

# **Lord's Day Supper**

## **How Often Do We Eat?**

Jesus Christ on the night that he was betrayed took bread and wine, gave thanks, and gave them to his disciples with the words: "Take, eat; this is my body" and "This is my blood of the New Covenant..." (Matthew 26:26, 28). This simple meal of bread and wine, received with thanks and accompanied by our Lord's words of self-offering, is the one thing Jesus himself commanded his disciples to do when they gathered together. Today when most Reformed Christians gather together, we do not do the one thing that Jesus told us to do. We do many good and necessary things in our church assemblies. We listen to God's Word read and preached. We sing psalms, hymns, and songs. We offer our prayers. We take a collection of our tithes and gifts. These are all things that we should do. It would not be a proper service of worship without the Word, prayer, praise, and offering.

Why, then, do we leave out the Lord's Supper? What is the biblical basis for having the Lord's Supper only four times a year? Or every other month? Or even every month? If we are truthful, the frequency of our celebration of the Supper has become a matter of tradition. It varies from congregation to congregation based upon each congregation's traditional practice or the preference of the pastor who is serving that congregation. But as Reformed Christians we ought to be asking the question, what does the Bible say? What is the biblical basis for celebration of the Supper four times a year? Or every other month? Or every month?

## **Westminster And The Supper**

It is the very nature of the Supper that determines whether it ought to be included in the regular Lord's Day worship of the church. This is obviously the case for the other sacrament, baptism. Because baptism is the sign and seal of our inclusion in Christ and the New Covenant, it is to be administered only once to any person. The Bible never says in so many words, "only baptize a person once." It is the nature of baptism, as the sign and seal of our union with Christ, of regeneration, of justification, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit, that makes its repetition a contradiction of its meaning. To repeat baptism is to repeat the unrepeatable, namely, to repeat regeneration, justification, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Since baptism by its very nature is only to be administered once to a person at his entrance into the Church, baptism must be an occasional element in worship. It will be celebrated only when there are infants or new converts to be admitted.

The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, is not the sign of our initial inclusion, but of our continuance and growth in Christ and the New Covenant. Its very nature as a meal requires a repeated observance. One does not eat and drink but once in life. It would be as wrong to have the Lord's Supper only once in the lifetime of each baptized Christian as it would be wrong to administer baptism to a Christian more than once. The nature of baptism forbids its repetition. The nature of the Supper requires its repetition. The Larger Catechism summarizes this difference.

*Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?*

*The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's Supper is to be administered often in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him... (177)*

This, however, leaves us with the question "How often is often?" But the question is now clearly focused on the nature of the Supper. If the Supper is to be celebrated often because it is a sign and seal of our spiritual nourishment in Christ and a confirmation of our continuance and growth in Christ, how often do we feed upon Christ?

The church normally gathers for worship once a week on the Lord's Day. There may be times, of course, when the church in a given locality will gather more frequently because of the special circumstances. We see this with the church in Jerusalem following Pentecost. Then the Christians were gathering together daily for the teaching of the Apostles, the breaking of bread, the sharing of goods, and prayer. Normally, however, the pattern is weekly. This weekly pattern is not optional for the Church but is required by the fourth commandment.

So then, what ought the Church to do when it gathers together on the Lord's Day? According to the Westminster confession these (along with prayer) are the ordinary parts of religious worship.

*The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart, as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God... (XXI/5)*

In the Reformed faith, the sacraments are an ordinary part of religious worship. Baptism and the Lord's supper are, confessionally speaking, ordinary. Baptism, however, can only be administered when there is someone to be baptized. It is the nature of baptism that makes its administration occasional. (Let us pray to God that the time will come when baptism will be administered weekly because of the great ingathering of God's elect!) But there is nothing in the nature of the Lord's Supper that makes it occasional. Every Lord's day there are objectively worthy recipients in the pews. That is to say, there are Christians who desire to feed upon Christ, to continue and grow in him. (The question of being subjectively prepared will be treated later.)

