

Why We Observe The Lord's Supper Every First Day of the Week

More than once, a member has approached me, polishing his doctrinal sword with a gleam in his eye, and said, "I'm having a discussion with a friend at work about the Lord's Supper. Where's that verse that says we're supposed to partake of the Lord's Supper every week?"

Well, it's not quite that easy. The Bible student will search the Scriptures in vain for a direct command or approved example that clearly instructs us to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week.

That's not to say, however, that our partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week is merely tradition, and that we can safely set it aside in favor of a monthly, quarterly, or annual observance. The subject deserves sober and careful examination.

All four gospel accounts record the same basic thing,

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:26–28).

In 1 Cor. 11:23–26, the Apostle Paul directed the Corinthians to observe this Lord's Supper, claiming to have received the same instructions, not from tradition, not from existing practice, but from direct divine inspiration:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 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." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

These passages provide us the purpose and elements of the Supper. But the only thing said with respect to the frequency of observing the Supper is open-ended and inconclusive—"as often as you eat."

Now, I suggest that the **purpose of the Supper**—one purpose for the unbeliever, one purpose for the believer—hints at its frequency. With respect to the unbeliever, the Supper is to “proclaim the Lord’s death.” When Christians observe the Supper in worship, it makes a bold declaration that unbelievers ought to consider—there is a God in heaven who gave His Son for you, and His church is together worshiping Him, and so should you be!

With respect to the believer, who is to “examine himself,” the Supper is to be carried out only “until He comes.” We won’t need to observe a memorial-meal in heaven, for we shall dine with Jesus Himself at the great and eternal feast! Thus, the Supper is a reminder, and a weekly observance keeps us mindful of our Lord in a way that an annual observance would not. Don’t we lament the fact that we only remember our military heroes on Veteran’s Day? As one brother said, “It’s God’s wisdom that we’re never more than seven days removed from a reminder of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.” Still, these are just my subjective impressions, and one could argue that an occasional observance accomplishes the same things. We shall have to look elsewhere if we are to answer the question.

If we can’t pin down the frequency of observance, we can pin down the **day of observance**. It is the first day of the week, what John calls “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). It’s clear that disciples conscientiously met on this day, the day that Jesus arose from the dead. The disciples started doing so very quickly (John 20:26). Paul’s commandment to contribute was for “the first day of every week” (1 Cor. 16:1–2). Early church writings (such as the *Didache* 9:1–12, 14:1, and Justin Martyr’s *First Apology* ch. 67) as well as anti-Christian authors such as Pliny (Letter to Emperor Trajan, #96) confirm that Christians met on Sundays to partake of communion. But Luke provides the clearest and most authoritative example in Acts 20:6–7,

We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

Thus, it’s fair to say that we have no example of disciples taking up a collection or observing the Supper on any other day of the week. And it makes sense that as an act of worship, partaking of the Lord’s Supper would be done when they were assembled together. After all, the unity of those present is an important part of the Supper. “When you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1 Cor. 11:33, *cf.* 1 Cor. 10:17).

If we can say with a good degree of certainty that God shows us, by Apostolic example, that He intends for us to partake of the Lord's Supper when we are assembled on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 11:20–21), the Lord's Day, then I feel comfortable in taking one more step **by inference**, that He intends for us to partake of the Lord's Supper *every* first day of the week. Let me illustrate: when the teacher says "after-school practice will be on Mondays and Wednesdays," it is generally understood that she means every Monday and Wednesday. In other words, if today is a Monday, there's after-school practice. In the Old Testament, when God says "remember the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8), He did not need to say "every Sabbath," for it is sensibly assumed that He means every Sabbath. He did not mean every other Sabbath, or every first Sabbath of the month, or one Sabbath a year. He meant that if today is a Sabbath, it's to be observed. Now, I realize that one person's necessary inference is another person's possible conjecture, but this inference seems to me obvious, safe, fitting the context and purpose of the Supper; and in the absence of further clarification, quite necessary. In fact, it has been suggested—and I think rightly so—that the reason Paul stayed in Troas for seven whole days, even though he was in a big hurry (20:16) was that he really wanted to observe the Supper with them.

I like the way J. W. McGarvey summarizes: "This passage shows that the first day of the week was the day the disciples broke the loaf; and also that the prime purpose of their meeting on that day was to observe this ordinance. Paul's preaching on the occasion was incidental. In the original institution of the Lord's Supper, nothing was said as to the frequency with which it was to be observed. Had nothing more been said, every congregation of believers would have been left to its own judgment as to frequency of observance. But the apostles were afterward guided by the Holy Spirit in this, as in other matters left indefinite by the Lord's personal teaching, and their example is our guide. Little is said on the subject, but that little is decisive in favor of a weekly observance. Here in Acts 20 it is represented as the chief purpose of the meeting; and the same appears in 1 Cor. 11:20–21... Slight as this evidence is, when taking in connection with the universal practice of the church in the 2nd century and for a long period afterward, it has proved sufficient to win universal agreement among Biblical scholars, that this was the apostolic custom ... our custom should be the same (*Acts*, pp. 178–179).

Taking the text as it stands, and assuming our commitment to it as the revealer of all truth, we would be hard pressed to identify *which* first day of the week, but can easily understand it to mean *every* first day of the week.

I also like the summary of Dave Miller: “Since Christians met every Sunday (1 Cor. 16:2), and a central purpose of such assemblies was to observe the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7) regularly and consistently (Acts 2:42), it follows that the early church partook of the Lord’s Supper every Sunday and only on Sunday” (www.apologeticspress.org). —*John Guzzetta*