

OBSERVING THE LORD'S SUPPER EACH LORD'S DAY

By Ashby L. Camp

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I. Introduction – There is no dispute that Christians are commanded to observe the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Jesus (Mat. 26:26-28; Lk. 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26) and that the early disciples repeatedly assembled to do so (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16-17, 11:17-34).¹ The question is whether it is God's will that Christians partake of the Supper on a certain day and with a certain frequency. I am convinced Scripture indicates that Christians are to observe this memorial each Sunday.

II. Practice of the Apostolic Church

A. It was the practice in the apostolic church to assemble each Sunday for the purpose of sharing in the Lord's Supper. This is apparent from Acts 20:7, where Luke writes, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul instructed them, intending to depart the next day, and extended the message until midnight" (ALC).

B. As David Aune notes in "Worship, Early Christian" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:979: "Here the phrase 'to gather together' is a technical term referring to the assembly of Christians for worship."

1. F. F. Bruce and Richard Longenecker concluded in their respective commentaries on Acts that Acts 20:7 provides "unambiguous evidence" for Christians assembling for worship on the first day of the week. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1954), 407-408; Richard Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 10:1024.

¹The Corinthians, along with other first century Christians (see, Jude 12; 2 Pet. 2:13), often, if not always, celebrated the Lord's Supper in conjunction with a larger fellowship meal. The Supper proper, meaning the symbolic bread and wine, was probably eaten at the end of the meal. The fellowship meal was a permissible rather than a commanded practice. It was separated from the Supper by the second century and then eventually dropped, at least as a regular practice. See, F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 266-267; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 262-263; Gordon Fee *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 535-544; Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, rev. ed. (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1987), 131-132; I. Howard Marshall, "Lord's Supper" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and others (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 571; Richard E. Oster, Jr., *1 Corinthians*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 278-279.

2. Numerous other scholars recognize that this verse refers to a Christian worship assembly. E.g., Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London: SCM Press, 1953), 10-11; Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 199-200; Roger Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday: A Biblical and Historical Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 36-39, 41; Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament Volume 2*, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 12; M. Max B. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 137; Richard Bauckham, "The Lord's Day" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 232-233; Paul Jewett, "Lord's Day" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:158; Gerhard Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1986), 378; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 169; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 814; and Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 669.

C. The phrase "to break bread" in Acts 20:7 is widely understood as a reference to the Lord's Supper (see Lk. 22:19; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16).

1. Hans-Josef Klauck writes in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:366: "That Luke at least has in mind the Lord's Supper, as he knows it from his church, could hardly be denied."

2. Similarly, Richard Longenecker states in "The Acts of the Apostles" (2007), 10:1024: "They met, Luke tells us, 'to break bread' (*klasai arton*), which, especially after Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:17-34, must surely mean 'to celebrate the Lord's Supper.' "

3. The German scholar Willy Rordorf wrote in *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (p. 221): "Surely, by the breaking of bread in Acts 20:7a nothing else than the 'Lord's Supper' is meant."

4. See also, Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 364; Johannes Behm, "Klao" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:730; Beckwith and Stott (1978), 89; I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 325; Goppelt (1982), 12; Turner (1982), 130-131, 137; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 425; and Fitzmyer (1998), 669.

5. Although Luke can use the term "to break bread" in reference to an ordinary meal (Acts 27:33-35), the fact he expressly connects it in Acts 20:7 to the Sunday gathering and describes it as the reason for the assembly strongly implies a liturgical meaning.

a. Thus, Jon C. Laansma concludes in his article on the "Lord's Day" in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*," eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 681:

This likelihood [that "to break bread" refers to the Lord's Supper] is increased by the combination of "to break bread" with "gathering" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20, 24; *Did.* 14.1; Ign. *Eph.* 20.2). We have to do, then, with a formal gathering of the church on the first day of the week, the stated purpose of which is to celebrate the Lord's Supper rather than to say farewell to Paul.

b. Max Turner writes in his chapter in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (p. 132):

We may be relatively sure that by the time the Book of Revelation was written, "the first day of the week" was widely referred to in the area as "the Lord's Day" . . . and that this day involved congregational worship. In order to explain the "Lord's Day" phenomenon, for which (at this stage) there were no Jewish or pagan Sunday parallels, we are forced to hypothesize earlier *Christian* "first day" observance of some kind . . . It is not therefore surprising that so many scholars have seen in Acts 20:7 precisely the sort of "first day" consciousness that they expected to find. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that they are right. It may be subjective, and not liable to proof, but the connection between "the first day of the week," "to gather together," and "to break bread" is remarkably similar to later statements that clearly refer to Sunday worship. Συνάγειν ("to gather together") coupled with κλάειν ἄρτον ("to break bread") appears to be a standard formula (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20; *Did.* 14:1; Ign. *Eph.* 20:2). The coincidence is too inviting to be dismissed.