The Westminster Standards do not specify whether we should celebrate the Supper weekly, monthly, or quarterly. However, the doctrine of the Supper found in the standards does not preclude a weekly celebration. Indeed, the idea of the Supper as spiritual nourishment seems to imply the propriety of a weekly participation. The Supper is explicitly said to be an ordinary part of religious worship. Therefore, the proposal for the weekly celebration of the Supper does not involve changing the standards. Let us turn, then, to the biblical arguments for weekly communion.

## Do This In Remembrance Of Me

The Lord's Supper is the memorial of Christ's sacrificial death. Jesus said to do this "in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24, 24; Luke 22:19). This phrase can be simply and accurately translated "in memory of me." To do something in memory of someone is a memorial. Jesus did not say "do this in order to remember me." He said to "do this in my memory." The idea of doing something in remembrance of a great event was common in the Old Covenant. Throughout the Old Covenant God appointed various signs to be memorials. The rainbow, the stones at the crossing of the Jordan, the inscribed jewels on the High Priests garments, and the Passover were all memorials. They set forth and proclaimed the great redemptive events of God. They served as a public witness of what God had done. Some (rainbow, jewels) were a memorial that even God himself said he would see and remember. So too, the Lord's Supper is **the** memorial of the New Covenant that proclaims the great redemptive event of the New Covenant - the death of Christ. Let us not miss the point. It is not merely that the Lord's Supper causes us to remember and think about Christ's death for us. In that case the Lord's Supper would simply be an aid to our devotion. It would be a psychological prop. It is rather that the Lord's Supper is the public, visible, and objective memorial of Christ's death. When Americans visit the Vietnam Memorial their memories of that conflict are stirred. But the Vietnam Memorial is more than an aid to remembering. It is a visible and public acknowledgment of the sacrifice of Americans in the Vietnam conflict. So too, the Lord's Supper not only spurs our personal reflections on the death of Christ, it is the visible memorial of his sacrifice for us. Therefore, we must say with the Apostle, not merely that the Lord's Supper stimulates our reflection, but that it proclaims Christ's death.

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)*

The Lord's Supper is the objective memorial of Christ's death in which the proclamation is made by the actions of eating and drinking. Such an objective memorial necessarily requires of its participants a subjective understanding and reflection. God is not honored if our actions are correct but our hearts are far from him. (See Larger Catechism 171, 174, 175) Yet we cannot allow the necessity of subjective faith, repentance, love, and joy on the part of the participants to abolish the words of Scripture. "For as often as you **eat** this bread and **drink** this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death till He comes." The Lord's Supper is not merely a subjective remembering, but an objective memorial, that is, a proclamation of the death of Christ.

No meeting of church should be on any other basis than the once for all death of Christ. No meeting should take place without proclaiming and remembering his death. The Lord's Supper is Christ's appointed means for doing this very thing. Can you imagine a Christian church gathering for worship and not proclaiming the death of Christ? Yet we regularly gather for worship and do not use Christ's appointed means of proclaiming and remembering his death. Does this not violate the regulative principle that we are to worship God, not as we devise, but as God appoints? Can we not break this principle as much by deletion as by addition?

This is the first reason why the Lord's Supper should be celebrated each Lord's Day. It is also the reason that weekly celebration does not become routine. If the Lord's Supper were primarily a

means to remind us of Christ's death, then a good hymn like "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" would be just as effective. But the Lord's Supper is an objective covenant memorial. It is an action, not that reminds, but that proclaims. It sets forth the death of Christ as the only basis of the Christian's life. It focuses our worship on Jesus crucified and risen. However, the Lord's Supper not only proclaims Christ death as an objective and once for all event in history, but also as that which Christ shares with us. It is memorial, but because it is a meal that is eaten, it is also communion.

## **The Communion Of His Body And Blood**

The Lord's Supper is our communion with the body and blood of Christ. In the Lord's Supper we are made partakers of Christ, of his body crucified for us, and of his blood shed for us. We eat that which Jesus called his body, and we drink that which Jesus called his blood. In terms of the symbolism, we eat his body and drink his blood. The idea of communion or participation in the body and blood of Christ is inherent in the very nature of the Lord's Supper. Precisely because the Lord's Supper is a meal that we eat, the idea of communion or participation in what Jesus called his body and blood is inescapable.

