

The Case for Weekly Communion:

A Biblical and Historical Apologetic

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ABSTRACT

The practice of Communion, also referred to as the Lord's Supper, Eucharist, or Breaking of Bread, holds a central place in Christian worship. However, considerable debate has existed throughout church history regarding the appropriate frequency of its observance. While many Protestant churches today celebrate Communion monthly or quarterly, a growing call for the restoration of weekly Communion reflects the practices of both the New Testament church and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. This paper argues for the practice of weekly Communion, drawing upon biblical mandates, early church practices, theological considerations, and the spiritual benefits of frequent participation. Through examining these historical, biblical, and theological sources, this paper presents a robust apologetic for why Christians should return to weekly Communion, while also addressing common theological and practical objections. The paper engages with opposing views, explores the historical shift away from weekly observance in the Reformed tradition, and includes references to both classical and contemporary scholars.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Lord's Supper is one of the most sacred and mysterious elements of Christian worship. It is an act of remembrance, a proclamation of Christ's death, and a means of grace. Yet, the frequency with which churches partake of Communion varies widely. Some churches observe it weekly, while others limit it to monthly or quarterly celebrations. The purpose of this paper is to build a biblical and historical case for the regular practice of weekly Communion, appealing to the New Testament model, early church practices, and the spiritual benefits that come with such frequent participation. Additionally, the paper will engage with opposing theological views and practical concerns, making a robust apologetic for the necessity and value of weekly observance.

II. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR WEEKLY COMMUNION

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

The origin of Communion is found in the Last Supper, where Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).¹ Jesus' command to "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) was not merely a directive for the apostles but for all believers throughout the church age. The Greek verb "ποιεῖτε" (do this) carries an ongoing imperative, suggesting that Communion was intended as a continual practice. This verb, when paired with the New Covenant in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20), shows that the Lord's Supper is an ongoing command, essential to the life of the New Covenant community, much like baptism is for initiation into that community.

¹ The Holy Bible. *English Standard Version Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001.

The Early Church's Example of Frequent Communion

The book of Acts provides critical insight into how the first Christians understood the frequency of Communion. Acts 2:42 indicates that the early believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Scholars widely agree that “breaking of bread” refers to the observance of the Lord's Supper, particularly when understood in its liturgical context. The Greek term “προσκαρτεροῦντες” (devoting themselves) suggests a sustained, habitual practice, which underscores the frequent nature of Communion in the early church.

Further evidence is found in Acts 20:7, where it states, “on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them.” The fact that this is linked to their regular Sunday gathering—already established in the early church to commemorate Christ’s resurrection—implies that partaking in Communion was a weekly event. Here, the “breaking of bread” is not incidental but a central act of their worship, which points to its frequency as part of their devotion to Christ.

Paul's Instructions in 1 Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul addresses improper practices regarding the Lord’s Supper, but his correction reinforces its significance for regular Christian worship. Paul writes that “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). The phrase “as often” could be interpreted as a neutral term; however, in light of the early church’s weekly gatherings for worship, this implies frequent observance. Furthermore, Paul's emphasis on “proclaiming the Lord’s death” every time they partake indicates that Communion was intended as a

repeated and foundational element of worship—keeping the gospel continually at the forefront of their gatherings.

III. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR WEEKLY COMMUNION

Apostolic Fathers and Early Church Fathers

The early church offers substantial testimony to the frequent observance of Communion. The *Didache*, a late first or early second-century Christian text, outlines Christian worship and clearly indicates that believers gathered on the Lord's Day to “break bread and give thanks”.² The connection between Sunday gatherings and the Eucharist points to a well-established practice of weekly Communion among the earliest Christians.

Justin Martyr, writing in the second century (ca. 150 AD), offers further insight in his *First Apology*. He describes Christian worship, noting that on Sundays, believers gathered for the Eucharist: “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place... Then there is a distribution to each and a participation of that over which thanks have been given”.³ The weekly nature of their gathering, tied directly to the Eucharist, strongly indicates that Communion was central to their Sunday worship.

Ignatius of Antioch, in his letter to the Ephesians, refers to frequent gatherings for the Eucharist, calling it “the medicine of immortality” (*Letter to the Ephesians* 20:2).

Ignatius’ vivid language indicates that early Christians saw the Eucharist not as a mere

² *Didache*, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed., trans. Bart D. Ehrman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 14:1.

³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885; rev. Kevin Knight, 1997), 67–68.

ritual but as essential to their spiritual vitality, making frequent observance critical for their life in Christ.

Even by the time of the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), the church continued to affirm the importance of frequent Communion. Canon 18, which addresses the proper administration of the Eucharist, reinforces that participation in the Lord's Supper was not only a priority but essential for all believers.

The Influence of the Reformation and the Shift Away from Weekly Communion

While the early church practiced weekly Communion, this frequency diminished during the Middle Ages, especially in the Western church, where a more sacramental and priestly view of the Eucharist led to infrequent participation by the laity. However, the Protestant Reformers, particularly John Calvin, sought to recover the biblical and early Christian practice of frequent Communion. Calvin lamented the rare observance in his time, stating, "*Every week at least, the Table of the Lord should have been spread for the Assembly of Christians*".⁴ His insistence on weekly Communion reflected his conviction that this practice was biblically mandated and spiritually necessary.

