

COMMUNION: THE FREQUENCY OF PRACTICE

by

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The frequency with which communion is celebrated by Christians is noted by its great variation. The Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and midweek gatherings have become a standard practice throughout much of fundamental Protestantism. Within this very standard framework of meetings, though, there is a very unstandard practice concerning the frequency of the communion celebration. This thesis investigates the Biblical and historical information concerning the frequency of communion. The reason for this investigation is to determine if guidelines within these two areas can assist the contemporary church as it determines the frequency of its communion celebrations.

The Biblical evidence is contained within Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Acts 2:42, 46 shows that the Jerusalem church practiced communion on a frequent, even daily basis. Acts 2:42 clearly shows that the communion celebration was a normal part of the worship service, while Acts 2:46 indicates that the meetings took place daily. Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 are records of the communion practices in the Gentile churches. These verses indicate that communion was not practiced as frequently in the Gentile churches as in the Jerusalem church, but that it was still an integral part of their gatherings and was probably celebrated on at least a weekly basis. None of these verses gives a command concerning the frequency with which contemporary churches should practice the ordinance. These verses only contain a historical record of what did happen; they do not contain a command of what should happen in this age.

The historical evidence shows that for the first four centuries communion was celebrated by a great number of churches on a weekly or daily basis. In the fourth century the church began to view communion as a sacrifice. As this view began to predominate, the frequency of communion decreased, and remained low until the time of the Reformation. At that time both the Catholic and Protestant churches encouraged more frequent celebration.

The Biblical and historical evidence both show that communion was celebrated frequently in the early church. There is no command in the Bible that this practice of frequent celebration should be continued today.

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INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to determine what guidelines, if any, should be followed concerning the frequency with which communion is celebrated. In determining these guidelines, two aspects will be considered, the biblical and the historical.

The Limits of the Thesis

The limits of this thesis must necessarily be strict. The purpose is not to do a study of the love feast and its connection with the bread and cup, nor to determine what form of communion should be offered. These topics may be mentioned in the course of the thesis, but only as they relate to frequency. Each believer must decide for himself what form this communion will take. This paper will only investigate the guidelines concerning the frequency of the participation.

The Presupposition of the Thesis

This thesis will assume that there is an ordinance of communion, or the Lord's Supper, and that every believer is commanded to partake of it.

The Need for the Thesis

It is evident from an observation of contemporary churches that there is great variation concerning the frequency of communion. Therefore, an investigation of the Biblical and historical evidence is needed in order to determine the validity of this variation. If there is no Biblical command or compelling historical evidence concerning frequency, then the variation is valid. However, if the frequency of practice is indicated, then churches should practice accordingly.

The Methodology of the Thesis

There are two important evidences concerning the study of communion frequency, the Biblical and historical. The thesis first investigates the Biblical evidence, examining the following passages: Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The meaning of each passage is determined with respect to its relevance concerning the frequency of communion.

Following the Biblical evidence, an historical study is made of the frequency of communion. This is an investigation of the past patterns of frequency, and the events which governed these patterns. In this investigation much emphasis is placed upon the writings of the early church fathers.

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

Within scripture, four main passages are pertinent to the question of frequency of communion. These passages are Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Each of these passages will be examined to determine its import to the study.

Acts 2:42

ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλᾶσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς.¹

The relevance of this verse to the question of frequency is dependent upon the phrase τῇ κλᾶσει τοῦ ἄρτου. Unless it can be shown that this phrase is referring to the Lord's Supper, the verse is not pertinent to this discussion.

The noun κλᾶσις occurs only twice in the New Testament,² both times being used by Luke. One of these occurrences is in the verse under discussion, the other in Luke 24:35. Both of these occurrences are within the same phrase,

¹Nestle-Aland, The Greek New Testament, 3rd edition, ed. Kurt Aland, et al. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1966), p. 424.

²W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, A Concordance to the Greek Testament, 5th ed. Revised by H. K. Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), p. 548.

τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου. Because of this, it is necessary to examine both occurrences to determine the meaning of the phrase.

In examining both uses, it must first be recognized that there is nothing grammatically inherent about the phrase which demands that it refer to communion. Kent, in referring to Acts 2:42, does attempt to prove that there is a grammatical significance to the phrase when he states that "the presence of the articles in the expression 'the breaking of the bread' indicates more than just eating."¹

However, in making this statement, Kent has failed to recognize the validity of Alford's² observation that the construction of the phrase requires the use of the article. In this phrase, ἄρτου is an objective genitive, receiving the action of the verbal noun κλάσει.³ As such, it is adjectival in character, and is used in an attributive relationship. Because of this, Greek usage normally requires the use of the article before the attributing genitive, ἄρτου. Robertson comments that, "if two substantives are united by the genitive, the article occurs with both or is

¹Homer Kent, Jerusalem to Rome (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972), p. 34.