Our Lord himself taught that it is necessary to eat his body and drink his blood in order to have eternal life. He explained the true significance of the feeding of the five thousand this way:

*I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever: and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever. (John 6:51-58)*

Jesus is the life. He is the resurrection. The food that gives eternal life is his body and blood. Only if we partake of him can we have life and resurrection. This doctrine that Jesus taught in the above passage, he also taught in ordaining the Supper. For the Supper says to us exactly the same thing. We must eat and drink of Jesus if we are to live. Jesus said that he who eats of his body and blood, lives in him and he in them. In the same way the Lord's Supper is a participation in the body and blood of Christ. The meaning of the Lord's Supper, and of the John 6 passage quoted above are the same. We must find our life in Jesus. We must have communion with him in his incarnate nature. We must eat his body and drink his blood. Whether or not John 6 refers to the Supper, it is clear that both refer to the same spiritual reality of feeding upon Christ.

Throughout the writings of the Apostles, salvation is described as sharing in Christ, in his death and in his resurrection. In baptism we have died with Christ. (See Romans 6:1ff; Colossians 2:11ff, 3:1ff) Our life is hidden with Christ and when Christ appears, our life will appear. Our old man was crucified with Christ. We are raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenly places. In all these ways, the Apostles teach that salvation is sharing in Christ. It is communion

with him. It is participation in his incarnate experience of death and resurrection. Paul sums this all up by saying that God has called us into communion with his Son.

*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:9)*

The Apostle Paul describes the Lord's Supper with this same word that in the above quotation is translated "fellowship." This word means communion, participation, and sharing. Paul declares by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the true interpretation of the Lord's Supper is that it is a communion with the incarnate Christ who was sacrificed for us, that is to say, a communion with his body and blood.

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)*

Paul asks a rhetorical question of his readers. This makes the point all the more emphatic. Paul could simply have asserted that the cup is the communion of the blood of Christ in order to teach the Corinthians. But the Corinthian Christians already knew this. And it was not an obscure idea that only the more gifted would understand. It was common knowledge. It was unchallenged doctrine. Thus Paul could say rhetorically, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" Bear in mind that in the context Paul is not concerned to teach about the Lord's Supper. His concern is to keep the Corinthians from the idolatry of eating communion meals at pagan temples. So he reminded the Corinthians of what they already believed: that the Lord's Supper is a communion of the body and blood of Christ. He does so that he may make the further point that Christians cannot have communion both with Christ and with demons.

*Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices **participate** in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be **participants** with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too: you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. (1 Corinthians 10:18-21 NIV)*

For the Apostle the Lord's supper is a communion or participation in the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, he says that those who share this meal ought not to share in the meal of demons.

## **The Nature of Our Communion**

How did disciples at the Last Supper eat the body of Jesus? In what sense do we have communion with his body and blood in the Lord's Supper? The disciples at the Last Supper ate of Christ's body in the sense that they were made participants in his body. They were incorporated into his flesh so that his death on the cross was their death, and his resurrection was their resurrection. They were joined to him in his incarnate existence and experience. This remains the sense for us. When we in faith eat the bread and drink the cup, we share in Christ's

body crucified for us and in Christ's blood shed for us. We are united to the incarnate Jesus so that what happened to him, death and resurrection, is also communicated to us.

The bread and cup are the body and blood of Christ in the sense that they represent and convey Christ. They are "the communion" of the body and blood of Christ. The bread becomes Christ's body, not by being changed in its material substance, but by being transformed in its function. Ordinarily, bread is nourishment for bodily life. In the Lord's Supper the bread becomes "the communion of the body of Christ" and hence is spiritual nourishment for eternal life. In other words, the bread signifies and communicates the body of Christ to the believer. It does not just signify. It also communicates.

