

## **The Lord's Supper**

Why We Should Celebrate the Lord's Supper Weekly

This paper is a very brief reasoning as to a conviction, regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper, that the Spirit has given me.

As I was studying Acts 2:42-47 I began to consider more precisely what seemed to be the regular practices of the early church. Specifically, as I was studying the "breaking of the bread" that the early church participated in I began to look at other passages that spoke to the practice, or the implementation of the institution, of the Lord's Supper. While the "breaking of the bread" may simply imply eating together in one another's homes, it is not only historically viable, but theologically likely, that it primarily meant the celebration of the Lord's Supper together. It is actually widely agreed (though there are those who disagree) that "the breaking of bread" is a technical term in Luke-Acts for the Lord's Supper. F.F. Bruce states, in regards to Acts 2:42 –

*The "breaking of bread" here denotes something more than ordinary partaking of food together: the regular observance of the Lord's Supper is no doubt indicated.*<sup>1</sup>

However, while Acts 2:42 may be argued (if someone felt a need to), there is another text in Acts that speaks more directly to the regular practice of that early church. Acts 20:7 says,

*"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight." (Acts 20:6–7 ESV)*

I. Howard Marshall says,

*The breaking of the bread is the term used especially in Acts for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (2:42; cf. 1 Cor. 10:16), and this passage is of particular interest in providing the first allusion to the Christian custom of meeting on the first day of the week for the purpose.*<sup>2</sup>

Now, this reality doesn't mean it was the *only* reason they met, but it certainly seems that it was one prominent purpose, and likely the one emphasized here (in Acts 20:7). Ray Van Neste agrees,

*The centrality of Communion to the weekly gathering is stated casually without explanation or defense, suggesting this practice was common among those Luke expected to read his account. These early Christians met weekly to celebrate the Lord's Supper.*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, revised, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 79.

<sup>2</sup> I.H. Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 83.

<sup>3</sup> Ray Van Neste, *The Lord's Supper*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville, B&H Academic, 2010), 371.

The longest discussion of the Lord's Supper comes in 1 Corinthians chapter eleven. The abuse of the Lord's Supper is what is in view when Paul writes the church. It seems that for Paul to address so clearly the abuses that were taking place it would have necessarily been something that was done routinely, not only once a month or less. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 11:20,

*"When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat." (1 Cor 11:20 ESV)*

When the church gathered ("come together") it is widely understood that they, as part of their meeting, ate the Lord's Supper together.<sup>4</sup>

Paul's instructions, in 1 Corinthians 11:25, say, "...as often as you drink it." While this can certainly be used to argue for a freedom to celebrate the Lord's Supper less frequently than weekly, in my estimation, it instead informs a regular, most likely weekly frequency that the early church practiced. Gordon Fee notes:

*This addition (1 Cor. 11:25) in particular implies a frequently repeated action, suggesting that from the beginning the Last Supper was for Christians no an annual Christian Passover, but a regularly repeated mean in "honor of the Lord," hence the Lord's Supper.<sup>5</sup>*

While I don't believe that it is a sin to celebrate communion with less frequency than weekly, I have been convinced, and convicted, that we would do well to learn from the practice of the early church, and many throughout Church history, and be purposeful in celebrating the Lord's Supper *weekly* here at SGC. For me it's a joy-filled obedience issue and belief that there is, indeed, a grace that we receive corporately (and individually) as we eat together.

Some may ask, "Won't taking the Lord's Supper every week rob us of its significance? Isn't there a risk of it becoming a superficial ritual?" I know that I used to ask those questions. And these questions are good ones! We understand the significance of the Lord's Supper and want to be careful to take it "in a worthy manner," as Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 11:27ff.

However, when we slow down and consider the biblically essential components of regular worship, the Lord's Supper is the only one that the church argues to be done less frequently. The reading and preaching of the word, prayers, singing spiritual songs and hymns, offering, etc. are all done every single week, and yet they are not considered, ultimately, to lose significance in their frequency. Over the last half year, the Holy Spirit has had me ask myself this question, "Why wouldn't we take the Lord's Supper weekly?" It's commanded to be observed by the church frequently and it simply belongs naturally in the regular worship of the church as a means of grace in remembering what Christ has accomplished. It's a tangible and clear means of grace in remembering and proclaiming to one another the centrality of our hope – the good news of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>4</sup> G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 535-36; D. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 539.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 555.

Sure, it is possible for communion to become a ritual...so can singing, preaching, prayer, daily bible reading/study, etc.... And so can “having” communion once a month. The issue is really in our hearts, isn’t it? I want to do whatever possible to not just “go through the motions,” but rather introduce, explain, and look to various scriptures that teach us of our hope in the substitutionary atonement of our Savior. I believe that a weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper is not only being obedient (to the conviction I feel) but will deepen the church’s appreciation of it as well.

Charles Spurgeon, as always, has strong words on the subject that we would be wise to listen to:

*“So with the Lord’s Supper. My witness is, and I think I speak the mind of many of God’s people now present, that coming as some of us do, weekly, to the Lord’s table, we do not find the breaking of bread to have lost its significance—it is always fresh to us. I have often remarked on Lord’s-day evening, whatever the subject may have been, whether Sinai has thundered over our heads, or the plaintive notes of Calvary have pierced our hearts, it always seems equally appropriate to come to the breaking of bread. Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month, and mar the first day of the week by depriving it of its glory in the meeting together for fellowship and breaking of bread, and showing forth of the death of Christ till he come. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord’s-day celebrating his Supper, will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons. Beloved, when the Holy Ghost is with us, ordinances are wells to the Christian, wells of rich comfort and of near communion.”<sup>6</sup>*

More can be said, of course. For further details on the reasons for the Lord’s Supper, please re-listen to my sermon from June 28, 2015 –

<http://www.sgcd Dayton.org/sermons/sermon/2015-06-28/the-first-church:-marked-by-devotion-to-the-fellowship-part-2>

There you have it. May we look at the biblical example we have been given to give us biblical warrant for weekly communion. And, if necessary, may we consider those final words of Spurgeon above to stoke our expectation, “...when the Holy Ghost is with us, ordinances are wells to the Christian, wells of rich comfort and of near communion.”

---

<sup>6</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *The Witness of the Lord’s Supper*, (<http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols58-60/chs3338.pdf>).