

# Four Reasons for Taking the Lord's Supper Every Lord's Day

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Last Sunday marked our fourth Sunday back after the COVID-induced hiatus of three months. And for the fourth week in a row, we took the Lord's Supper and remembered the death and resurrection of Christ with elements resembling his body and blood.

In preparation for the Lord's Table, two of my sons asked at different times, "Why are we taking the Lord's Supper *again*." To be clear, they have never taken the Lord's Supper, because as unbaptized members of our family, they have not yet identified themselves through baptism with God's household of faith. That said, their question arose from a personal knowledge of what we do at church and when we do it.

For all of their young lives, they have followed us to church. And since they began joining us in the gathered assembly of worship, they have always and only seen communion taken on the first Sunday of every month. This has been our practice at OBC and at our last church too. Indeed, it is a practice that is commonplace among many Bible-believing churches.

So why the change to communion every Sunday? Let me give four reasons, as we prepare for the Lord's Table again this Sunday.

## It's Biblical

First, it is biblical to take the Lord's Supper when we gather for worship. Acts 2:42–27 describes that when the church devoted themselves to the things of God, they broke bread (i.e., partook of the Lord's Table) day-by-day. That is, when they gathered together with one another, they fellowshiped around the teaching of the apostles, and they responded with prayer and the breaking of bread. This introductory description of the church's activities in Acts sets a pattern for all churches.

In fact, in Acts 20 we discover that the church in Troas met on the Lord's Day for the express purpose of breaking bread. Verse 7 states, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together *to break bread* . . ." Here, the singular reason for gathering on the Lord's Day is "to break bread," which we understand to mean taking the Lord's Supper.

Since these early days, the Lord's Table has been applied by different traditions in different ways. Often weekly communion has been something associated with more liturgical churches. However, when we look at the Bible, we see that taking the Lord's Supper is both modeled and encouraged.

Some churches take the Lord's Supper once a year, or a few times a year. Our tradition at OBC has been to take the Lord's Supper regularly on a monthly basis. With our typical order-of-service in the days before COVID-19, the logistics and time spent passing the bread and the cup also played a role in our rhythm of taking the Lord's Supper once a month.

For some time, many of the elders have had a biblical conviction and desire to move towards weekly communion. With other priorities, we have not taught to that end or made that change. However, with the events related to COVID-19, it has reinforced our need to keep the Lord's Table as a regular part of worship. Our recent inability to gather and take the Lord's Supper has increased our desire to share in it more frequently. Not because we need to "catch up," but because we love to share in the Lord's Table with our church family. Weekly communion is biblical, and now it is once again possible.

### **It's Possible**

As we learned with the unexpected and immediate closure of our church on March 22, next week is not guaranteed. In theory, we already knew that. Scripture teaches us that life is a vapor (James 4:14). No one plans their future with absolute certainty (James 4:13-17), and everything we say and do must fall under the banner of "If the Lord wills." Yet, for the past three months, this theoretical truth has hit home in new ways.

Today, we still are not gathering together with absolute freedom. Our governor's executive orders prescribe 6 foot social distancing within the walls of our church. While public gatherings of 250 will be possible in Phase 3, his orders still prohibit our church from assembling together inside our own building. How we should think about this and respond to it is a question for another day. But on this day, we need to recognize that the assembly of God's people is still under threat.

This is why we have gathered outside for the past four weeks. And what a joy it has been! There is nothing like gathering with the saints, devoting ourselves to the apostles teaching (which gives us access to hear the voice of Christ), fellowship, the prayers, and the breaking of bread. These actions are not possible sequestered in our homes, parked in front of computer screens, isolated from one another. Church is only church, when the church churches. The word for church, *ekklesia*, means assembly or gathering, and therefore, the church can't be the church when it doesn't meet.

For three months, we did not meet, and therefore we did not and could not take the Lord's Supper. First Corinthians 11 makes it very plain, the Lord's Supper can only be taken when the Lord's body, the church, "comes together" (repeated in vv. 17, 18, 20). Of course, special care should be made for those who are temporarily or permanently disabled from gathering. But when the church as a whole doesn't gather, we cannot take the Lord's Supper.

Conversely, whenever the church *does* gather, it is possible to take the Lord's Supper. And more than possible, it is prudential.

### **It's Prudential**

We are not saying that it is sinful to take the Lord's Supper less frequently than every week. It would be difficult and uncharitable to make that argument. But it would be possible to make a case that it is not good or wise to wait a whole month or more between meals. Would it be wise for a family to only share a meal once a month, instead of as often as possible? If the church is a family of faith who finds their shared identity in Christ displayed in communion at

his Table, then we would do well to consider taking the Lord's Supper when we meet on the Lord's Day---just like the early church.