²Henry Alford, Greek Testament, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1894), p. 29.

³H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946), p. 78; John A. Sproule, "Intermediate Greek Notes" (unpublished notes, Grace Theological Seminary, 1979), pp. 3, 67.

absent from both."¹ Turner echoes this statement in his grammar.²

Thus, Alford³ is correct when he states that the construction of the verse requires the articles, and Kent⁴ is incorrect in his assertion that the articles indicate some special reference to the communion service.

Having shown that the phrase itself does not indicate a reference to communion, the use of the phrase within the context of both passages will be examined. Through this it will be shown that the Luke 24:35 passage refers to a common meal, and the Acts 2:42 passage refers to a communion service.

Referring first of all to the Luke passage, the remarks of several commentators may be noted. Alford states that, "We must not suppose any reference . . . to the Lord's Supper . . . neither of these disciples was present at its institution."⁵ The point of this comment is that it would be impossible for those who were not even aware of the institution of communion to recognize Christ through that

¹A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 780.

²N. Turner, Grammar of New Testament Greek, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 180.

³Alford, Testament, vol. 2, p. 29.

⁴Kent, Jerusalem, p. 34.

⁵Henry Alford, Greek Testament, vol. 1 (London: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1874), p. 671.

institution. Therefore, it is necessary that this action was only the ordinary breaking of bread, which the disciples may have seen Christ perform, and by which they did recognize Him. It is further explained that a Jew was bound to give thanks at a meal anytime that there were three or more gathered, and that therefore the actions of this meal were not unusual.

Lenski corroborates this by stating that "this was the regular table prayer . . . imagination has made this the Sacrament."¹ Lenski notes the impossibility of this as a reference to the communion by the fact that it was broken off in the first phase. It would have been a very strange ordinance, and in contradiction to that which Christ instituted, if it had been offered in one kind only.

Meyer envisions the scene as taking place at an inn. By virtue of the wisdom which He showed during the journey, Jesus acts as the master of the house over the meal and offers the blessing for the bread. There is nothing denoting communion here, and Meyer states that "it is quite arbitrary for most of the church fathers and Catholics to decide that Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper."²

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 1192.

²Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, trans. by Robert E. Wallis (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1884), pp. 579-80.

Finally, on a grammatical note, Plummer states, "that this was a celebration of the Eucharist . . . is an improbable hypothesis."¹ He supports this statement by the following argument from Luke 24:30. In Luke 24:30, the imperfect ἐβρῆδ'δου is used and this is in contradiction to the theory that the Eucharist is spoken of here. This is because in the accounts of the Last Supper there is no change from the aorist to the imperfect, such as there is here and in the accounts of the feeding of the multitudes. In neither the gospels, nor in 1 Corinthians 11:23 is the imperfect used of the Eucharist.

In addition to the commentators noted above, others with similar arguments reject the theory of the celebration of communion in Luke 24:35.²

From the above arguments, most of which are based upon the context of the verse, it is evident that the phrase τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου does not refer to a communion celebration within the context of Luke 24:35. On the basis of this, it might be argued that the identical phrase in Acts 2:42

¹ Alfred Plummer, Gospel According to S. Luke, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), p. 556.

² See Horatio B. Hackett, Commentary on the Original Text of the Apostles (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1858), p. 71; Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), pp. 637-38; John Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures--Mark and Luke, trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 397.

would also refer to a common meal. However, as the following discussion will show, this phrase does refer to communion within Acts 2:42.

As a basis for the discussion, it must be realized that references to a breaking of bread were commonly associated with the communion service in the Bible. These references are found in the synoptic gospel accounts of the Last Supper (Matt 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19), where the verb form of the noun κλάσις is used. More importantly, however, references are also found in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 11:24. These references in 1 Corinthians are particularly important in establishing that Luke was familiar with the use of this phrase as a reference to communion, as practiced in the churches, and not just as a reference to the Last Supper. Because Luke was a traveling companion of Paul's, and because the letter to the Corinthians was written before the book of Acts, it is reasonable to assume that Luke was aware that this phrase was used in the churches as a reference to the communion service.

In addition to this, it should be noted that as early as the writing of the Didache (ca. 100 A.D.),¹ the communion service was referred to as the breaking of the

¹P. Woolley, "Didache," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 2, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 125.

bread.¹ Thus, there is an early witness to the expression used in Acts 2:42.

In examining the phrase in Acts 2:42, it is necessary to first consider the context within which it is found, as opposed to the context of Luke 24:35.

As Meyer has indicated,² the fact that Christ presided over the supper indicates that the events of Luke 24:35 occurred at an inn, rather than at the home of one of the disciples, where they would have naturally been the master of the meal. In such a setting, that of three travelers in an inn, the context would indicate, as shown previously, that the meal is not one of communion.

In contrast, the Acts 2:42 passage describes a different series of events. Verse 41 has described the addition of three thousand members into the church. Verse 42, as Meyer states, "describes what the reception of the three thousand had as its consequence; what they, namely, the three thousand and those who were already believers before . . . , as members of the Christian community under the guidance of the apostles perseveringly did."³ Alford states

¹ Everett Ferguson, Early Christians Speak (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1971), p. 94; R. J. Knowling, "The Acts of the Apostles," in vol. 2 of Expositor's Greek New Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 97.

² Meyer, Luke, p. 579.

³ Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles, trans. by Paton Gload (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1889), p. 68.

that this is a description of the life of the early believers, a picture of their activities.¹ Among these activities were the four listed in verse 42, the teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

Therefore, there is a basic difference in the context of the phrase. This difference must be taken into consideration when assigning meanings to it. Bearing in mind this context, commentators have made the following remarks.

Lightfoot, in discussing both Acts 2:42 and 2:46 comments that this phrase signifies the action which began the meal, but that "I do not remember that I have anywhere in the Talmudists observed the phrase applied to the whole meal of dinner or supper." Based upon this fact, he concludes that "breaking of bread, in these places we are now upon, must not be understood of their ordinary eating together, but of the Eucharist."²

Bruce comments as follows:

While this observance appears to have formed part of an ordinary meal, the emphasis on the act of breaking the bread, "a circumstance wholly trivial in itself," suggests that this was "the significant element of the celebration. . . . But it could only be significant when it was a 'signum,' viz. of Christ's being broken in death" (R. Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man [Eng. tr., London, 1943], p. 315).³

¹Alford, Testament, vol. 2, p. 29.

²J. B. Lightfoot, A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 36.

³F. F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 79.

From this, it is clear that the phrase under consideration only makes reference to a small part of the meal. This part would be insignificant in itself, but because of its reference to the communion celebration instituted by Christ, it is worthy of mention in this verse.

Hackett states that the phrase may have reference to an ordinary meal, and cites Luke 24:35, but continues, "but that here would be an unmeaning notice."¹ Although in the Luke 24:35 passage the context does fit the reference to a common meal, Hackett agrees that in the Acts passage that type of reference would be lacking in significance.

In considering this phrase in context, Lenski remarks that "Luke is speaking of the greatest things in this first congregation, and uses for the celebration of the Lord's Supper the expression common at that time: 'breaking the bread.'"² This comment underscores the fact that this is not a trivial or insignificant phrase which Luke has inserted, but that its importance is of the same degree as the other three activities mentioned in the verse.

Finally, Knowling agrees with this nonsensical nature of referring this phrase to a common meal when he states that "it seems superfluous . . . to introduce the mention of common food at the time of community goods."³

¹Hackett, Apostles, p. 71.

²R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 115.

³Knowling, "Acts," p. 95.

Within the verse itself there is also evidence that the phrase refers to the communion celebration.

Lenski notes that the four activities have been presented in two pairs. The first is the teaching and its related fellowship, the second is the sacrament and the prayers of worship which parallel it. Thus, all four of these give a description of the first Christian congregation. In this pairing, the breaking of the bread must necessarily refer to the ordinance in order to be parallel to the worship.¹

Longenecker echoes Lenski's sentiments when he says, "It is difficult to believe that Luke has in mind here only an ordinary meal, placing the expression, as he does, between two such religiously loaded terms as 'the fellowship' and 'prayer.'"²

From the above comments it has been shown that the phrase "the breaking of the bread" is one which is very much dependent upon the context within which it is found in order to determine its meaning. Within the Acts 2:42 context it is evident that the phrase does refer to the communion celebration. Any other interpretation would be out of context with the activities of the believers and would be an insignificant mention of a minor blessing at the beginning of the meals.

¹Lenski, Acts, p. 115.

²Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in vol. 9 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 290.

However, if even in light of this evidence the argument should be pressed that the reference in Acts 2:42 is to common meals, the practice of communion is still very likely. In explaining this, it must be remembered that this verse takes place in the context of a gathering of believers. The practices of these gatherings must therefore be considered when determining the meanings of the verse. In discussing the communion celebration of these early gatherings, Knowling comments that "it is altogether indisputable that this commemoration at first followed a common meal."¹ Therefore, although it is very unlikely that the reference in Acts 2:42 is to a common meal, that possibility, if accepted, does not negate the fact that communion was very likely taking place. This is by virtue of the fact that in the early church communion was celebrated with a meal. Other commentators have also remarked upon the close connection between a common meal and the communion in the early church.²

The previous remarks have shown that the context within which the verse rests indicates that the phrase "the breaking of bread" refers to the communion service. If it is insisted that the phrase only refers to a common meal,

¹Knowling, "Acts," p. 94.

