakening, a new assumption spread throughout Presbyterian churches: ‘The presumption of regeneration in the case of children of the covenant, based upon the covenant promises, was largely displaced, by the Church’s practice of recognizing as Christians only those who gave ‘credible evidence,’ satisfactory to themselves, of regeneration.’ The shift was marked. We stopped believing God’s Word, and started believing converts. Before we would take any sacramental action, we had to hear from man. Having heard from God’s promises was insufficient.” (RINE, 188-189)²

II. WILSON DISMISSES REFORMED SACRAMENTAL PIETY³ AS PIETISTIC REVIVALISM, WHILE DOWNPLAYING THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL SELF-EXAMINATION.

- A. “I believe that in our pietistic revivalistic tradition, going back at least 150 years and maybe, in some sectors, way before that, what we have done is we have used the table of the Lord in a way that is diametrically opposed to the intent of the table. So we’ve taught people to look in the wrong direction. What happens when you normally observe the Lord’s Supper in most evangelical churches? People curl up into a little cocoon. You dim the lights [audience laughing]. You close your

¹ **Joel Beeke:** “A pietist sees personal holiness in our relationships to God and man, both in the church and in the community around him, as his primary concern. In this sense, the Puritans were pietists. The word *piety* has become a pejorative term today. Classifying someone as ‘pietistic’ most often connotes excessive religiosity, self-righteousness, or a holier-than-thou attitude. The etymology of the word *piety*, however, is more positive. The Old Testament term for this word means ‘the fear of the Lord,’ and its equivalent in the new Testament, *eusebeia*, means ‘reverence for God’ and ‘godliness.’ The latin term for piety (*pietas*) indicates conscientiousness and scrupulousness with regard to one’s duty to God, to family, and to the fatherland (patria)... Calvin said piety embraces every aspect of one’s life. He wrote, ‘The whole life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness.’... Reformed theologians viewed piety as the heartbeat of their theology and of godly living. This was particularly true of the Puritans. For example, William Ames (1576–1633)... defined theology as ‘the doctrine or teaching [*doctrina*] of living to God.’... He said, ‘This practice of life is so perfectly reflected in theology that there is no precept of universal truth relevant to living well in domestic morality, political life, or lawmaking which does not rightly pertain to theology.’ ...At its heart, Reformed and Puritan theology is pietistic; the concern of Reformation theology is as practical as it is doctrinal... The Christian’s actions in the family, field, workshop, and marketplace—in short, the entire scope of life—are to be a grateful, pious reflection of the grace found in Jesus Christ... The genius of genuine reformed piety is that it marries theology and piety so that head, heart, and hand motivate one another to live for God’s glory and our neighbor’s well-being. Piety understood in this sense is not something to be despised or shunned... Being called ‘pious’ or ‘pietistic’ in its true sense is a compliment!” (847-850)

² **Wilson:** “Just a short time ago, another grandchild came to his first observance of the Lord’s Supper. I know this is troublesome to some readers, but please bear with me for a moment. He is a year and a half old, and doesn’t really talk yet. But he worships with his family throughout our worship service, and he has a basic sign language catechism down. ‘Where is Jesus?’ He pats his heart. ‘Where is God?’ He points to heaven. ‘Are you baptized?’ He pats his head. At the conclusion of our worship service, we all sing the *Gloria Patri* with hands upraised, which he used to do also. But as he began to notice the communion tray going by and he didn’t get any, it began to distress him. About a month before he came to the Table, he stopped raising his hands in the *Gloria Patri*, and just watched. He was starting to learn how to observe as a detached outsider. When it was decided he should come to the Table, he was carefully instructed in the meaning of the Supper as he held the bread. When he partook, together with his family, one of the first things he did was pat the heads of everyone around him — mother, father, grandmother. We are all baptized, he said, discerning the body. At the *Gloria Patri*, his hands shot up in the air. Glory to God indeed. So we believe the terms of the covenant, and we believe that God has promised us our children. We talk like we believe it because we do.” (AAT, 4)

³ Cf. *Mk. 14:18-21; Mt. 26:27-28; 1 Cor. 11:28f. WLC 171* They that receive the sacrament of the Lord’s supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants; of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance; love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong; of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience; and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer. **WLC 174** It is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, that, during the time of the administration of it, with all holy reverence & attention they wait upon God in that ordinance, diligently observe the sacramental elements & actions, heedfully discern the Lord’s body, & affectionately meditate on his death & sufferings, & thereby stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise of their graces; in judging themselves, and sorrowing for sin; in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ, feeding on him by faith, receiving of his fullness, trusting in his merits, rejoicing in his love, giving thanks for his grace; in renewing of their covenant with God, & love to all the saints.