If we take Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:16, and add in this idea of signifying and conveying, the verse makes perfect sense. "The cup of blessing (which signifies and conveys the blood of Christ), is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" The Reformed doctrine of the Supper as spiritual communion with the body and blood of Christ is consistent with the Apostle's words. This idea that the bread is the communion with Christ's body is, as we have said above, inherent in the institution of the Lord's Supper. While Jesus was bodily present, he called the bread his body and the cup his blood. Jesus added that his body was given for his disciples and his blood was shed for them. So the natural interpretation is that by eating the bread and drinking the cup, the disciples would be made sharers in the body and blood of Christ, that is to say, in the sacrifice of Christ. His death would be their death. The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares to us that this is the true meaning when he calls the cup a "communion" or "participation" in Christ's blood and the bread a "communion" or "participation" in Christ's body.

The biblical idea is not that we need to share in Christ's body and blood as mere material existence in order to be saved. What we need is to have his death count as our death, and his resurrection guarantee our resurrection. In other words, we need to share in the incarnate Christ in his death and in his resurrection. Eating the bread in faith means sharing in his dying. It is communion with Christ in his self-oblation. And if we share in his death, we must also share in his resurrection. Is it possible to share in his death, and not also to share in his resurrection? How can we be united to Christ, who was crucified and risen, and not be united both to his death and his resurrection? As the Apostle says, we are

*...always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Corinthians 4:10)*

In baptism we are buried with Christ, that we might also rise with him. Baptism is the sacrament of our initiation into Christ. It is a sharing in his death as the Supper is a sharing in his death. In baptism we share in his death that we might also share in his resurrection.

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)*

So too, in the Supper we share in his death that we might also share in his resurrection. This is inherent in the nature of the Supper as a meal. We eat in order to live. So in the Supper we eat in

order to live forever. We eat of his death that we might, as a result, share in his life. After all, the Christ with whom we have communion is no longer dead.

*I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever. (Revelation 1:18)*

When we eat of his death, we do so, not unto death, but unto life. His death is spiritual food. Sharing in his death means sharing in his resurrection as well. We are joined to Christ in his life experience of suffering, death, burial, and therefore also resurrection and ascension. To have communion with the death of Christ and its benefits, is to have communion with the first and chief benefit - resurrection. This is the fundamental doctrine of salvation in the New Testament. And it is the central significance of both the sacraments: we are united to Christ in his death, that we might also be united to Christ in his resurrection.

*...they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with him confirmed... (Larger Catechism 168)*

We do not mean that the only time we share in Christ's body and blood, that is, his death is during the Lord's Supper. No. We have a continual communion with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and through faith.

*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:9)*

The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of that communion. In the Lord's Supper our communion with Christ is made the conscious focus. It is given a tangible form. We are called upon to believe that we, in truth, are united to Christ our savior. His death is our death. His resurrection is our resurrection. Therefore, we are saved. The proper response to the words, "This is my body, given for you," is not "How can this be?", but "Yes, Lord, I believe!" Since every meeting of the church is a meeting to be with Jesus, why then should the church gather without the sign and seal of her communion with Christ? Salvation is communion with Christ and every meeting of the church is a meeting to have communion with him. The Lord's Supper is the means by which that communion is made the focus of the church's gathering. Should we not each week feed upon Christ in the manner he has appointed? Should we seek communion with him while we neglect the ordinance he has established for the manifestation of that communion? Are we not despising the grace of God when we neglect the outward means by which Christ communicates his grace to us?

## **The Meal Of Unity**

The Lord's Supper, because it is our communion with Christ, is also a sign of our communion together as common sharers in Christ. It is the bond that unites the church for it unites us to Christ. We cannot be in Christ without being in his church, which is his body.