D. Luke's wording suggests that it was a normal occurrence for the church to assemble on Sunday to break bread.

1. The fact Luke specifies both the day of the meeting and that its purpose was "to break bread" suggests that this was a regular occurrence, something known to Luke's readers. If it was just a spontaneous or convenient gathering for the purpose of breaking bread, why specify the day of the week on which that gathering occurred? If it could have happened any time, the day seems like a trivial detail not worth mentioning. This admittedly is a subtle thing, but it has been recognized by a number of scholars.

a. Rordorf writes (p. 199): "Verse 7a is, therefore, self-explanatory within its own terms: one has the impression that it conveys to every reader and hearer the setting of the assembly for the breaking of bread which was known to each one of them."

b. Beckwith and Stott state (p. 36-37):

[T]he form of the language in Acts 20:7 seems to imply that to meet for breaking of the bread on the first day of the week was normal practice for Paul and the rest of the church at Troas. Even the fact Luke names the day of the week (not usual in his writings) appears to indicate that there was something significant about it.

c. Turner writes (p. 132):

We are faced with the conclusion that Luke's specification of the day of the week in Acts 20:7 probably should not be relegated to the category of irrelevant personal reminiscence. . . . The brevity of Luke's notice would suggest that he considered such meetings to be uncontroversial and to require no further explanation, from which we may infer that they were relatively widespread and regular.

2. Also, if it was not a normal occurrence for the church to assemble on Sunday to break bread, it seems more likely that Luke would have written, "On the first day of the week, we assembled [finite verb form instead of a participle] to break bread, and Paul talked with them . . ." As a comparison, one would not report to absent coworkers, "On Friday, *when we were assembled to be paid*, the boss discussed various retirement plans," if it was not customary to assemble on Fridays for the purpose of being paid.

E. Furthermore, the day on which the church assembled to break bread apparently was fixed.

1. Paul was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (Acts 19:21, 20:16), and yet he stayed in Troas seven days (Acts 20:6), just long enough to be there through Sunday (note that he left the next morning – 20:11).

a. Gordon Fee states in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (p. 814) (emphasis supplied): "[Luke] *implies most strongly* that Paul and the others waited in Troas until the 'first day of the week' precisely because that is when the Christians gathered for the breaking of bread."

b. Andrew Lincoln writes in the final chapter of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (p. 383): "[T]he narrative with its talk of staying for seven days in Troas and of Paul's intention to depart the next morning reads as though Paul deliberately planned to address all the believers when they assembled for their weekly meeting."

2. That Sunday was a fixed day of Christian worship is further indicated by Paul's instruction to the Corinthian and the Galatian churches that they set aside money for the collection for God's people "on the first day of every week" (1 Cor. 16:1-2). As most scholars recognize, this statement of date shows that "Sunday is already the day of meeting." Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 296. Referring to the combined significance of 1 Cor. 16:2 and Acts 20:7, Fee states in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (p. 814):

All of this together, therefore, implies that [the first day of the week] is the day when believers from a very early time gathered for their specifically Christian celebration of worship, which included the Lord's Table. Thus, even though they were not necessarily to bring their gift to the assembly on this day,² it was the fact that this day marked for them the specifically Christian day in their week that probably made it convenient for Paul to note it as the time for them to remember the poor among the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

F. The distinctiveness of Sunday as a day of Christian worship is confirmed by John's reference to it as "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10).

1. To repeat Max Turner's statement: "We may be relatively sure that by the time the Book of Revelation was written, 'the first day of the week' was widely referred to in the area as 'the Lord's Day' . . . and that this day involved congregational worship."

2. After surveying the relevant second-century evidence, Richard Bauckham states in "The Lord's Day" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (p. 231):

We conclude that in the *Didache*, Ignatius, and the *Gospel of Peter* Κυριακή is a technical term in fairly widespread use at least in Syria and Asia Minor, designating the first day of the week as the Christian day of regular corporate worship. It therefore becomes extremely likely that κυριακή ἡμέρα in Revelation 1:10 also means Sunday.