Consider three effects of *not* taking the Lord's Supper each week. First, it separates the preaching of the Word from the central message of the gospel, proclaimed visually through bread and wine. I have long wondered if sermons that explain the Bible without a consistent connection to Christ's death and resurrection do so because the preacher finishes his message with no vision of the cross and resurrection. The Lord's Supper resolves that problem. By moving from biblical exposition to cross-centered proclamation through digestion, it demands the preacher to connect the text to the central act of Scripture---the cross of Christ.

Second, not taking the Lord's Supper every week means that some Christians, through happenstance or habit, may go months without taking the Lord's Supper. If a woman is sick on the first Sunday of January, traveling the first Sunday of February, and serving in the nursery on the first Sunday of March, it might be four months since she last obeyed Christ by taking the bread and cup in remembrance of him. This is not good. But a simple solution is to share the Lord's Table weekly.

Third, if we take seriously the admonition to examine ourselves for the Lord's Supper, as 1 Corinthians 11:28 states, ("Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup"), then a weekly examination spurs every member of Christ's body towards love and good deeds. We should not argue for a more irregular remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, because someone needs more time to prepare themselves. Such an argument actually undercuts the power and the purpose of the cross itself. If I can only take the Lord's Table when I have self-corrected myself, what does that say about my faith? Instead, weekly calls to confess sin may be one of the best ways to solidify faith in Christ (not myself) and to improve relations at home, at church, and throughout all areas of life.

Indeed, if you understand the depravity of your sin and the way it innervates every aspect of your life, you know how foolhardy it is to argue that we need the gospel proclaimed less often. We need the gospel every day, not just every week. But having a weekly rhythm of communion with Christ ensures that every week, we are hearing and seeing and touching and tasting the word of grace that is offered to us in Christ. In this way, weekly communion is not just possible, but it is prudential, for it preaches the gospel to us and calls us to respond in faith.

### **It's Evangelistic**

To all of this, an objection may be raised: If we take the Lord's Supper every week, it will become rote, tired, and perfunctory. Okay, maybe. But I would suggest that this objection says more about the person questioning the regular means of grace, than the means of grace itself. Either, it misses what the Lord's Supper is, or how it can be observed---as something other than reciting the same words each week. Or it misses how much we need to hear the gospel, in every form prescribed by God.

If we believe, as Scripture teaches, that the cross of Christ is not a way that God reconciles man to God and man-to-man, but *the only way* to reconciliation, then we would be wise to do everything in our power to present Christ's cross in all of its fulness. Preaching the Word of God is necessary for this, but as flesh and blood creatures, who often need physical reminders to instruct us, we also need the gospel made tangible in the Lord's Supper.

Surely, it is possible to just go through the motions and miss the meaning of the Lord's Supper. But that is true whether we take communion once a week or once a month. Indeed, one way our services are designed to provide freshness, as opposed to mere repetition, is to let the sermon text shape the themes, songs, Scripture readings, and prayers of the day. The same is true for the Lord's Supper.

Because every part of Scripture gives us a different facet of Christ's grace and glory, it will never just be a dull repetition. And when various parts of Scripture precede the Lord's Table, the resulting synthesis is a gospel proclamation that follows the same pattern of sound words, but with different emphases and angles that God has inspired. To put it crudely, it is unlikely that we will ever "run out of material" when it comes to taking the Lord's Table.

For that reason, we believe that one of the best ways to preach Christ in our weekly services is to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week. What's the proof for this approach? Besides all that I have shared above, one final proof is the fact that taking the Lord's Supper every week elicits conversation with my children about the gospel and their need to trust in Christ.

Truly, this is something all of us should aspire to do with the Lord's Supper. This gospel meal is not just for meal-takers, it is also for those who are watching. And with its weekly display of the gospel, it both provides and requires that we would be ready to give an explanation of the gospel to unbelieving children and friends who cannot take the Lord's Supper. And it calls upon us, to explain how one can find a place at the Lord's Table. Indeed, sermons that are filled with Christ should provide fodder for such conversations, but for those who learn better by seeing, than by hearing, the Lord's Table may be even more applicable for the purposes of evangelism.

### **As Often as the Lord Permits Us to Gather Together**

For these four reasons then, we look to partake of the Lord's Table as often as we are able to gather---and to gather with our entire church. As we have noted, with our governor's restriction in place, we might not be able to gather together every Sunday if weather forces us inside.

On those Sundays, we will make other accommodations for service. But in such cases, when our congregation is not able to gather, we won't take the Lord's Supper. But on those days when we are all together, we will. For when taking the Lord's table is possible, the Lord has taught us through COVID-19 that we should. For weekly communion is both biblical and prudential. And until Christ comes again, we will endeavor to take the Lord's Supper as he permits us to gather together.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds