

What Does the Bible Teach About Coming Together as a Church?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. From March 2020 to the end of that year, churches around the world had to do something with which none of us have had experience: find a way to worship in a world beset with a dangerous and virulent disease. In spite of our inexperience and the critiques of others, we did the best we knew how to do in the moment. We spent a great deal of time in prayer, meditation, and discussion of how best to handle this by the light of God's word. It appears that the worst of this crisis is well behind us, at least for the present. Now we are faced with the difficult task of how to return to serving the Lord without the crisis and the sometimes mistaken responses Christians have had toward it. Once again, we use the same resources to come up with the answer that we used four years ago: prayer, meditation, discussion of what the word of God wills for us to do. We are a little bit wiser and quite a bit wearier than four years ago.

B. Today, we will discuss coming together to share the communion of our Lord in fellowship with one another. This is one of the reasons why Christians assemble together. We could examine other reasons why Christians assemble together, such as: to be edified both in worship and Bible study, to enjoy fellowship with one other, and to engage in opportunities to do the Lord's work. However this lesson is intended to help us understand that couch potato Christians will be lost because they violate a command regarding the communion service. One is no more worshiping while watching live streamed services, than one is playing football by watching the Steelers play on TV. Live streaming is not and will never be a substitute for assembling for worship. I would rather you know this now than for you to discover it too late on Judgment Day.

I. WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?

- A. At its simplest, the Lord's Supper is a holy meal composed of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine that is prepared for Christians to eat together.
- B. Jesus ordained this meal with His disciples before His death.
 1. Matt. 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20
- C. Jesus intended for His followers, Christians, to eat this meal together after His death - Luke 22:19
- D. Paul was instructed by Christ regarding the Lord's Supper - 1Cor. 11:20-34
 1. The Lord's Supper was not for the purpose of satisfying hunger, but it is a memorial meal meant to commemorate the death of Jesus by eating bread and drinking fruit of the vine that calls to our minds the body and blood of Jesus.
 2. We partake to remember Jesus and to show our fellowship with Him and our brethren. Hence, it is also called "communion," another word for fellowship or sharing in common - 1Cor. 10:16-17
- E. The Lord's Supper is not a sacrament by which God conveys His grace to us through the body and blood of Jesus.
 1. Nor is one disobedient if they are unable to partake of the Lord's Supper; they will not lose their salvation.
 - a. Paul in prison, the seriously ill, the servants, etc.

2. Those only are lost who:
 - a. Abuse or profane the Lord's Supper,
 - b. Ignore, refuse, or reject it, or
 - c. Neglect fellowship with others who have assembled to partake.
- F. The Lord's Supper highlights the Bible principle that worship must be both individual and collective simultaneously. We eat the Supper examining ourselves before the Lord, and at the same time we eat it with the Lord and with one another.
 1. There is no authority for the church to take the Supper by proxy for those who are not present, and...
 2. There is no authority for an individual to eat the Lord's Supper at any time except when the church comes together for that purpose.

II. CHRISTIANS COME TOGETHER TO EAT THE SUPPER

- A. When Jesus instituted the Supper, He and the apostles were gathered together in the upper room.
 1. Jesus wanted to eat the Passover with the disciples - Luke 22:15-16
 2. It was critically important that all of them be present, even Judas.
- B. Paul remained in Troas for a week, presumably to assemble with the church and eat the Lord's Supper with them on Sunday - Acts 20:6-7
 1. Although he was "hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16), he tarried in Troas for seven days with several other disciples (20:4-6).
 2. It was the practice of the church in the first century to gather every first day of the week to share the Lord's Supper.
 3. "Every Lord's day, gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions." The Didache, A.D. 50-70)

III. WHAT DOES "COME TOGETHER" MEAN?

- A. 1Cor. 11 and "come together."
 1. 17 - "Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.
 2. 18 - "For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it."
 3. 20 - "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper."
 4. 22 - "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?"
 5. 33 - "Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another."
 6. 34 - "But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come."
- B. It is just my translation?
 1. American Standard Version - "When therefore ye assemble yourselves together, it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper"

2. New King James Version - "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper."
3. King James Bible - "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper."
4. English Standard Version - "When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat."
5. New American Standard Bible - "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper"
6. In addition, it reads the same in 17 other translations commonly used in the Christian community.

C. "Come together into one place" - Definition

1. Συνερχομένων (Synerchomenōn) - Verb - Strong's 4905: "From sun and erchomai; to convene, depart in company with, associate with, or, cohabit."
2. When this was written, there were as yet no church buildings. The Lord's Supper was held in private houses where disciples would come together to commune with the Lord.

D. Perhaps it means something else in the Bible ("Come together" - 19 times, 5 of them in 1Cor. 11)

1. Job 19:12 - "His troops come together and build up their road against me; they encamp all around my tent."
2. Isa. 60:4 - "Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather together, they come to you..."
3. Jer. 3:18 - "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers."
4. Matt. 18:20 - "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."
5. Acts 1:6 - "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'"
6. Acts 5:16 - "Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed."
7. Acts 10:27 - "And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together."
8. Acts 19:32 - "Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together."
9. Acts 25:17 - "Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in."
10. Acts 28:17 - "And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them..."
11. 1Cor. 7:5 - "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together

again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”

12. 1Cor. 14:26 - “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”
13. 2Thes. 2:1 - “Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him”
14. Heb. 10:25 - “Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

IV. NECESSARY CONCLUSIONS

- A. Jesus Christ instituted His Supper to be eaten by His disciples when they come together.
- B. The church in the New Testament gathered together in the same place on the first day of the week to eat the Lord’s Supper together in fellowship.
- C. With the exception of the Passover where Christ instituted it, the only examples in scripture of the Lord’s Supper being eaten was by the New Testament church when the church assembled together.
- D. The New Testament church did not have the authority to make changes to the Lord’s Supper in any of the following: day, place, items eaten, or purpose.
- E. If the church of Christ at Tomlinson Run wants to be like the church Christ built in the New Testament, we cannot change any of the following: day (Sunday), place (assembled together), items to be eaten (unleavened bread and fruit of the vine), or purpose (to remember the death of our Lord).
- F. If individual Christians, who are physically capable of leaving their homes and truly want to honor the Lord’s Supper, they will assemble with the local church when it comes together to commune with the Lord.