3. Thus, as David Aune notes in *Revelation 1 – 5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1997), 84, "κυριακή ἡμέρα in Rev. 1:10 is widely understood to be a new Christian designation for Sunday." It is the day that belongs to the Lord in the sense it is the day on which his people assemble to specially commemorate his death and resurrection by sharing in the memorial he prescribed.

²Though Paul's instructions concerning the collection often have been understood as referring to a private activity, Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 240 lists six considerations that indicate Paul is here referring to a public contribution to a church treasury.

4. This was the conclusion reached by Oscar Cullmann in his study of early Christian worship. He wrote that "the primitive Christian (Church) service created for itself a specifically Christian setting in which *one* day was specially marked out as the day for the (Church) services – the Lord's Day." He then declared that "the Lord's Supper is the natural climax towards which the service thus understood moves and without which it is not thinkable." Cullmann (1953), 10, 34.

5. Likewise, Willy Rordorf, after an extensive scholarly study, concluded (p. 305):

[I]n the ancient Church it was unthinkable for a Sunday to pass without the local church gathering for a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Sunday was absolutely nothing without the Lord's Supper; the Lord's Supper formed the focal point of the worship around which all the other parts of the service found their place."

G. In fact, a number of scholars are convinced that the title "Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10) reflects the day's connection with the "Lord's Supper." (The adjective *κυριακός* appears only in these two verses.)

1. Rordorf says (p. 221), "it is probable that the title *κυριακή ἡμέρα* [Lord's Day] is derived from the designation *κυριακὸν δεῖπνον* [Lord's Supper]: in other words, it seems probable that the whole day on which this 'Lord's Supper' took place received the title 'Lord's Day.' "

2. According to Paul Jewett in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (3:158):

The most plausible explanation of the term [Lord's Day] is that it derives from the parallel expression "Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20), since the early Christians gathered on the first day of the week to celebrate this meal as the culmination of their corporate worship. An account of an early (late 50's) Lord's Day service is found in Acts 20:7-11, beginning with the words "on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread."

3. Though David Aune is a bit more cautious about the derivation of the title "Lord's Day," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6:980) he acknowledges the inextricable link between Sunday and the Lord's Supper:

A clue to [the meaning of the term Lord's Day] may be provided by the only other occurrence of the adjective *kyriakos* in the NT, 1 Cor. 11:20, where Paul refers to the Lord's Supper (*kyriakon deipnon*). Since the breaking of bread, i.e., the Lord's Supper, was the central ritual of Christian worship, it is possible that this very early way of referring to the ritual as 'the Lord's Supper' was later used to designate the day of worship itself.

H. Meeting on "the first day of the week" was no doubt connected to the fact this was the day of Jesus' resurrection (Mat. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1).

1. I. Howard Marshall reminds us in *The Acts of the Apostles* (p. 150), "Although the emphasis in Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:26 has sometimes led to the view that the Supper is concerned exclusively with reminding us of the death of Jesus, there is plenty of evidence to show that in the early church it was regarded as the place of meeting with the risen Lord." The resurrection aspect of the Supper is apparent in the clause "until he comes" in 1 Cor. 11:26.

2. This day is so emphasized in the resurrection accounts (including Jn. 20:19, 26, where the Lord met with the disciples on the day of the resurrection and the following Sunday) and the resurrection is so significant to Christian faith, that it could hardly be otherwise. The association of Sunday with the resurrection is substantiated by most of the early second-century references. See Richard Bauckham, "The Lord's Day" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (p. 236-240).

I. Early church history corroborates the N.T. picture that the practice of the apostolic church was to observe the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day.

1. The *Didache* is a manual on church life, dating from the late first or early second century, which probably originated in either Syria or Egypt. It states: "Having earlier confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure, come together each Lord's Day of the Lord, break bread, and give thanks." Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, rev. ed. (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1987), 94. Regarding the curious double expression "Lord's Day of the Lord," Everett Ferguson states (p. 72):

[P]erhaps the simplest explanation is to see the phrase as a counterpart to the O.T. and Jewish phrase, the Sabbath of the Lord' (cf. Leviticus 23:38), meaning the Sabbath is the Lord's. *Kuriake* would already have been for the author the name of a particular day of the week. It belongs to the Lord (Christ now and not God), as well as bearing his name. It is "the Lord's Sunday," or "the Lordly day of the Lord."

