

April 2, 2006 PM

WEEKLY COMMUNION
ACTS 20:7

1. AN APOLOGY FOR WEEKLY COMMUNION

A. THE SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE FOR WEEKLY COMMUNION

The regulative principle of worship - the Scriptures *regulate* our worship. Christian worship is regulated by Scripture through command, precept, principle or example.

Command and precept are pretty clear. *Principle* might not be as clear. But e.g., note our own worship service grounded in the principle of the order of the sacrifices in the OC. We apply the principles as fulfilled in Christ.

As far as *example* goes, we follow the example of the Apostles in meeting on the Lord's Day. There is no direct command given in the NC to "switch" the Sabbath from the last day of the week to the first day of the week. We find in the NT that the early church regularly met on the "first day of the week," the Lord's Day, to worship together. John the Apostle entered into the worship service we know as the book of Revelation on "the Lord's Day" (Rev 1.10).

Since the Apostles are part of the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20), their words and practices are authoritative for the church. So, the church has worshiped on the Lord's Day since its early days.

We have an example that helps us understand the frequency of the Lord's Supper as well. Note: there is *no* example, principle, precept, or command which lends itself to a monthly or quarterly observance of the Supper.

Those who practice yearly communion have a little more warrant to their practice because they connect the observance of the Supper to the Passover. This practice, oddly enough for former Roman Catholics here, was the practice of the medieval Roman Catholic Church who pronounced that this should be the practice of the church in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (cf. *Institutes*, 4.17.44, fn 41, 1422). (It would seem kind of odd, would it not, to call weekly communion a Roman Catholic hold over.)

While this may have some logical, Biblical connection, this practice does not take adequate account of all the Biblical evidence either found in the NT directly or through the theological deductions of the fulfillment of all the OC sacrificial meals in Christ.

The real debate comes between the last two choices of whether we should celebrate communion *daily* or *weekly*.

Practice of the early church: Ac 2.42, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and [**the**] fellowship, in **the** breaking of bread, and in [**the**] prayers." Each of these things in which they continued were definite and regular activities of the church as indicated by the fact that each one of these has a definite article (i.e., "the") before it.

"The breaking of the bread" - It is commonly recognized by scholars that this became an idiomatic expression for the Lord's Supper coming from the actions of Jesus at the beginning of the institution of the sacrament. Cf Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1Cor 11:23-24

Although "the breaking of bread" was, in the early church connected with a meal that was called "the Agape," or the "love feast," the Lord's Supper was distinguished in some way within it. Cf. 1 Cor 11.34

Acts 2:46 - this was the *daily* practice of the church as they went from house to house. Cf. also 1 Cor 10 where Paul equates manna with "spiritual food," i.e., the Supper, which they gathered daily.

Acts 20:7 "Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples *came together to break bread*, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." So much was the celebration of the Lord's Supper a regular and vital part of the early church's worship that *it is the stated purpose for their coming together*.

This is the understanding that Paul has of the Corinthian practice when he addresses them in 1Cor 11. I.e., they were coming together to have the Lord's Supper.

Where do we have this much evidence for sermons being preached in worship? Where do we have this much evidence for singing being a part of worship? Where do we have this much evidence that the first day of the week is the Christian Sabbath? Nowhere!

At the very least, the worship of the church should occur on the Lord's Day, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be part

of that worship based apostolic practice established in the early church.

B. THE COVENANT RENEWAL STRUCTURE OF WORSHIP DEMANDS IT

The Lord's Day worship is covenant renewal. Movement from call to worship, to confession of sin and cleansing, to consecration by the Word, to the goal/culmination/climax of worship: communion.

Communion is where everything in worship leads because it is the essence of the benefit of being in covenant with God. We are no longer estranged from God, but rather we enjoy intimate fellowship with Him.

When the Lord's Supper is taken away as the culmination of the service, the entire flow of the service is destroyed.

The lack of frequent observance of the Lord's Supper in our churches has led, I believe, to all sorts of substitutes for that which Christ instituted to be the means of grace. People seek Christ in some emotional experience—whether that be through walking an aisle or simply being intellectually stimulated through the lecture—instead of seeking Christ where God promises that He is found—in the bread and in the wine within the gathered community of His people.

2. THE BLESSINGS OF WEEKLY COMMUNION

A. THE COVENANT IS RENEWED

As the memorial of Christ, God sees and hears all that goes on in this sacrament and remembers His covenant with us in Christ.

A paltry view of the covenant, covenant memorials, and thus covenant renewals has led to a great misunderstanding of how the right practice of worship in general and the Supper in particular contributes to the entire life and mission of the church.

There is a marshal or militaristic aspect to the Supper. When the memorial of Christ is presented before the Father, not only are we strengthened to do the Lord's will, God sees and responds by going before us to defeat our enemies.

B. THE LORD'S SUPPER IS A MEANS OF GRACE

It must be said quickly here that views on the efficacy of the Sacrament—that is, what God does in and through the Supper—effects views on the frequency of the Supper. If, for instance, people don't believe that God is actually working in the Sacrament, the frequency doesn't matter. But if, as we believe, the Sacrament is God's means of grace, then our view of frequency will be affected.

God has appointed the Lord's Supper as a means through which He works to bless us.

The bread and the wine are not “magical elements” in and of themselves. But they are means through which God communicates His grace to us (which I discussed some time back). Paul says that in the bread and wine we commune with the body and blood of Christ (1Cor 10:16).

In light of this, and with the obvious practice of the apostolic church, why in the world would we want to neglect communing with Christ, or relegate it to a once per month, quarter, year activity?

C. WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO SETTLE OUR RELATIONSHIP DIFFERENCES

While it may not always be true because the Supper is not understood rightly and thus not practiced rightly, when coupled with the faithful teaching of the word, we are encouraged maintain healthy relationships within the church and to seek the peace and purity of the larger church.

3. ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS AGAINST WEEKLY COMMUNION

A. “THE LORD'S SUPPER LOSES ITS SPECIAL-NESS IF IT IS PRACTICE EVERY WEEK.”

Some people think it can turn into ritualism. But no one within the conservative ranks who holds this view has any problem about ritually having preaching every week, singing every week, praying every week, etc. Just a few questions: Do you eat regular meals once a month or once a quarter lest you begin to become ungrateful for them? Absurd! You discipline yourself to express gratitude for your food every time you eat it ... which is usually every day.

B. “PEOPLE MAY COME TO THINK THE SUPPER IS MAGICAL.”

Yes, a danger, but so is infrequent communion. This Supper is so mystical that we can only have it every once-in-a-while.

We are to celebrate the Supper weekly because there is overwhelming Biblical evidence to do so.