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Is Weekly
Communion
A Scriptural
Requirement?



'...this do in remembrance of me'

Fourth Printing

IS WEEKLY COMMUNION A SCRIPTURAL REQUIREMENT?

by
Clayton Winters

**“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”
(Acts 20:7.)**

This Scripture is a recorded example of early New Testament Christians as they observed weekly communion — a practice well attested by inspired writers, early church Fathers, historians of both an ecclesiastical and secular nature, and scholars of almost all denominations.

In fact the practice of a weekly observance of the Lord’s supper in New Testament times is such a widely accepted truth that very few men of reputation would even attempt to deny it. And that Acts 20:7 exemplifies this practice most will heartily agree. But is it necessary for Christians in the twentieth century to follow this first century example? Well, that is another question — the answer to which the following pages of this tract will be devoted. We pray that you, the reader, will give our reasoning your careful consideration.

Search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. (Acts 17:11.)

SOME EXAMPLES NOT BINDING

It is quite evident to the careful student of the Bible that some examples in the New Testament are not binding.

Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:33-35.) Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), and by this means earned support for himself and his companions. Furthermore, he declared that in so doing he was setting an example.

But was it a binding example? That is, did such an example make it mandatory that all gospel preachers earn their living in this way? Evidently not, because the same apostle declared that he had a right to expect financial support from the churches with which he laboured: "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" (1 Cor. 9:4-6.) Later in the same chapter he continued, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gos-

pel should live of the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:14.) So Paul's example of supporting himself is a good one and worthy of imitation by preachers today; but it is not a **binding** example which **must** be imitated. Gospel preachers are left free to choose other means of support if they so desire.

In Acts 2:44,45 we read: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." Again in Acts 4:34-37: "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses: who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." What love these early Christians had for each other! And what an example of benevolence — selling even their possessions and giving the price to the needy! Certainly such a magnanimous spirit is worthy of imitation; but is it an absolute requirement for Christians of this century?

If so, then we know of no Christians. The truth is the New Testament teaches that such sacrificial benevolence was a matter of choice, not commandment. Ananias, who had practiced such with

hypocritical intentions, was told: "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." (Acts 5:4.) Paul declared, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7.) So the disposal of property for benevolent purposes was a matter of choice with Ananias and other first century Christians. Neither would their example in this respect be binding upon Christians today.

When we consider the Lord's supper, we note that in every example of its observance it was in an upper (upstairs) room. "And he shall show you a large upper room furnished: there make ready." (Luke 22:12.) "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together." (Acts 20:7,8.)

But since we have such examples concerning the upper room in connection with the Lord's supper, does it necessarily follow that such is the only place where it could properly be observed? Certainly not! Place has nothing to do with acceptable worship in the Christian dispensation. Jesus made this perfectly clear in his conversation with the

woman of Samaria: "The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." (John 4:19-23.) Under the old law worship was centered in the temple service at Jerusalem; but Jesus taught that such was not to be the case in the Christian dispensation. Thus the example of observing the Lord's supper in an upper room is not a binding one.

SOME EXAMPLES ARE BINDING

However, while some examples are left to the Christian's own discretion, there are still others which are not; and we are not to underestimate the importance of these in making known to us God's will. May we now examine some Biblical proofs of this latter class.

The Greek word **tu^os** (from which we get our English word **type**) is one of the words which the King James Version translates **example**, **pattern**, **fashion**, etc. Its usage shows the importance of following certain divinely-given examples. "Who

serve under the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the **pattern** shewed to thee in the mount." (Heb. 8:5; see also Acts 7:44.) Of Israel's sins Paul said, "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted . . . Now all these things happened unto them for **ensamples**: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. 10:6,11.) Would anyone conclude from these Scriptures that the examples given were optional? We think not.

Tupos is again used of that form of doctrine representing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that **form** of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Rom. 6:17,18.) Is it essential to obey that **form**?

Another interesting Greek word translated example is **hupogrammos**. It means literally an under-writing, and refers to the copy which was given a child in teaching him the letters of the alphabet. He wrote under the example or copy set before him, trying to imitate it as closely as possible. So Peter said of Christ, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an **example** that ye should follow his

steps." (1 Pet. 2:21.) Is such Christ-like copying essential?

If the reader should require further proof of the binding nature of examples, let him consider these words of Jesus: "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15.) Or the admonition of Paul: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1.)

WHEN EXAMPLES BIND

It is quite evident from the foregoing that some examples are not binding, but it is equally evident that others are. So the question which now confronts us is, "When do examples bind?"

And from a careful consideration of Bible teaching involving examples, the answer to this question becomes apparent: **examples bind only when they illustrate a requirement.** The example of Paul's supporting himself with manual labor is not binding because it does not exemplify a requirement (1 Cor. 9:14); the example of selling one's possessions for benevolent purposes is not binding because it does not illustrate a requirement (Acts 5:4; 2 Cor. 9:7); neither is there a requirement for the place for the observance of the Lord's supper (John 4:24.) Therefore, the use of an upper room is not a binding example.

