

Introduction

**I.      The Practice of the Early Church**

A. Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33 and 34 makes it very clear that the Corinthian church had been directed to come to together regularly to eat the Lord's Supper.

B. During an earlier visit Paul had taught "the whole church" at Corinth to come together regularly for the purposes:

1. of worship (1 Cor 14:24-25).
2. and of edification (1 Cor 14:26).

C. According to the apostolic pattern of teaching, all the churches were to come together regularly to be edified, to worship God and to eat the Lord's Supper.

D. Then Paul gives another directive to the Corinthians: to lay aside some money.

1. This money was to be given "on the first day of the week" (1 Cor 16:1-3).
2. Why on the first day of the week?
3. Because they were already coming together on the first day of every week (Sunday) to be edified, to worship and to eat the Lord's Supper.

**II.      Time of Observance**

A. How often did the New Testament church eat the Supper?

B. Early believers ate the Lord's Supper weekly,

C. Acts 20:7 tells us,

*<sup>7</sup> On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. (Acts 20:7)*

D. Acts 2:42 tells us,

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)*

E. So when Paul wrote,

*<sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:26)*

1. it is to be understood that Paul had already taught about the specific time to observe the Supper.

F. Acts 20:6-7 makes this plain,

*<sup>6</sup> But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.*

*<sup>7</sup> On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:6-7)*

1. Apparently Paul and his companions arrived too late at Troas to assemble with the church on the first day of the week.
2. The question is why they waited another seven days before assembling with the Troasian church.
3. And how did they know the church would assemble on the first day of the next week?
4. It appears that it was taken for granted that the church would assemble to worship God, to be edified, and to eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week.

G. The earliest writing after the NT period relevant to this point comes from the *Didache or The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*.

a. The date when this was written ranges somewhere between A.D. 90 - 120.

b. Chapter XIV of the *Didache* (entitled “Christian Assembly on the Lord’s Day”) states,

“But every Lord’s day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.”

c. What is significant is that *Didache* states clearly that the Lord’s supper was celebrated weekly, on the Lord’s day.

d. The early church fathers repeat what the *Didache* had stated.

i. Ignatius (A.D. 30-107) exhorts the church to “come together in common . . . breaking one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality and the antidote which prevents us from dying” (Epistle to the Ephesians chap xx).

ii. For Ignatius, to come together to worship is to come together for the Lord’s supper.

iii. The same is true for Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165), who suffered martyrdom at Rome under Marcus Aurelius when Rusticus was prefect of the city (between 162 and 168 ). He writes,

“on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets

are read . . . and when our prayers are ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and . . .there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given" (*First Apology of Justin*, chap. LXVII – “Weekly worship of the Christians”).

- iv. Irenaeus (120 - 202) speaks about the Lord’s supper as an offering of ourselves to God through Jesus Christ, and he says,

“thus it is, therefore, also His will that we, too, should offer a gift at the altar, frequently and without intermission” (*Against Heresies*, 4.18.6). Without intermission would mean: every week.

- v. Pliny the Younger (63-113), civil judge of Rome once wrote to the emperor Trajan to ask him about the way he ought to judge Christians, since he had always condemned those who did not deny Christianity and discharged those who offered the prescribed sacrifices to the Roman gods. He said in his letter:

[According to them] their guilt or error was simply this – on a fixed day they used to meet before dawn and recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god. So far from binding themselves by oath to commit any crime, they swore to keep from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of faith, and not to deny any trust money deposited with them when called upon to deliver it. This ceremony over, they used to depart and meet again to take food. (*Epistulae, Letters*, Book X, 96)

I remind you that the Christians at this time would gather for worship, then go home to have a meal which included the Lord’s Supper.

H. Even during the period of the Reformation the Lord's Supper was still believed to be eaten every week.

1. "In 1523, Martin Luther said that the Lord's supper should be



The Colloquy at Marburg was called in hopes of reconciling the two centers of the German Reformation - Zurich and Wittenberg, but conflict over the Lord's Supper split their common cause.

celebrated only on Sundays." (W.D. Maxwell, *A History of Christian Worship: An Outline of Its Development and Form* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 74.)

2. In his *Institutes* John Calvin states this point even more forcefully. He wrote that

"this custom that enjoins that men should communicate only once a year is certainly an invention of the devil. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated in the Christian congregation once a week." (W.D. Maxwell, *A History of Christian Worship: An Outline of Its Development and Form* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 117.)

I. From a Biblical and a church historical point of view, there is no doubt the Lord's Supper was taken every first day of the week.

J. This is why we eat the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

### III. The Design of the Lord's Supper

A. It is designed to keep members “in remembrance of the death of Jesus, our fellowship, participation, and communion.

*<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

- i. Those who have been saved by the death of Jesus would need something to remind them of Jesus death.
- ii. We tend to forget. We forget our keys. We forget things so easily.
- iii. The Lord's Supper changes our priorities.
- iv. When we have to stop each week and gaze upon the cross, the cross changes things, especially who we are and how we see ourselves.

B. It is designed to remind believers of the nature of the death of Jesus.

*<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

- i. In taking the bread and the wine, we Christians celebrate the manner of Jesus' death.
- ii. It was excruciatingly painful and bloody.
- iii. The end of it was a sacrifice for human sin, which takes away our sin.

C. It is designed to show forth Jesus' death “until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26)

<sup>26</sup> *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

- i. In due time Jesus will come again.
- ii. Until he comes we will remember his incarnation, sacrificial death, resurrection and second coming.
- iii. The Lord's Supper fills us with hope. The hope of our resurrection and eternal life.
- iv. The fact that we eat the Lord's Supper every week is a sign of our expectation of his quick return.
- v. We live our lives differently when we expect Christ to return at any moment.

## Conclusion

- A. The place of honor at this supper belongs to Jesus.
  1. It is the Lord's Table, on the Lord's day in the Lord's house.
  2. We are the guest, not Jesus.
- B. At a formal meal when someone tinkles the glass, it is rude not to pay attention
  1. Remember whose table you are at and in whose house.
  2. Remember the nature of this meal.

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