Although practical concerns, such as limited clergy, time constraints, and the desire to avoid "over-familiarity," led to less frequent observance in many Reformed churches, Calvin's theology remained clear: weekly Communion was the ideal. Post-Reformation churches often settled for quarterly or monthly observance due to the logistical and pastoral challenges of the time. These pragmatic decisions, though practical in their context, led to a tradition of infrequent Communion that persisted across various

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.XVII.43.

Protestant denominations. By understanding this historical shift, modern churches can better assess how to return to the biblically ideal practice of weekly observance.

Comparison with Catholic and Orthodox Practices

The Catholic and Orthodox traditions, both of which emphasize the sacramental importance of the Eucharist, have maintained more frequent observance of Communion, with daily Mass and weekly Divine Liturgy. These traditions highlight the centrality of Communion in worship and offer a comparison that strengthens the argument for the regular participation in the Lord's Supper within Protestant contexts as well.

IV. THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF WEEKLY COMMUNION

A. Spiritual Nourishment and Means of Grace

The Lord's Supper is not merely symbolic; it is a means of grace, where believers spiritually feed upon Christ by faith. **John 6:53-56**, where Jesus commands the necessity of "eating His flesh and drinking His blood," highlights the importance of communion with Christ. While this passage isn't solely about Communion, it reflects the depth of spiritual sustenance believers receive from Christ in the Eucharist.

For Augustine of Hippo, the Eucharist was a source of spiritual refreshment: "This bread and this cup are signs; in them Christ is received, and the heart is refreshed with the love of Christ" (*Sermons on John*, 26.112).⁵ In John Calvin's theology, Christ is spiritually present in Communion, and believers are "nourished by the true substance of the body and blood of Christ".⁶ Frequent participation ensures that believers receive this grace regularly, sustaining their spiritual life.

⁵ Augustine, *Sermons on John*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), 26.112.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.XVII.19.

Reinforcement of the Gospel

Every time Christians partake of Communion, they proclaim the Gospel—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:26). Weekly Communion ensures that the church’s worship is centered on Christ and His atoning work, keeping the message of the cross constantly before the congregation. In a time when distractions are many, the frequent observance of Communion serves as a grounding act, reinforcing the core message of the Gospel at the heart of worship.

Strengthening Communal Identity

The Lord’s Supper is a communal act that highlights the unity of believers in Christ. Paul writes, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). Weekly Communion strengthens the bond of believers by regularly reminding them of their unity in Christ. Just as the early church “devoted themselves to the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42), so contemporary Christians should view Communion as a vital expression of their shared life in the body of Christ.

V. ADDRESSING THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND OBJECTIONS

Memorialist and Symbolic Views

Some Protestant traditions, particularly those influenced by Zwinglian theology, view the Lord’s Supper as purely symbolic and see no need for frequent observance. These memorialist interpretations argue that Communion merely serves as a mental reminder of Christ’s sacrifice. However, this view neglects the biblical and theological depth of the Lord's Supper as both a means of grace and a proclamation of the Gospel. John 6 and Paul’s theology in 1 Corinthians 10-11 affirm that Communion is not merely

symbolic but a spiritual participation in Christ. Even if one holds to a symbolic view, the centrality of Christ's sacrifice in the Gospel calls for its regular remembrance through weekly observance. Reducing the frequency of the Lord's Supper risks relegating the central Gospel message to an occasional event, which stands in contrast to the early church's devotion to it.

Over-Familiarity or Ritualism

Some argue that frequent Communion could lead to ritualism or a casual approach. However, frequency does not inherently result in over-familiarity; rather, it is the lack of engagement that leads to ritualism. Preaching, prayer, and singing are performed weekly, yet their significance is not diminished by repetition. With proper pastoral teaching, weekly Communion can maintain its reverence and become a rich, deeply meaningful part of Christian worship, just as other acts of worship do.

Practical and Logistical Challenges

Some churches raise logistical concerns about offering weekly Communion, especially in larger congregations. However, many modern churches have found creative ways to incorporate weekly Communion, such as offering it in small groups, during evening services, or using pre-packaged elements. These logistical challenges can be overcome, and the spiritual benefits far outweigh the practical concerns. By adopting a flexible approach, weekly Communion can be integrated into worship without detracting from other elements of the service.

VI. CONCLUSION

Weekly Communion is not only biblically warranted but also historically grounded and theologically enriching. It is a vital means of spiritual nourishment, a

proclamation of the Gospel, and a reinforcement of the unity of believers. The early church embraced the practice, and many Reformers sought to recover it as essential to worship. As contemporary churches seek to recover the richness of early Christian worship, a return to weekly Communion represents a biblically faithful and spiritually nourishing step forward. The neglect of this practice risks losing a crucial means of grace that Christ intended for the ongoing vitality of His people.

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