*For we, being many, are one bread and one body: for we all partake of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17)*

According to Paul the eating of the bread makes us to be one body even though we are many individuals. It is not that we are not already one body by the work of the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ. But in the Lord's Supper our unity is made manifest. We are signified and sealed as one body. And let us not take this lightly for the Apostle told the Corinthians that many were sick, and some had died because they tried to eat the Lord's Supper in disunity. Eating in disunity was sinning against the body and blood of Christ. Notice that Paul's advice was not to have the Lord's Supper less frequently, as if God were fooled by such a subterfuge, but to examine or prove ourselves before we eat.

*Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own Supper ahead of others: and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you... Therefore **whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. (1 Corinthians 11:17-30)*

The Corinthians tried to have the Lord's Supper despite their divisions. The result was an unworthy manner of eating and drinking. That unworthiness was not the result of private sin on the part of a few in the congregation. It was an unworthiness that stemmed from their public factions. As a result, they sinned against the body and blood of the Lord.

As the communion of the body and blood of Christ, the Supper is also the sign of the unity of the church. This is inherent in the fact that we all eat of the one loaf and drink of the one cup. Whenever the church gathers for worship, it gathers as the body of Christ. The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of that reality. It signifies and conveys to us that we are one body. It marks us as the body of Christ. The Lord's Supper, therefore, is essential to a proper gathering of the church. Indeed, we may say, that it is the celebration of the Supper that makes a gathering to be a distinctly ecclesiastical gathering. The Word may be preached on all sorts of occasions not only to Christians, but also to outsiders. Preaching on the street is every bit as much preaching as from behind a pulpit. Prayers may be offered anytime, by all Christians. But the Supper alone can be celebrated only in the assembly of the saints by a minister of the Word. So it is the sign and seal of that assembly.

## **The Thanksgiving Meal**

Finally, the Lord's Supper is the great thanksgiving of the church for the gift of Christ. Paul speaks of the "the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks." The ancient church understood this, and took the Greek word that means "to give thanks" as a name for the Lord's Supper. They called the Lord's Supper "the Eucharist" (literally "the Thanksgiving"). When we give thanks for the cup and the bread, we do not give thanks for them merely as food and drink. We do that at every meal. Rather, in the Lord's Supper we give thanks for the bread that Jesus called his body and the cup that Jesus called the New Covenant in his blood. Thus the Lord's Supper is the

church's great offering of thanks to God for the gift of Christ, his body given of us and his blood shed for us.

In the Old Covenant, God's people were required to bring a sacrifice whenever they came to the Lord. Indeed, to worship and to sacrifice were virtually interchangeable concepts. Now in the New Covenant we no longer are to offer animal sacrifices. Christ has himself offered the one and only sacrifice on the cross. We can add nothing to his sacrifice. It needs no augmentation. All we can and need do is to receive his sacrifice and give thanks. The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of our receiving Christ's sacrifice for it is the communion of his body and blood. But the Lord's Supper is also the sacrament of thanksgiving. Through the faithful doing of the Lord's Supper (as well as all forms of prayer and praise), the church brings to fulfillment what the prophet said:

*From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and pure offering... (Malachi 1:11)*

The incense of the New Covenant is the prayers of God's people, and the pure offering is the sacrifice of praise.

*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. (Hebrews 13:15)*

Our confession does not separate the Supper from this sacrifice of praise, but rather call the Supper "a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same..."

Why would the church, then, meet to give thanks to God for our Lord Jesus Christ, without doing so in the way that Jesus commanded? If it is normal and right of the church when it gathers to give thanks for Christ, then it is normal and right for the church to do so in the way that Christ appointed with bread and wine. Otherwise, we violate the regulative principle by deletion. We offer our worship to God, not in the form God sets forth in his Word, but according to what we regard as appropriate.

So then, according to the Bible, the Lord's Supper is: (1) the memorial of Christ by which we proclaim his death till he comes; (2) a communion or participation in his body and blood; (3) an offering of thanksgiving to God for Jesus Christ; and (4) a bond of the unity of the church. These are things that belong to every meeting of the church. Hence it is the very nature of the Supper that requires its celebration each Lord's Day.

The church meets on the basis of Christ's once for all death, to give thanks to God for Christ, to have communion with Christ, not merely as individuals, but as the one body of Christ. This is what the Lord's Supper is all about. This is why the Lord's Supper is a necessary part of Lord's Day worship.

### **Weekly Communion In The Apostolic Church**

So far we have seen that it is the very nature of the Supper as memorial, communion, and thanksgiving that requires the weekly celebration of the Supper as an indispensable element in

worship. But we can also see in the New Testament the historical fact that the Supper was celebrated whenever the church gathered together as the church. From the Book of Acts we learn that the Jerusalem church celebrated the breaking of bread whenever they gathered together.

*They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)*

Here are the four main parts to Christian worship: 1) the Apostles' teaching, 2) fellowship [which was sharing with the poor, not a social hour], 3) the breaking of bread [the Lord's Supper], and 4) prayer. We can do no better than to imitate this apostolic pattern. We would never think of holding a worship service without apostolic teaching, offering, and prayer. Why, then, should we neglect the fourth element - the breaking of bread?

When the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper, it is clear from his language that the Corinthian church, like the Jerusalem church, ate the Lord's Supper whenever they gathered together. The only difference was that the Corinthians gathered once a week, and not daily. (Probably the Jerusalem church was also on a weekly schedule by the time Paul wrote to Corinth.)

*In the first place, I hear that when you **come together as a church**, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it...When you come together, it is not the **Lord's Supper you eat**, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. (1 Corinthians 11:18, 20)*

Whenever the Corinthians came together as a church, they intended to eat the Lord's Supper. Notice that Paul says "when you come together as a church...it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat..." The Corinthians gathered together to eat the Lord's Supper, but because of their divisions, they were not really eating the Lord's Supper. Rather they were abusing the Supper and sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

In the verses quoted above Paul describes the Corinthians' church meeting as "when you **come together as a church**." In verse 33 of the same chapter, Paul says "So then, my brothers, when you **come together to eat**, wait for each other." For Paul, "to come together as a church" and to "come together to eat" are the same thing. Likewise Luke in the Book of Acts describes a Christian gathering as

*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)*

Luke uses the phrase "to break bread" as a technical designation of the Christian assembly. This is because the Christian assembly began historically for the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper, that is, of breaking bread. After Pentecost the church regularly gathered in the temple precincts to listen to the teaching of the Apostles. They also continued in attendance at the synagogues throughout Jerusalem on the Sabbath. These gatherings were not exclusively Christian gatherings. But the Jerusalem church also gathered in homes in order to break bread. (Acts 2:46) These communal meals were both full meals and the Lord's Supper. (Even by the

time of Paul's first letter to Corinth the Supper was still celebrated as a whole meal.) The point is that Jesus' command to do the Supper required the institution of a distinctly Christian gathering separate from both Temple and Synagogue. The need to break bread as Jesus commanded necessitated and actually created the first uniquely Christian assemblies. These gatherings were in houses of Christians since the Jerusalem church did not yet possess a building of its own. For many years the church would continue to gather in the homes of members to celebrate the Supper.

Jesus never said, *per se*, to have a church assembly. He said to do what he did concerning the bread and the cup. This is the origin of distinctly Christian or New Covenant worship. When the Lord's Supper is not celebrated in the worship assembly, the very nature of worship is distorted. Its historical origins are confused, and its proper pattern is missed.

### **Conclusion**

Reformed Christians continue to come together on the first day of the week, but because of human tradition, we often do not do what the apostolic church did, namely, eat the Lord's Supper. We ought to celebrate the Lord's Supper each week because it, like the sermon, preaches Christ to us and invites us to receive him. Calvin explains that Christ is offered to us "through the gospel but more clearly through the sacred supper, where he offers himself with all his benefits to us, and we receive him by faith." (*Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 5) It is time for the Reformed churches to reform their practice according to the Word. "We celebrate communion four times a year...but please God, we might base more frequent celebration of it. For we see by Luke in the book of Acts that the early church had it more often...by this we must confess it our own fault in not following the example of the Apostles." (John Calvin, Letter to Senate of Berne, 1555)

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