

The Lord's Day at Fairview

Background

In 2015, after hearing feedback from some and realizing the need myself for increased fellowship and time together as a congregation I thought that another gathering (resuming the Sunday evening service) would be a good way to achieve this. After thinking about different ways this could be done and discussing during some of our leadership meetings we decided to do a survey to get feedback. We asked people if they were willing to attend another service on Sunday and if so, would they prefer to attend an afternoon service or an evening service. As I reflect on these events, I believe this course of action was a mistake.

As a congregation we must go to the word of God to see what must take place as we come together as a body on the first day of the week. As a pastor I need to lead in this area to understand how the Bible dictates our gatherings and then from the principles found in the Scriptures lead the congregation into biblical orthopraxy (right practice) by sharing and exemplifying the same teachings from the Scriptures.

When I began sermon preparation on the second half of 1 Corinthians 11 on the Lord's Supper, a number of traditions that I had never questioned were challenged as I studied the text.

This document is a summary of some of what I researched. It considers what should happen as the church gathers on the first day of the week.

I. A Biblical Look at the Elements of the Gathered Church

I consider 5 essential elements to a church's gathering on the Lord's Day. The first four (preaching, singing, reading Scripture, and prayer) are mentioned briefly where the real focus and argument is placed on the fifth essential element: the Lord's Supper and Fellowship Meal.

1) Preaching

As seen Acts 2:42 ("they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"), from the first days of the church they were devoted to learning from the apostles. The apostles gave the charge to elders of congregation to teach, specifically to preach the word.

2 Timothy 4:2 says, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

Acts 20:26–28 says, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all,²⁷ for I did not shrink from **declaring to you the whole counsel of God**.²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."

Paul wanted the Ephesian elders to follow in his steps and to care for the church by declaring the whole counsel of God. In other words to preach, and specifically, to preach the word.

2) Hymns and Spiritual Songs

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

Ephesians 5:19 says, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart"

3) Scripture Reading

1 Timothy 4:13 says, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching."

The public reading of Scripture here mentioned alongside exhortation (preaching) and teaching is what Pastor Timothy should be devoted to.

4) Prayer

1 Timothy 2:8 says, "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (see also Acts 2:42 cited above).

This instruction was given in light of how one ought to behave in the household of God (3:14–15).

5) The Lord's Supper and Fellowship Meal

The institution of the Lord's Supper is in three of the four gospels (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23). We see it practiced explicitly in Corinth during the gathering of the church (1 Corinthians 11:17–34; 10:16–17). It is also likely mentioned in Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7.

When we examine how the Lord's Supper was practiced in the early church, we always see it mentioned in the context of a meal. Therefore, we'll discuss the fellowship meal and the Lord's Supper together.

Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42 says, "And they **devoted** themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

What is the breaking of bread?

- This is a term used for a regular meal (cf. Luke 24:30,35; Acts 20:11; 27:35).¹

¹ Luke 24:30–35 says, "When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" ³³And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread."

Acts 20:11 says, "And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed."

Acts 27:34–36 says, "Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." ³⁵And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves."

- Acts 2:46 says, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts." Clearly, a meal is in context here.
- However, it likely included the Lord's Supper as part of this fellowship meal for the following reasons:
 - The breaking of bread appears between a list of spiritual church-gathering activities "teaching and the fellowship" and "prayers" in Acts 2:42.
 - Paul uses the term "the bread that we break" (1 Cor 10:16) to refer to the Lord's Supper.²
 - Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the midst of the Passover meal (Luke 22:7–23).
 - The Lord's Supper in Corinth (1 Cor 11:17–34) was practiced with a meal.

In summary, Acts 2:42 describes the daily gathering in the first few weeks of the church where they would gather for teaching, prayers, fellowship, and eating together while practicing the Lord's Supper.

Acts 20:7

Acts 20:7 says, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight."

What is being described here?

- The now weekly (rather than daily) gathering of the church on the first day of the week (Sunday).
- This is the day of the week when they "gathered together to break bread"
- This likely refers to a fellowship meal (Acts 20:11) as well as the Lord's Supper (see discussion on Acts 2:42 for support).³

In summary, Acts 20:7 describes the weekly gathering as including a meal and the practice of the Lord's Supper as well as listening to teaching.

