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Church of Christ
371 W. Main Street
Greenwood, IN 46142
(317)888-8288

www.churchofchristatgreenwood.org

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Did the Early Church Observe the Lord's Supper Daily?

By Wayne Jackson

“It is becoming increasingly common to hear Christians argue that the first-century church, under the oversight of the apostles, observed the Lord’s Supper on a *daily* basis. Hence, it is alleged that it does not matter upon which day Christians partake of the communion elements. The time and frequency are said to be optional matters. We have been asked to comment upon this.”

The “Proof-Text”

The chief “proof-text” for this new concept is **Acts 2:46**.

“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat [food] with gladness and singleness of heart.”

Some are contending that this passage affords evidence that the primitive saints broke bread, i.e., partook of the Lord’s Supper, on a *daily* basis. The exegesis underlying this view is flawed in several particulars.

1. The expression “daily” denotes the frequency with which the disciples were meeting in the temple. Grammatically, it does not modify “breaking bread.” Thus, even if it could be established that “breaking bread,” in verse 46, is an allusion to the Lord’s Supper, there still would be no proof that the communion was an everyday occurrence.

2. The term “breaking bread” in this passage does not refer to the Lord’s Supper; rather, it denotes a *common meal*. This is evidenced by the fact that they are paralleled with “eat their food” in the same clause. The word “food” translates the Greek *trophe*, which essentially means *nourishment* (Danker, *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 2000,

2

p. 1017). The term (employed some sixteen times in the Greek New Testament) is *never* used of the communion, for such was not designed to nourish the physical body.

A comment from Presbyterian scholar, Albert Barnes, speaks to this point:

“Here [meat -KJV] it means all kinds of sustenance; that which nourished them – *trophes* – and the use of this word *proves* that it does not refer to the Lord’s supper; for that ordinance is nowhere represented as designed for an ordinary meal, or to nourish the *body*” (**Commentary on Acts**, p. 59).

3. In **Acts 2:42** there is a reference to the disciples “breaking *the* bread.” Notice the article preceding “bread” (not translated in our common versions, but present in the Greek text). The article indicates that a special “bread” is under consideration, i.e., the Lord supper (cf. **Acts 20:7** “*the* breaking of bread” and **1 Corinthians 10:16** “*the* bread which we break”).

However, in **Acts 2:46** there is no article in connection with “bread,” hence a distinction seems to be drawn between the “bread” of **2:42 and 46** (cf. A.

Campbell, **The Christian System**, pp. 272-273).

Numerous scholars do not believe that the Lord’s supper is referred to in **Acts 2:46** (cf. R.C.H. Lenski, A.T. Robertson, J.W. McGarvey, W. E. Vine, etc.).

4. There is an interesting context later in the book of Acts that may add some insight to this matter. Near the conclusion of his third missionary journey, Paul had departed from Phiippi after “the days of unleavened bread”—which came just following the Jewish Passover—(**cf. Acts 20:6**), and he was making his way hurriedly to Jerusalem. He hoped to arrive there in time for Pentecost—fifty days after Passover (**cf. 20:16**).

In spite of the fact that he had a journey of several hundred miles yet to make, which could involve difficult sailing conditions, he took the time to *tarry* seven days in Troas. Why? The most reasonable inference is so that he could meet with the saints of that city and observe the communion with them. Burton Coffman noted: “**Presumably, this delay from Tuesday till the following Monday was to enable the missionary group with Paul to observe the**

Lord's supper with the church in Troas, an inference from the fact that no reason was given for the delay, coupled with the account of the Lord's day meeting in Troas immediately after mentioning the delay"
(Commentary on Acts, p. 384).

If this reasoning is correct, the following question is entirely appropriate: if the communion was being observed daily, or if the time of this commemoration was optional, what need would there have been for a delay of one week? This is circumstantial evidence for a weekly (not daily) Lord's supper.

The Record of Church History

The testimony of the writings of those who lived shortly after the apostolic age bears unmistakable witness to the fact that the Lord's supper was observed each week on Sunday, and only upon that day. In the **Didache** (a document written about A.D. 120), the statement is made that Christians "come together each Lord's day of the Lord, break bread, and give thanks" (7:14). Justin Martyr (c. 152) also speaks of Christians meeting on Sunday and partaking of the communion (**Apology** I, 67).

In his book, **Early Christians Speak**, Everett Ferguson has observed that the literature of the post-apostolic age indicates that the Lord's supper was a constant feature of the Sunday service. He declares that there is no second-century evidence for the celebration of a daily communion (p. 96).

Thus, it must be concluded that there is no biblical authority for the novel concept that one may partake of the Lord's supper at his own discretion.

Whose Fault Is It?

By Author Unknown

A preacher and an atheistic barber were once walking through the city slums. The barber said, "This is why I cannot believe in a God of love. If God was as kind as you say, He would not permit all this poverty, disease and squalor. He would not allow these poor bums to be addicted to drugs and other life-destroying habits. No, I cannot believe in a God who permits these things."

The preacher was silent until they met a man who was especially unkempt and filthy. His hair was hanging down his neck and he had a half-inch of stubble on his face. The preacher said, "You cannot be a very good barber or you would not permit a man like that to continue living in this neighborhood without a haircut or shave."

Indignantly the barber answered, "Why blame me for that man's condition? I cannot help it that he is like that. He has never come in my shop. If he were to visit me, I could fix him up and make him look like a real person! No barber would ever let that man leave his shop without him looking well-groomed."

Giving the barber a penetrating look, the preacher said, "Then do not blame God for allowing these people to continue in their evil ways, when He is constantly inviting them to come and be saved. The reason these people are slaves to sin and evil habits is that they refuse the One who died to save and deliver them."

The barber saw the point. Do you?