2. Justin Martyr, who was scourged and beheaded for his faith, wrote the following in the early 150's as part of his defense of Christianity (from Ferguson [1987] 81):

And on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a city or a rural district. The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then, when the reader ceases, the president in a discourse admonishes and urges the imitation of these good things. Next we all rise together and send up prayers. And, as I said before, when we cease from our prayer, bread is presented and wine and water. The president in the same manner sends up

prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability, and the people sing out their assent saying the "Amen." A distribution and participation of the elements for which thanks have been given is made to each person, and to those who are not present it is sent by the deacons.

3. *Acts of John* is an apocryphal work that was probably composed in Asia Minor shortly after the middle of the second century. It states (from Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha [Volume Two]*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965] 254-256):

And on the next day, as it was a Sunday and all the brethren were assembled, he . . . [spoke to them and offered a prayer]. And he asked for bread, and . . . [after giving thanks] broke the bread and gave to all of us, praying over each of the brethren that he would be worthy of the Lord's grace and of the most holy Eucharist.

4. Ferguson, who served as editor of the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, reaches the following conclusion regarding the early church's observance of the Lord's Supper in "The Lord's Supper and Biblical Hermeneutics," *3 Mission* (Sept. 1976), 13:

[T]exts from early Christian literature stress that Christians observe the first day because it is the day of the resurrection. They observe the day with an assembly, and in that assembly they take the supper. The testimony of church history shows that we have not misread the New Testament [in concluding that the Lord's Supper was observed each Sunday]. The apostolic practice was a weekly communion on the first day of the week. If this was not the apostolic practice, then one has the difficult job of explaining how all the churches came to adopt the same custom. The conclusion to be drawn is that Acts 20:7 is not an accidental reference but reflects the general practice of New Testament churches.

5. Richard Bauckham, another expert on the early church, echoes the point in "The Lord's Day" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (p. 236):

Sunday worship appears, when the evidence becomes available in the second century, as the universal Christian practice outside Palestine. There is no trace whatever of any controversy as to whether Christians should worship on Sunday, and no record of any Christian group that did not worship on Sunday. This universality is most easily explained if Sunday worship was already the Christian custom before the Gentile mission, and spread throughout the expanding Gentile church with the Gentile mission. It is very difficult otherwise to see how such a practice could have been imposed universally and leave no hint of dissent or disagreement. . . . The conclusion seems irresistible that all of the early missionaries simply exported the practice of the Palestinian churches.

III. No Other Practice – There is no persuasive evidence that Christians observed the Lord's Supper on any day other than Sunday.

A. Jesus instituted the Supper on a Thursday night, but the institution of the Supper is different from its observance by the disciples. The Lord was instructing them that in the future, after he was gone, they were to share the bread and wine in memory of him and of what he did in giving his body and blood for the forgiveness of humanity's sins. The institution of the Supper was *before* those things were accomplished; the Supper as a religious memorial was *after* those things were accomplished.

B. Acts 2:46 is not proof of a daily observance of the Lord's Supper.

1. It is not certain that the phrase "from day to day" in Acts 2:46 modifies the clause "breaking bread from house to house." It may refer only to the practice of meeting in the temple, which, of course, would destroy any argument from this verse that they daily partook of the Lord's Supper.

a. The choices are:

And [daily spending time in the temple with one accord] and [breaking bread from house to house], they were sharing food in gladness and generosity of heart . . ."

And daily [spending time in the temple with one accord and breaking bread from house to house], they were sharing food in gladness and generosity of heart . . ."

b. Though most are convinced the latter is correct, there are well respected scholars who dispute that.

(1) Everett Ferguson states in *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 239-240: "It is not certain that the 'breaking of bread' [in 2:46] is a reference to communion (cf. the usage for beginning an ordinary meal in Acts 27:33-36); nor is the construction unambiguous that 'daily' modifies 'breaking bread' as well as 'being together in the temple.'"

(2) Gerhard Krodel writes in *Acts* (p. 93): "Daily celebrations of the Eucharist cannot be deduced from v. 46 because the Greek phrase **day by day** (Greek, *kath' hēmeran*) refers only to the first clause, namely, that they attended **the temple** daily, and has its correspondence in the phrase **in their homes** (Greek, *kat' oikon*) where they celebrated the Eucharist."

