

II. An *a fortiori* preclusion argument (or simply a good order argument)

There are privileges and responsibilities that a lack of membership precludes. Baptized believers without local church membership are precluded from voting on the church budget, from voting for office holders, from being office holders, and from church discipline. Regarding discipline, it is worthy of note that Matthew 18 anticipates the local church where ministers exercise the keys of the kingdom. Being precluded from discipline is not something positive. Truly, discipline, as the reformers saw it, has a beneficial goal and as such is a mark of a true church. Coming into membership, a person commits himself to the discipline of the church. Discipline has its primary and regular application in the context of one anothering love of members to members and of members to the pastor (as J Adams states, there is a corrective level of discipline even before, and should be there before, Mat 18 kicks in).

The things precluded vary in significance, but the question is revealing: why would we have a lower standard of preclusion for communion than for voting, office holding, and church discipline? Lower here refers to the fact (where membership is not required) that a lack of public commitment to a local church does not preclude from communion, whereas, a higher standard applies to voting, office holding, and discipline. In other words, membership by a public covenant must exist with a local church for participation in such things. Therefore, *a fortiori*, if we preclude (because of a lack of public commitment to the church) from these things that are not gospel signs or sacraments, then, how much more ought we to preclude from communion because it is a gospel sign that symbolizes the unity of God's people connected with nourishment under Christ in His church. If good order applies to things like voting, how much more ought it to apply in matters of the gospel signs.

Objection1: communion is a sacrament in contrast to voting, office holding, and discipline. So, the analogy does not hold. There can be a different standard for the sacrament (with no membership requirement) than for these other things.

Reply: a) this makes communion a universal church ordinance rather than a local church ordinance, but contradicts 1 Corinthians 11.18, which teaches that communion is not for any group of Christians to observe anywhere at anytime; it is for those who gather as a church (**when you come together as a church...it is...the Lord's supper that you eat**). b) Even if communion were a universal church ordinance, the *a fortiori* still has weight because it would mean that there is a lower standard for communion (something higher in nature in the church) than for voting (something lower in nature in the church). c) This objection tends to break the bond of the universal and the local church. The local church is the universal church in a given setting, so, if the sacrament is a universal church ordinance, it is therefore a local church ordinance. d) This objection misses the crucial point that this gospel sign symbolizes the unity of God's people connected with nourishment under Christ in His church and connected with good order that has gospel implications according to 1 Tim 3.15 (cf. good conduct in context of elder qualifications).

Objection2: the preclusion argument for a membership requirement wrongly elevates voting, office holding, and discipline to the level of a sacrament.

Reply: the only way that these things (communion, voting, office holding, and discipline) are put in the same category with communion is as matters of concern in the local church that require good order, and that good order is important for clarifying and guarding the gospel.

Objection3: it wrongly elevates a membership commitment to the level of a sacrament.

Reply: requirements for taking communion do not have sacramental equivalence with communion. Faith and repentance are not sacraments even though required for communion; a membership commitment can be required without gaining sacramental status.

Therefore, because communion is a gospel sign that symbolizes the unity of God's people connected with nourishment under Christ in His church (for feeding on the one Loaf by feeding on the word preached), then membership in a local church should be required for partaking.