

The Lord's Supper

"When is Supper?"

First Corinthians 11:26

Churches celebrate the Lord's Supper with different frequency:

- Catholic and high Anglican churches tend to celebrate it daily.
- Many Protestant churches offer it once a month.
- Some churches have communion quarterly or annually.

A 2013 survey revealed that a majority of evangelical churches celebrated the Lord's Supper once a month.

Weekly communion is coming back as a standard in many churches. If you search the internet for, "How often should a church take communion," the majority of the articles favor "weekly." They offer compelling arguments for the practice.

Others put an even greater importance on it, demanding we celebrate the Supper at *every* meeting of Christians. One pastor went so far as to say, "It is quite possible that we have not worshipped as the church without celebrating the Lord's Supper."

Should we therefore observe the Lord's Supper at every meeting, or at least weekly?

I think the best way to begin is with the conclusion. I'm going to quote a strong, scholarly proponent of weekly communion. He says, "I am an avid proponent of weekly communion for our churches. [However] **this practice is not directly commanded in Scripture**, so I am not accusing others of sin. The issue is the pursuit of "best practice," what best fits the patterns found in Scripture and makes best use of the resources God has given us."

He goes on to argue, mostly from the pattern found in the Book of Acts, that the early church observed the Lord's Supper weekly, and did so on into at least the fourth century.

That's true; I don't dispute it. The point, however, is this: Do we have any precedent in the Bible for exercising freedom in the frequency of our observing the Lord's Supper - or must we follow the at-least-weekly tradition of the early church?

If the early church is your standard, you *can* argue that they originally observed the Lord's Supper **daily**. In Acts 2:42 we read,

Act 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

This seems to be describing a meeting of the church. When the church met, they did these four things.

The phrase, "the breaking of bread," seems to indicate communion - not just a regular meal.

How often did such gatherings occur? We're told a few verses later:

Act 2:46 So continuing **daily** with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

I think you could make a solid argument that the “best practice,” the pattern, *originally*, was daily a **daily** gathering of Christians at which communion was celebrated.

You'd have to at the very least say that it was celebrated at every meeting.

Most evangelicals who are rethinking the issue of frequency are not arguing we do it at every meeting; just weekly. They base it on what we are told later in the Book of Acts:

Act 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.

This does establish that there was a regular pattern of meeting weekly, on Sunday. At that weekly meeting, on the first day of the week - on Sunday - they broke bread, i.e., they celebrated the Lord's Supper.

It does not answer whether or not the Lord's Supper was celebrated at other meetings of the church.

Truth is, if you are going to use the first century church as your standard, there is another requirement you're going to have to implement. It's clear from the Bible, and church history as I've been taught it, that they observed communion *in the evening, as a supper*.

For example, that key passage in Acts twenty goes on to talk about the apostle Paul teaching past midnight. It was the meeting during which young Eutychus grew drowsy, and fell asleep - and fell to his death from the window sill he'd been dozing in. Paul paused from his teaching to raise the young man from the dead.

The meeting started in the evening and went through the night, to the next morning. It was a Sunday night church gathering, and that is when the Lord's Supper was observed.

It's my understanding that churches like the one in Corinth met on Sunday evening, since most of the membership was servants or slaves, and that would be the only time they were free to attend a meeting.

Maybe it's just me, but I think it is inconsistent to say that the first century church met weekly and celebrated communion as a supper, and then argue we must therefore celebrate it weekly, but can do so at breakfast time or lunch time.

If the day is so important, why isn't the time of day equally important?

The very name, the Lord's *Supper*, argues for it not being celebrated earlier in the day.

Also, remember that Jesus instituted it in the evening, after supper.

Should we therefore be celebrating the Lord's Supper at every meeting of the church?

The one thing we are told in the Bible, directly, about the frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper is in First Corinthians 11:26, where we read,

1Co 11:26 For **as often as** you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

What does "as often as" mean? Commenting on this verse, Gordon Fee notes, "This addition in particular implies a frequently repeated action, suggesting that from the beginning the Last Supper was for Christians not an annual Christian Passover, but a regularly repeated meal in 'honor of the Lord,' hence the Lord's Supper."

But how regularly? Fee goes on to say that observing the Lord's supper is a "primary" New Testament truth, but the frequency of the rite "is based upon tradition and precedent" and those "surely are not binding."

Fee says, from his study of the language, we are not bound to the traditions of the early church in the matter of frequency.

Somewhere between celebrating it *annually* and *daily* is where we want to be as far as frequency. We have the freedom to determine the Lord's leading for our church.

If there is a pattern to discover in the Book of Acts, it's every meeting. Any church not celebrating the Lord's Supper at every meeting is exercising freedom to serve it "as often as" they choose. Bear that in mind when someone tells you that weekly communion is essential to worship.

Truth is, we **are** observing the Lord's Supper weekly, in the evening, but we're doing it Wednesday instead of Sunday.

For a while, we had the elements set-up on Sunday mornings, in the Prayer Room upstairs, for anyone who wanted to partake.

We had every meeting covered.

The Lord's Supper is essential. But so is our freedom in Jesus Christ, to not be put under man-made traditions, thinking they make us more spiritual.

I say that cautiously, since the traditions established by the apostles are important. But what I see here, in studying the Word, is that we have freedom from any set tradition.

We **emphasize** communion monthly, on the last Wednesday of the month; we **offer** the elements every Wednesday, for those who wish to partake.