(3) It appears that the translators of the NIV agree with Krodel, as they have 2:46-47a: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."

2. But even assuming the verse says they were daily "breaking bread," it would not mean that the church observed the Lord's Supper each day.

a. As John H. Fish III wrote in "The Life of the Local Church," *The Emmaus Journal* (Vol. 6, No. 1, 1997), 35:

Acts 2:46 says that "*day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.*" This indicates a daily breaking of bread, but the problem here is that the same expression is used both for the Lord's Supper and for the daily meals. Both were indications of the fellowship in the early church. There is no way of proving which is in view in Acts 2:46.

b. Given the emphasis in Acts 2:44-47 on the generosity and communal aspect of the early church, the reference in v.47 to "sharing food," and the practice of daily meals noted in Acts 6:1, it makes more sense to me to see this as their sharing of an ordinary communal meal. And I am in some good scholarly company in thinking that.

(1) W. E. Vine, a Greek scholar from a prior generation, states in *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 346: "In [Acts 2:42] the phrase 'the breaking of bread,' unaccompanied by any word about taking food clearly stands for the Lord's Supper; whereas in v. 46 the phrase 'breaking bread at home' is immediately explained by 'they did take their food,' indicating their ordinary meals."

(2) A. T. Robertson, another Greek scholar from a prior generation, states in *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1930), 3:39 (emphasis supplied): "Daily they were [in the temple] and daily breaking bread at home (*kat' oikon*) which looks like the regular meal."

(3) David J. Williams, who is vice principal of Ridley College in Australia, says of verse 46 in *Acts*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 61, "On these occasions they broke bread, which raises the question of whether we should give to this phrase the same meaning as in verse 42 or regard it now as simply a reference to ordinary meals. The additional words, 'eating the food,' and the absence of the definite article (cf. v. 42, 'the bread') suggest the latter, though the argument is by no means conclusive."

(4) C. K. Barrett, who is Emeritus Professor of Theology at the University of Durham (England), states in *The Acts of the Apostles Volume 1*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 170: "**46.** *Kath' hemeran* [day by day]: so that the meals referred to later in the verse were not weekly celebrations of the Lord's resurrection but, much more probably, the necessary daily

meals, which the believers took in common."

(5) Ben Witherington, who is professor of New Testament interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary, writes in his 1998 commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 163 (n. 124): "As Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 1, p. 170, notes, the reference to daily meals means we are not talking about some sort of weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper."

(6) Richard Longenecker, who is professor emeritus of New Testament at Wycliffe College in Toronto, writes in his 2007 commentary on Acts in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (p. 757) (emphasis supplied):

The [meaning of 'the breaking of bread' in Acts 2:42] is somewhat difficult to determine, for while 2:42 and 20:7 may very well relate to the full Pauline understanding as expressed in 1 Cor. 10:16 and 11:24, and while Luke referred to "the breaking of the bread" in that way in his passion narrative at Luke 22:19, elsewhere Luke uses "breaking bread" for an ordinary meal (cf. Luke 24:30, 35; Acts 20:11; 27:35) *and seems to have in mind an ordinary meal in 2:46.*

(7) Jonathan Leeman, who is the editorial director of 9Marks and teaches at several seminaries, says in *One Assembly: Rethinking the Multisite & Multiservice Church Models* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 96: "Acts 2:46 seems to refer to ordinary meals: 'Breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.' Their generous hearts are sharing food, and people are gladly receiving it. Why? Verse 45 tells us that some 'had need.' They were glad, presumably, because it was food and people were hungry."

3. On the other hand, the "breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42 seems to refer to the Lord's Supper because of the things listed with it. (Note that the editors of the Greek text and a number of English translations – ASV, RSV, TEV, REB, NRSV – create a new paragraph after v. 42, which means they detect a shift in focus at v. 43.)

a. To repeat the quote from W. E. Vine: "In [Acts 2:42] the phrase 'the breaking of bread,' unaccompanied by any word about taking food clearly stands for the Lord's Supper; whereas in v. 46 the phrase 'breaking bread at home' is immediately explained by 'they did take their food,' indicating their ordinary meals."

b. E. H. Trenchard in "Acts" in *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1275 also sees the breaking of bread in this context as equivalent to the Lord's Supper because "only a fundamental activity of the church would be put alongside teaching and prayer."

c. I. Howard Marshall says in *The Acts of the Apostles* (p. 127) that Acts 2:42 is a description of "four constituent parts of an early Christian gathering."

