

The Frequency of Partaking of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's church has been criticized repeatedly over the years from theologians with denominational views over the fact that we partake every Sunday. Many (perhaps most) "churches" of the world celebrate the Lord's Supper (sometimes under another name) once a year or a few times per year, claiming that to do it every week would become monotonous and the event would lose its significance. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ is the heart of the gospel (**1 Cor 15:1-4**). It is very important that we remember it in the proper way and at the proper time. If we have little concern about remembering the major event of the Bible properly, it will do no good to be concerned about other, less significant, items. This lesson examines four questions relating to this topic.

1. How can one know the Lord's Supper is meant by the phrase "break bread"?

The term "break bread" is used both as a reference to a common meal and as a reference to a spiritual meal, the Lord's Supper. We must examine the context of its use to determine which is intended. The following are all the verses in the Bible that contain the word "bread" along with either "break", "broke" or "breaking".

A. **Matt 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:23-24.** These are the four parallel passages that record the institution of the Lord's Supper. (See Lesson #1)

B. **Luke 24:30 and 24:35.** Jesus meets with two of his apostles on the road to Emmaus, teaching them (with His identity hidden), and at the end of the journey, they invite Him in and they share a common meal. Both verses refer to the same event.

C. **Acts 2:42 and 2:46.** After the day of Pentecost where 3000 were baptized following Peter's speech, the new disciples devoted themselves to (as listed in vs 42) *"the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* This most likely refers to the Lord's Supper since the other items are spiritual in nature, and it would be strange to insert a reference to a common meal here, since all must partake of common meals just to live. Then in vs 46, they continued day by day meeting in the temple and afterward sharing common meals in their homes, which is where Paul said in **1 Cor 11:22 & 34** they should eat them. So, the second reference surely is a common meal.

D. **Acts 20:7 and 20:11.** On the first day of the week, the disciples met to break bread and Paul preached until midnight, as recorded in vs 7. This is clearly the Lord's day, as they had waited 7 days (per vs 6) for this meeting. It would make no sense to wait 7 days for a common meal. After the event where a young man interrupted Paul's sermon by falling out of a window to his apparent death, whereupon Paul attended to him and said "his life is in him." This event seemed to end the sermon, however vs 11 records Paul entering a conversation with those gathered around after he had *"gone up and had broken bread and eaten"* strongly implying this was a common meal. It records no one but Paul doing this, but since he was getting ready to leave on a journey, he needed sustenance. So, here again the first reference is the spiritual meal and the second a common meal.

E. **1 Cor 10:16** In this reference, Paul is clearly referring to the Lord's Supper, since he links the breaking of the bread to communion in the body of Christ along with taking the cup being communion in the blood of Christ.

F. **Jer 16:7** The passage Jer 16:1-9 records one of Jeremiah's discourses to the disobedient of Judah prior to the Babylonian captivity. He says that many of the people will die horrible deaths and should not be mourned or lamented, quoting several customs that

were usually observed, saying they shall not practice them. One of them, in vs 7, is to “*break bread for the mourner*” and to “*give him the cup of consolation to drink*.” While this seems to have been a custom, it does not have reference to the future Lord’s Supper.

G. Four references in the OT (in some versions) to “*break the staff of bread*” (**Psa 105:16, Ezk 4:16, Ezk 5:16, Ezk 14:1**) all mean to destroy the provisioning of bread (food).

2. How can one know that “break bread” also includes the fruit of the vine?

That the drink component is not specified in Acts 20:7 does not prove it was a common meal, nor that the Lord’s Supper consists of only the bread element. This is a figure of speech where one part of something is used to represent the whole. When Jesus, teaching the disciples how to pray (**Matt 6:9-13**), prayed “*Give us this day our daily bread*” He was not implying that all we need is bread to the exclusion of all other forms of food. And likewise in many places in scripture (in some versions) food is called “meat” but is not intended to exclude vegetables. This figure of speech is used the same way whether “break bread” is referring to a spiritual meal or a common meal. The spiritual meal clearly consists of both bread and cup. (See **1 Cor 11:28**)

