

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

I. Introduction

- A. The frequency with which “church” is used in Scripture is suggestive of its importance.
1. “Church” is used 109 times to refer to God’s New Covenant people.
 2. “Church” in its *universal* sense refers to all God’s people throughout time and space (Heb. 12:23) and in its *local* sense to those who live close enough to each other to form a collective unit to meet, worship, and work together (Rev. 1:11).
 - a. The universal church emphasizes a disciple’s relationship with God while the local church emphasizes a disciple’s relationship with fellow disciples.
 - b. However, this distinction should not obscure the overlap the universal church and local church have in common, for one’s relationship with his brethren affects his relationship with God, and vice versa.
- B. The relationship between the local church and the Lord’s Supper is discerned in the bearing the Lord’s Supper has on the assembling together of its members.
1. Scripture reveals, not only that members of a church assembled with one another (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:23), but also that they were required to do so (Heb. 10:25).
 2. Yet, the requirement for the members to assemble is essentially meaningless unless Scripture also reveals *why*, *when*, and *how often* they should assemble.
 - a. The New Testament reveals that they were to assemble for the purposes of:
 - 1) Worship
 - a) Instruction from God’s word (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:19,26; Col. 4:16),
 - b) Singing (1 Cor. 14:15),
 - c) Prayer (1 Cor. 14:16,17),
 - d) the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34), and
 - e) (Monetary) giving (1 Cor. 16:2; cf. Acts 2:42,47).
 - 2) Making, announcing, and implementing decisions about the church’s work, including disciplinary cases (Matt. 18:15ff; Acts 6:1ff; 1 Cor. 5:4f)
 - 3) Hearing of evangelistic reports (Acts 14:27).
 - b. As to when and how often the members of a local church were to assemble:
 - 1) The church in Jerusalem initially met every day (Acts 2:46; 5:42).
 - a) However, this example does not reveal whether this was required.
 - b) There are no indications other churches met daily (Acts 20:6,7,16).
 - 2) Troas (Acts 20:7) and Corinth (1 Cor. 16:2) met on the week’s first day.
 - a) Since there is always a religious connection between the activity and the day on which it is said to occur in all 74 instances when a particular day of the week is cited, the disciples at Troas must have eaten the Lord’s on Sunday because they were commanded to do so.
 - b) Furthermore, the fact that the first day of the week is cited implies that it was done with a *weekly* frequency; otherwise, a church which does not partake of the Lord’s Supper on any particular Sunday cannot say that it has done on that day what the disciples in Troas did (by divine command).

II. The Importance of the Lord's Supper to the Church

- A. The importance of the Lord's Supper to the local church lies in the fact that it is the only activity which requires all of the members to gather at one time and at one place.
1. Scripture appointed a specific *time*, Sunday, for the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).
 - a. Thus, Christians are not free to partake of the Lord's Supper on other days.
 - b. The Lord's Supper is strictly a church activity.
 - 1) If the Lord's Supper could be a private, or individual, activity, it would not matter whether a day were specified for it.
 - 2) Yet, while prayer (1 Thess. 5:17), teaching (Acts 5:31), and singing (Jas. 5:13) may occur on any day, the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Christ's death (1 Cor. 11:26) and needs an appointed time.
 2. Scripture also appointed the church assembly for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:18).
 - a. So, members are not free to partake of the Lord's Supper another setting.
 - b. They gather to "break bread" with one another (1 Cor. 11:17,18,20,33,34).
 - 1) If the Lord's Supper were a private activity, it would not matter whether a place were specified for it.
 - 2) Yet, since the Lord's Supper is to be an activity which occurs within the setting of the assembled church, a place needed to be appointed for it.
- B. Therefore, to assert that the Lord's Supper may be eaten at any time other than the first day of the week and in any setting other than that of the local church deprives the local church of its obligation to appoint a specific time and place for its members to assemble.
1. If it were really just as acceptable to partake of the Lord's Supper with less than the local church, then there is no obligation for the members of the local church to arrange to meet with one another to partake of it.
 - a. Once the only activity which *must* be done in the context of the local church is removed from the local church, then the members of the local church do not have to assemble.
 - b. If the members have to assemble only when, or as often, as they choose, then the local church might soon cease to exist.
 2. However, this is precisely what some are claiming ("Offering the Lord's Supper a Second Time," Bobby Graham, *Truth Magazine*, February 2019, pp. 16-18).
 - a. If members are justified in partaking of the Lord's Supper without the local church *any* time, they are justified in doing it *all the time*.
 - b. Some claim that exceptional circumstances allow members to partake of the Lord's Supper without the local church.
 - 1) Yet, the Scriptures nowhere specify such circumstances or exceptions.
 - 2) Also, if a local church may be subdivided into subgroups, whose members might never see each other, and even be overseen by the same elders, this allows for a hierarchical and diocesan organization of the universal church (on earth).

III. Conclusion

- A. If members of a local church were free to partake of the Lord's Supper at any time and any place they chose, they might soon cease to assemble regularly to partake of it.
- B. This is not to say that there cannot, and should not, be regular assemblies of the local church on other days (Acts 2:46), but these provisions that the Lord's Supper be eaten at a specified time and place guarantees that at least the church will assemble no less than weekly.