d. David Fiensy states in *New Testament Introduction* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 171:

Acts 2:42 reads, after describing the first converts to Christianity on the day of Pentecost: "And they continued in the teaching of the apostles, in sharing, in breaking the loaf, and in prayers." Since the word "loaf" or "bread" (Greek, ἄρτος, *artos*) has the definite article, "the loaf," we are safe in assuming that the reference is to the Lord's Supper (contrast Acts 2:46 where the definite article is not used). Therefore the Lord's Supper was one of those four basic and essential practices of the early church.

e. Longenecker states (p. 757), "[I]t is difficult to believe that Luke meant only an ordinary meal in 2:42, placing the expression, as he does, between two such religiously loaded terms as "the fellowship" and "prayer."

C. The indication in Acts 20:7, 11 that the church in Troas "broke bread and ate" after "midnight" does not prove they observed the Lord's Supper after 12:00 midnight.

1. Some are convinced the compound phrase "broke bread and ate" signifies an ordinary meal rather than the Lord's Supper, which they already would have eaten.

a. Richard Longenecker states in his commentary on Acts (p. 1024): "Eutychus was restored to life. Then everyone returned to the third-story room, where they had a midnight snack – here certainly the compound 'broke bread and ate,' (*klasas ton arton kai geusamenos*) signifying an ordinary meal, not the Lord's Supper – and Paul continued to talk till dawn."

b. This view is supported by W. E. Vine (p. 346): "As to whether Acts 20:11 refers to the Lord's Supper or to an ordinary meal, the addition of the words 'and eaten' is perhaps a sufficient indication that the latter is referred to here, whereas ver. 7, where the single phrase 'to break bread' is used, refers to the Lord's Supper."

2. Moreover, the N.T. follows the Roman practice of dividing the night into four watches: evening, midnight, cockcrow, and morning.

a. Jack Finegan states in *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 9: "The nighttime was divided into watches. . . . The rabbis debated whether there were three watches or four. In the New Testament, as in Roman and Egyptian practice, we find four watches of the night: evening, midnight, cockcrow, and morning (Matt 14:25; Mark 13:35)." See also, D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8:344 and Morna Hooker, *The Gospel of Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 324.

b. The term "midnight" therefore covers the period from roughly 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight. So Paul could easily talk until "midnight" (e.g., 9:30 p.m.), bring Eutychus back to life, and still "break bread and eat" before 12:00.

3. But even if Acts 20:11 meant that the church in Troas shared in the Lord's Supper after 12:00 midnight, the Christians in Troas no doubt reckoned the first day of the week to extend to the following dawn, so it was still Sunday.

a. Leon Morris writes in *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 708:

Westcott thought that John used the "Roman" method of computing time, whereby the day began at midnight as with us. . . . This is attractive, but there appears to be no evidence that the so-called Roman method of computing time was used other than in legal matters like leases. At Rome, as elsewhere, the day was reckoned to begin at sunrise.³

b. In fact, Luke seems to use this method of reckoning the beginning of a "day," as he specifies that Paul intended to leave "the next day" (Acts 20:7) and then reports that Paul left "at daybreak" (Acts 20:11). F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 425-426. Luke's use of this method of reckoning also is apparent in Acts 23:23, 31-32. The detachment of soldiers, horsemen, and "spearmen" (the meaning is uncertain) left Jerusalem around 9:00 p.m. and during the night traveled the roughly 37 miles to Antipatris. They would not have reached Antipatris until long after midnight. So when Luke says they returned to the barracks "on the next day," it seems clear that he considered the "next day" to have begun at sunrise.

D. Thus, Ferguson states in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 1096, "Apart from Acts 2:46, which is ambiguous, there is no evidence in the early Christian literature for a daily Lord's supper, or indeed for its observance on any day other than Sunday." It was only later that the Supper came to be observed at other special occasions (e.g., on the anniversary of the deaths of martyrs).

IV. A Practice We Are to Follow

A. We are commanded to observe the Supper in memory of Jesus. The apostolic church appears to have observed the Supper each Sunday, that being the day of the Lord's resurrection, and only on Sunday.