3. How do we know that the Lord’s Supper is a weekly observance and not monthly or annually?

A. **Acts 2:41** says about 3000 souls were added “the same day” on Pentecost, the first day of the week. The next verse (vs **42**) says they “*continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread*” implying that Christ’s death had been remembered on the day of Pentecost and was continued regularly in the days and weeks afterward. Jesus had said that He would not partake “*until the Kingdom of God shall come*” (**Luke 22:18**). The word “until” means up to a specified time, and that time was the beginning of the Kingdom (church) on that day of Pentecost. The word “steadfastly” denotes frequency and regularity, or habitually. The same passage says they also continued steadfastly in prayer. Did they pray only monthly or quarterly or annually? That could not be considered steadfastly. Clearly all four items mentioned (doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer) were to be done regularly together. If partaking of the supper was to be done infrequently, then “steadfastly” would not have been the term to use.

B. If our Lord’s death was to be remembered yearly, then a certain day of the year would have been designated for it in **Acts 20:7** or elsewhere, which is not the case. If our Lord’s death was to be remembered monthly, then a certain day of the month would have been designated. This would then occur once a month. However, no day of the month is mentioned as it is in the Old Testament for certain feast days under the old law. If our Lord’s death was to be remembered weekly, then a certain day of the week would have been designated for it. This is exactly what we find in Acts 20:7, the first day of the week.

C. First century Christians met on the first day of every week. The word “every” is found in **1 Cor 16:1-2** in associating with giving. (in Greek, ASV, NASV, NIV) They gave of their means every first day of the week and they partook of the Lord’s Supper when they met, thus on every first day of the week. Christians meeting on the first day of the week and their partaking of the supper occurred with the same frequency. It would be inconsistent to meet on the first day of the week to remember our Lord’s death and then not do the very thing he said to do “*in remembrance of Me*.” (**Luke 22:19**) Even more so since He told us in **Matt 18:20** “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*.” And in **Matt 26:29** that He would drink the fruit of the vine with us in the Kingdom. He is there **every week** to commune with us. How can some ignore Him?

4. Wouldn't the death of Christ lose its meaning if the LS is observed every week?

A. Many denominational "churches" that maintain this position and observe the Lord's Supper infrequently do not neglect the weekly game by the church's ball team, or the weekly choir practice, or the weekly fellowship dinner. They certainly take up an offering every week, and sometimes every time they meet. None of these seem to lose their significance with frequency. In these they continue "steadfastly." In reality, it seems to be those who practice the Lord's Supper once per quarter or per year that have lost the meaning of the death of Christ.

B. Other elements of true worship are important, e.g. prayer, giving, singing, preaching. No one argues that these lose their meaning if done every week. When the Lord's Supper loses its meaning to a child of God, it is not the fault of the Lord's Supper or its frequency. The problem lies within the person. Such an objection is an indictment of the wisdom of God and attempts to shift the blame to Him for one's own indifference.

C. There is no Biblical commemorative institution ordained of God in any age since Creation that has not had a fixed time for its observance. The Lord's Supper is not an exception to this observation.

D. Some have been concerned that observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week is only explicitly stated once in **Acts 20:7**, and that if this is so important, then God would have told us in more than one place. This assertion is responded to by two experienced brotherhood preachers:

"If Acts 20:7 is not authority for the Lord's supper, then we have an incompleteness of revelation. If God hasn't told us all we need to know, then he hasn't told us at all. And if God hasn't spoken to us through the Bible, he hasn't spoken at all." -- Franklin Puckett

"When God speaks the truth one time, there is not enough power in hell and Earth combined to make it false." -- J. C McQuiddy

Therefore, we really don't need another reference. God said it; that settles it; I believe it.

5. Review Questions

- A. Why should we be concerned about remembering Christ's death in the proper manner?
- B. In Acts 20, which verse records the Lord's Supper and which records a common meal?
- C. When did Jesus say he would partake of the supper again? When did it happen?
- D. Is it permissible to meet for worship on the first day of the week and NOT partake of the Lord's Supper?
- E. In the OT, how frequently did the children of Israel observe Ex 20:8 *"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."*? Could it have been once a year?
- F. How many times does God have to make a statement for it to be so?