eyes [and] close in on yourself, and you mull over your sins, you rake them up, and you just shut yourself off from everybody else. 'I don't think I'm worthy. I don't think I'm worthy.' And everybody in the church has this automatically assumption that when you come up with enough gunk, you have the authority to excommunicate yourself. And just, 'I had a bad week, and so I'm not going to partake, because I'm not worthy.'" (FVLD, 2005)

- B. "I think pastors need to get in people's faces and say, 'Young man, I'll tell you when you're not worthy.' [Wilson/audience laughing] And it's a wonderful pastoral tool when someone has stumbled and fallen into serious sin, one of the first things I tell them — and they've confessed and they're working through it and it can be pretty horrendous sin — one of the first things I tell them is that you must come to the table. You must come to the table. And it just knocks them over. And it's not easy. It's hard for them on two levels. [First,] they're humbled. And, secondly, the bad teaching we've gotten where we think that the Lord's Supper is introspection time." (FVLD, 2005)

III. WILSON, IN AN ATTEMPT TO RETAIN SOME NOTION OF SELF-EXAMINATION, UNDERMINES PAEDOCOMMUNION.

- A. "The Scriptures require self-examination. But as we should already have learned, the Word prohibits morbid introspection. What is the difference? Self-examination holds up the mirror of the Word and asks honest questions. Morbid introspection holds up the mirror of self and spews forth doubts." (RINE, 127)
- B. "Granted that communicants ought to examine themselves, and ought to be receiving exhortations to do so from their first admittance to the Supper, what are they to be looking for as they conduct the examination?...This means, in line with the context, that a proper self-examination in coming to the Supper would have more to do with whether a young participant had been pinching and hassling his sister during the service, and not whether he could articulate the differences between the various theologies of the Real Presence. If he had been pinching his sister, he would have been in principle doing the same thing the Corinthians had been doing to raise the apostle's ire... This is not to set aside the important of a clear proclamation of the Gospel in all this — the Word should accompany the sacrament with every administration of it. The clear need to stop pinching one's sister needs to be set in the context of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, by which means He established His body in us — a body that must be discerned in love..." (Blog, 3/28/09)

IV. WILSON RECKLESSLY & INCONSISTENTLY REINTERPRETS PAUL'S COMMAND TO "DISCERN THE LORD'S BODY".

- A. "And [in] the sacrament, we're told to discern the Lord's body [1 Cor. 11:29]. Well, we're not being invited to do metaphysical theological speculation about the bread or the wine. How do you figure out how the Lord's body and how the Lord's blood is in that? And it's no wonder we exclude the five year old, because they're smart enough not to go for that sort of thing" [Wilson/audience laughing]. (FVLD, 2005)
- B. "The 'Lord's body' — Paul says it explicitly: 'you're the loaf.' You're the congregation. You're the one loaf. Christ is in you. And if you are to discern the Lord's body, you should be looking up and down the row and craning your neck and looking to see if the person behind you got enough bread, just looking around, eyes wide open." (FVLD, 2005)
- C. "On 1 Cor. 10:17... If the loaf is the body (KJV), then all who are bread should get bread... This means that everyone that we want to be considered as part of the one body should partake. And this means that anti-paedo-unionists are in a tug of war over the kids. 1 Cor. 10:17 means (on this take) that the non-communicant kids are not considered part of the one body, because 'all' who are the one body partake of the one bread. But then on the other hand, we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). Perhaps those who don't think that our children should be treated as part of the one body at the communion table should stop baptizing them into that one body at the font." (BLOG, 4/1/09)
- D. "Any baptized child may partake of the Lord's Table, provided the parents instruct the child at each observation of the Supper, and the child can heed the instruction." (Christ Church Elder Protocols)