³See also, Marshall (1980), 325-326; Conzelmann (1987), 169; Bruce (1990), 425-426; Aune (1992), 979; Ferguson (1996), 238; Geoffrey Wainwright, "Lord's Supper, Love Feast" in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 688; and Finegan (1998), 7. Marshall, Aune, and Wainwright say the Romans reckoned the day to begin at dawn, but since it seems clear that at least the official Roman day began at midnight, they are presumably referring to the common practice. Bruce, Conzelmann, and Ferguson indicate that Greeks reckoned the day to begin at dawn, but Finegan, quoting Pliny, says the Greeks reckoned the day to begin at sunset.

B. The day appears to have been fixed, so much so that it was not altered to accommodate the fact Paul was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem. That suggests there was more to it than mere custom or habit.

C. The Corinthian church met repeatedly to take the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:16-17, 11:17-34). 1 Cor. 16:2 indicates they met regularly on Sunday. In light of Acts 20:7, Rev. 1:10, and early church history, we have every reason to believe that their repeated sharing in the Lord's Supper was during their regular Sunday meetings. Since Paul founded the church in Corinth (Acts 18) and instructed them in the Lord's Supper (11:2 with 11:17, 23, 26), weekly observance of the Lord's Supper must have been part of what he passed on to them. And if Paul passed that on to them, on what basis do we choose to take a different course?

D. In Heb. 10:25 we are commanded not to forsake "our own assembly" (Attridge's translation – ἐπισυναγωγή can refer to the assembled body), meaning our Christian meeting(s). Certainly the most prominent Christian meeting was the Lord's Day gathering, so the readers naturally would take that meeting as the primary reference. Given that the Lord's Supper was a central aspect of the Lord's Day gathering – indeed, it was the purpose for that gathering – the command not to neglect the Lord's Day gathering cannot be separated from the practice of taking the Lord's Supper. In other words, if the first-century practice is in fact as I've painted it, then they're being told at the very least not to cease attending the Lord's Day meeting where the Supper is eaten. That is a divine seal of approval on the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day.

E. Some suggest that the phrase "as often as" in Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 11:25-26 means Christians are free to take the Lord's Supper at any time, but I don't think that is correct.

1. Paul writes: ²⁵In the same way, after supper [he took] the cup also, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, **as often as** you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For **as often as** you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

2. I do not believe one can infer from that phrase that there was no schedule for taking the Supper. If Coach K told his team, "As often as you play a game, you represent Duke University," that would not mean there was no schedule for their games. It simply would mean that each time they played *pursuant to that schedule* they represented Duke.

F. It is therefore not surprising that the link between the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper was maintained throughout most of Christian history. As Wayne Grudem says in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 999:

In actuality it has been the practice of most of the church throughout its history to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week when believers gather. However, in many Protestant churches since the Reformation, there has been

a less frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper – sometimes once a month or twice a month, or, in many Reformed churches, only four times a year.

V. Sunday and Rom. 14:5-6

A. Romans 14:5-6 is not inconsistent with Sunday being an appointed day for corporate worship. Paul is there speaking of those who distinguish days qualitatively in terms of holiness (the Sabbath) versus those who consider each day equally holy. What Paul is saying is that, under the new covenant, the Jewish practice of considering certain days as distinctively *holy* is a matter of indifference to God. No day is holier than another to those in Christ; rather, all days are equally holy. So Christians cannot be required to observe the Sabbath or other Jewish holy days by claims that those days are holy. The same truth is indicated in Gal. 4:9-10 and Col. 2:16-17.

B. That the "Lord's Day" is an appointed day of Christian worship does not mean it is a more sacred day in the sense the Sabbath was a more sacred day. I realize that some believe Sunday is a Christianized version of the Jewish Sabbath, but I do not share that view. As Andrew Lincoln explains in the final chapter of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (p. 389-390):

[T]he Lord's Day need not be understood in terms of a sacred day. . . . The day can be said to be the Lord's because it is the appropriate day for worshipping Him, and this is significantly different from the view that sees the day, by analogy with the Jewish Sabbath, as a full twenty-four hour period belonging to the Lord in a distinct way from that in which all the Christian's time belongs to the Lord. Whereas the latter is in conflict with the sentiment approved in Rom. 14:5, the former need by no means be. There is a sense in which all of life should be a prayer, and yet a recognition of this does not detract from the need for specific prayer at specific times. Similarly the notion that all of one's time is devoted to the Lord does not detract from the necessity of specific worship at specific times. To claim that specifically Sunday is the appropriate day for a gathering of the Christian community for worship is not to imply that somehow in itself that day is holy.