On the other hand each item of the sanctuary was a requirement (see Exo. 25-27). For this reason Moses was to copy the pattern exactly. The

humble service exemplified by Jesus in the washing of his disciples feet was a requirement (Matt. 23:11; 20:25-28), and thus it is necessary that we follow the example of our Lord in rendering **such needed services**, debasing though they may be. The same would be true of all the other binding examples to which we have called attention. Remember, **an example binds when it illustrates a requirement.**

ACTS 20:7

Now we are ready to return to our original question involving Acts 20:7. Is this example of the early church meeting on the first day of every week to observe the Lord's supper binding? We are ready to emphatically affirm that it is. And we are also ready to affirm that such is the case because in each detail it **illustrates a Scriptural requirement.**

AN ASSEMBLY IS BOUND

In Hebrews 10:25 we read, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Although there are a number of things about the assembly which we cannot determine from the above verse, these things we know: 1, the assembly was a Christian requirement. 2, the assembly was a very necessary function of the early church of Christ — so important in fact that to forsake it was

to abandon the sacrifice for sin (see Heb. 10:26). 3, the Christians were urged to exhort one another more earnestly as the day of assembly approached. 4, although no specific or set time of assembly was given in this verse, one was nevertheless implied, and a day so well known to the Hebrews that the writer felt no need of specifying it. Thus we find that an assembly is a cardinal part of the Christian religion, and is a requirement of every Christian; but for the set "day" implied for this assembly we must look elsewhere.

THE DAY IS BOUND

But this set "day" is not difficult to find. "Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come." (1 Cor. 16:1,2, RSV.) Although the King James Version does not use the word "every" as quoted above, later translations consistently do, and upon good authority; for according to the Grammars, in certain fixed phrases kata with the accusative means "every." For example "every day" (Acts 2:46; Luke 16:19), "every year" (Luke 2:41; Heb. 10:3), "Every city" (Luke 8:1). So in 1 Corinthians 16:2 kata mian sabbatou would mean "every first day." (See A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Arndt-Gingrich, article kata.)

These being true, we have found the commanded day of assembly as was implied in Hebrews 10:25. It is the first day of every week. Nor is this an optional thing; it is an apostolic order: "... As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye." (1 Cor. 16:1.)

PURPOSE OF THE ASSEMBLY BOUND

So we have found the assembly to be a gospel requirement. We have also found the first day of every week as being the set time bound for the assembly. But as of yet we have found no purpose for that assembly. Since it is highly unlikely that the Lord would require a weekly assembly of Christians without giving a reason for that assembly, we shall now turn our attention to the task of finding it.

The Corinthian church met on the first day of every week as commanded. (1 Cor. 16:1,2.) In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 we find an entire section dealing with these appointed assemblies: "... Ye **come together** not for the better, but for the worse." (v. 17.) "For first of all when ye **come together in the church** ..." (v. 18.) "When ye **come together** therefore into one place ..." (v. 20.) "... That ye **come not together** unto condemnation ..." (v. 34.)

It is thus certain that they were assembling, but for what reason? Verse 20 shows it to be for the observance of the Lord's supper: "When ye **come together** therefore into one place, this is not to eat

the Lord's supper."

But someone is probably ready to say, "Why, that shows their purpose in coming together was not to eat the Lord's supper." Really? Remember, Paul in this verse is discussing an **abuse** of their purpose in coming together. Suppose a teacher sees a group of his students misbehaving and reprimands them by saying, "Students, you haven't come here to learn." What is that saying concerning the purpose of the school? Is that not tantamount to saying, "The purpose of this school is for learning, but when you act thus, you are thwarting its purpose"? The same thing is true of Paul's rebuke. The purpose of the Corinthian meetings was to observe the Lord's supper, but having turned it into a gluttonous feast to satisfy the appetite rather than the memorial it was intended to be, they had thwarted its purpose and were not in reality observing the communion of the body and blood of Christ. That this is true may also be seen from verse 33: "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another." Paul said they came together to eat; and of course that which they were to eat was the Lord's supper. If they wanted a common meal to satisfy the appetite, that was to be taken at home before they came together. (1 Cor. 11:34.)

Having reproved the brethren for their abuse of this memorial feast, Paul then proceeds to reiterate a proper observance of it: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that

the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:23-25.) Then by direct commandment he admonished them, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." (1 Cor. 11:28.)

Is the purpose of the assembly then — namely, the observance of the Lord's supper — a gospel requirement? It certainly is; and we are at a loss to see how anyone could fail to see it as such. For should someone reject the implications of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, then he is forced to the untenable position that the Bible requires a weekly assembly but gives not an inkling as to what the assembly is for. A strange position indeed!

Now we turn once again to Acts 20:7: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." This truly exemplifies the practice of the early church as is almost unanimously attested by both inspired and secular authorities. But is it a binding example? With the information we now have before us we

can say most assuredly that it is.

It illustrates the required **assembly** of Hebrews 10:25 — "The disciples came together."

It illustrates the required **time** of assembly found in 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 — "Upon the first day of the week."

It illustrates the **purpose** of the assembly as required by 1 Corinthians 11:33 — "To break bread."

It is therefore a binding example for Christians today because it is an illustration of gospel requirements for men of all ages.

Remember, an **example binds** when it illustrates a **requirement**. Acts 20:7 illustrates a required assembly on a required day for a required purpose. Reader, do you observe the Lord's supper on the first day of **every** week in imitation of this example? If not, there are churches of Christ in your area which would be glad to have you join with them in this weekly commemoration of the Lord's death. Why not pay one a visit?

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