V. WILSON RECKLESSLY & INCONSISTENTLY REINTERPRETS THE CONFESSIONAL TEACHING⁴ ON TABLE-FENCING.

- A. "With regard to the 'ignorant,' we also want to be careful how we fence the Table here. There are types and degrees of ignorance. For example, there are ignorant people who ought not to be, and so they should be excluded from the Table because their ignorance is culpable. But a five-year-old is necessarily ignorant, and, to some extent, so is a mature Christian... Consequently, we do not want to be maneuvered into saying that Christians should first grow big and strong, and then we will give them some food. This aspect of the Confession has to be carefully considered when discussing the issue of child communion, although I do not believe [WCF 29.8] excludes child communion necessarily. It seems clear that the ignorance addressed (at least here) is a culpable, stiff-necked ignorance and not the ignorance which every worthy partakers of the Supper confesses daily." (RINE, 116-117)
- B. "Any baptized child may partake of the Lord's Table, provided the parents instruct the child at each observation of the Supper, and the child can heed the instruction." (Christ Church Elder Protocols)

⁴ **WLC 177** ...the Lord's supper is... only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves. **WCF 29.1** Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted... the Lord's Supper... for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body.

VI. WILSON'S THEOLOGY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER CONFUSES THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WITH A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY.

- "The marks of the sacraments place 'a visible difference' between the members of this church and the world outside. When the world outside is brought to faith, the marks of the sacraments will place 'a visible difference' between this tribe and the next tribe over. One of the great failures of North American evangelicalism is this. We have not communicated a scriptural & covenantal identity to our children & grandchildren. We have not learned how to function as a people." (Blog, 4/22/22)⁵

VII. ACCORDING TO WILSON (AND HIS FEDERAL VISION ALLIES), AMERICA'S SPIRITUAL DECLINE HAS OCCURRED PRECISELY BECAUSE EVANGELICAL PREACHERS HAVE FOCUSED *TOO MUCH* ON MATTERS OF PERSONAL HOLINESS & SPIRITUALITY AND *NOT ENOUGH* ON BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF WEALTH AND ECONOMICS.

- A. "Evangelicals have concentrated so long and so hard on being spiritual, with 'spiritual' being defined as an ethereal and other-worldly interest, that we have cultivated no theology of material blessings. Think about this—millions of Christians, heading into a cornucopia of material blessings, of a magnitude and on a scale that most of earth's inhabitants throughout the history of the entire earth could scarcely even comprehend, and they did so without their preachers and teachers telling them how to behave while there....I am talking about the conservative pietists, who emphasized spiritual joys, and spiritual truths, and private devotion, and keeping one's own personal nose clean, not to mention heavenly bliss, but who steadfastly refused to apply the Scriptures to a comprehensive account of how a wealthy society was obligated to serve Christ with that wealth. **And so our wealthy society refused to serve Christ, and turned instead to pornography, drugs, mammon, idol worship, and ultimately to violence.** And it was multitudes of silent preachers who watched them go... To instruct the people biblically might incur the charge of *theonomy*. Someone might utter the dreaded word *reconstructionist*. Or they might call you a Kuyperian. They might think that you want a second Christendom. And even if it is touted as a mere Christendom, there is still too much of Christ in it. And if there is one thing that pietistic Christians cannot stand, it is too much of Christ in things. Keep it within the conference walls, friend...Use it in such a way as to make your private devotional life soar like a bird. Sail around your bedroom, we don't care. But what has been implicit in all of this from the beginning is manifest and apparent now. In times like ours, pietism is ungodly." (Blog, 11/23/21)
- B. Steve Schlissel: "Western Christendom was not built up by the method of individual conversion; it was a way of life which the people accepted as a whole, often by the decision of their rulers; and which, when accepted, affected the whole life of society by the change of their institutions and laws... If you want to know how it could have been that a nation that was once pretty much uniformly Christian in its self-understanding has become Anti-Christian, you need look no further than this individualized conception of God's dealing, so that it became every man for himself... Children of believers, on their scheme, are brought near to Christ, but must not be regarded as truly in Christ until they give evidence of some kind. Some go so far as to say that elect children who do not die in infancy must be sustained until they can have a faith moment (or a beginning of faith), marked by assent to a set of understood propositions about themselves and Jesus. Until then they are not justified. After all, one can only be justified by faith, and faith alone. Thus, for these men, the covenant status of the children of believers is a halfway sort of thing." (AAPC, 2002)

⁵ George Gillespie: "The commonwealth is not in the church, but the church is in the commonwealth; that is, one is not therefore in or of the church, because he is in or of the commonwealth, of which the church is a part; but yet every one that is a member of the church is also a member of the commonwealth, of which that church is a part." (ARB, 89)