1 Corinthians 11:17–34

This passage describes the Lord's Supper and its abuse in Corinth. Of note is the following:

- The Lord's Supper was in the context of a meal (v. 21, 33)
- The Lord's Supper was practiced when they came together as a church—i.e., weekly on a Sunday ("when you come together" [v. 17]; "when you come together as a church" [v. 18]; "when you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat." [v. 20]). From verse 20 especially, we see that they came together to eat when they gathered as a church.
- The saying "as often as you eat..." which has traditionally been used to argue that the frequency is not important was quoted in the midst of a weekly practice of the Supper.

² 1 Corinthians 10:16 says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"

³ Acts 20:11 says, "And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed."

In summary, 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 describes the weekly gathering of the church where they practiced the Lord's Supper and ate a meal together.

As we consider all these verses, it seems that every time the church gathered they shared a meal and practiced the Lord's supper.

II. Historical Data for the Frequency of the Lord's Supper

From the earliest Roman description of Christianity, the imperial governor Pliny the Younger (61/62–c. 113) mentions in a letter to the emperor Trajan (reign 98–117) that Christians in Bithynia and Pontus were in the habit of meeting on a weekly basis to partake of food.⁴

Justin Martyr in his First Apology (151/155) discusses the Lord's Supper as a regular weekly communion.⁵

This was continued through history and up through the time of the Reformation. "Calvin upheld the ancient rule that no meeting of the church should take place without also partaking of the Lord's Supper."⁶ The Geneva city council, however, would not permit this so quarterly communion became the norm.

Spurgeon said, "So with the Lord's Supper. My witness is, and I think I speak the mind of many of God's people now present, that coming as some of us do, weekly, to the Lord's table, we do not find the breaking of bread to have lost its significance—it is always fresh to us. I have often remarked on the Lord's-day evening, whatever the subject may have been, whether Sinai has thundered over our heads, or the plaintive notes of Calvary have pierced our hearts, it always seems equally appropriate to come to the breaking of bread. Shame on the Christian church that she put it off to once a month and mar the first day of the week by depriving it of its glory in the meeting together for fellowship and breaking of bread and showing forth the death of Christ till he comes. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord's day celebrating his supper, will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons. Beloved, when the Holy Ghost is with us, ordinances are wells to the Christian, wells of rich comfort and of near communion."⁷

Despite the Scriptural and historical warrant, the vast majority of Baptist churches today and through the last few hundred years have observed the ceremony once per quarter or once per month.⁸ Some have argued for weekly practice such as William B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Today, most Baptist churches in Scotland have adopted the practice and there is a growing movement advocating weekly celebration.⁹

⁴ Pliny, *Letter* 10.96.

⁵ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 65 and 67.

⁶ B.A. Gerrish, "Eucharist," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (New York: Oxford, 1996), 77.

⁷ "Songs of Deliverance," Sermon no. 763, July 28, 1867. Online: <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0763.htm>

⁸ in 1953, the SBC reported that 66 percent of churches observed it quarterly and, 19 percent monthly (Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual*, 1953, 449).

⁹ See *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes* (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

III. Application of these Principles for our Church at Fairview

In light of the biblical data just discussed, here is a proposed gathering for the Lord's day, the first day of the week. The change being a weekly practice of the Lord's Supper *and* a weekly Fellowship Meal

1. Discipleship Classes (Sunday School) — 9:30am

A time to focus on teaching the word.

2. Worship Service — 11am

The main preaching service where we worship together. This service includes hymns, public reading of Scripture, pastoral prayer, preaching, and benediction.

3. Fellowship Meal with the Lord's Supper — 12:30pm

A simple potluck meal or rotating groups that provide simple meals where fellowship (conversation), not feasting is the focus. Different organizational ideas are welcome.

This means that each week we would celebrate together a meal and remember our Lord and look forward to his return by practicing together the ordinance of communion.

IV. Going Forward From Here

I will present this paper at our next members meeting on July 27th and encourage discussion on this matter. No changes to current services will take place until September at the earliest.