²See Alford, Testament, vol. 2, p. 29; Bruce, Acts, p. 79; Hackett, Apostles, p. 71; Lenski, Acts, p. 115; Meyer, Acts, p. 68; A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 38.

then the practice of having communion with a meal still indicates that communion was taking place at these gatherings.

Having shown that the phrase τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου does refer to the communion celebration either by itself, or in conjunction with a meal, the manner in which the celebration was pursued will now be examined.

The action within Acts 2:42 is expressed by an imperfect periphrastic, which has durative significance.¹ From this, the conclusion may be drawn that the Christians of Acts 2:42 were habitually or continually meeting for the purpose of teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

This conclusion is further substantiated by examining the verb used to indicate their actions. A compound verb, προσκατερέω, is used. It is derived from κατερέω, meaning "to remain strong, steadfast,"² and the prefix πρὸς. The addition of the prefix retains the basic meaning of the root, but intensifies the time element, resulting in the meaning "to persist in an opinion or activity."³

The verb is found ten times in the NT, and is used in both a non-religious and religious sense. Acts 8:13 and

¹Dana, Grammar, pp. 186-88, 231-32; Robertson, Grammar, pp. 887-88.

²The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "κατερέω," by W. Mundle, vol. 2:767.

³Ibid.

Romans 13:6 are representative of the non-religious uses, the first relating the attention of Simon Magus to Philip, and the second relating the devotion of rulers to their duties.¹

In a religious sense, the verb is found in Romans 12:12 and Colossians 4:2 when referring to constancy in prayers. Robertson, in discussing the usage in Acts 1:14 gives to it the English meaning "carry on."² This same constancy is found reflected in Acts 2:42.

From the preceding information, it is possible to conclude that the early Christians practiced communion on a frequent and devoted basis. It is not possible to conclude that there is a command to continue that practice on such a frequent basis today. The verse only records the usual practice of that time, and the fact that communion was an integral part of the gatherings of the early Christians.

Acts 2:46

καθ' ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ,
κλῶντές τε κατ' οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλ-
λιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας.³

In this verse, there is a contrast given between the public worship in the temple and the private activities which took place in the homes. As Lenski notes, "The daily

¹Ibid.

²Robertson, Pictures, vol. 3, p. 14.

³Nestle, Testament, p. 425.

visits to the temple were for participation in the temple worship; we see Peter and John thus engaged in 3:1."¹ From this, it becomes apparent that the Christians did not suddenly disassociate themselves from the worship in the temple. Agreeing with this, Meyer states that "as confessors of the Messiah of their nation, whose speedy appearance in glory they expected, as well as in accordance with the example of Christ Himself, and with the nature of Christianity as the fulfillment of true Judaism, they could of course have no occasion for voluntarily separating themselves from the sanctuary of their nation."²

It is difficult to know the extent of their participation in the temple worship. Acts 21:26 does give evidence that the Christians still participated in the sacrificial system up until at least 56 A.D., and as mentioned above, Acts 3:1 indicates their attendance at the hour of prayer. Along with this temple worship, though, there were certain activities which took place in the home. These activities are pertinent to the study of the frequency of communion.

In contrast to the public worship in the temple there was an activity known as the κλῶντές τε κατ' οἶκον ἄρτον. Within this phrase there are two main sections, that of κλῶντές ἄρτον, and that of τε κατ' οἶκον.

¹Lenski, Acts, pp. 118-19.

²Meyer, Acts, p. 71.

The second of these phrases has been translated in several ways. Lenski interprets it as meaning "in each home,"¹ the sense here being that where there was a Christian home the inhabitants of it took their food with gladness of heart.

Knowling mentions both the interpretation "from house to house," and the interpretation, "at home."² The latter of these emphasizes the contrast between the worship in public and the worship in private, or the home. He emphasizes that the latter interpretation does not mean that only one home was used, but that private homes were open to the disciples for their use, i.e. the house of John Mark.

Hackett is in accord with Knowling in this, and states that the interpretation "at home . . . may be more exact in form, since it brings out more strongly an apparent contrast between the public worship and their more private services."³ In addition, he notes that they would not have met in a single dwelling, because the number of believers at that time would have prohibited such a mass gathering.

Meyer interprets the phrase as meaning a gathering of the believers in one fixed place, and bases his interpretation upon the account in Acts 1:13.⁴ However, between the

¹Lenski, Acts, p. 119.

²Knowling, "Acts," p. 97.

³Hackett, Apostles, p. 72.

⁴Meyer, Acts, p. 71.

events of Acts 1:13 and the events of 2:46 there has been a substantial increase in the number of believers. Therefore, Meyer's interpretation must be rejected as logistically improbable.

From the above discussion, it may be seen that the worship of the early church was two-fold. They met both in the temple for the traditional Jewish services, and in smaller groups in private houses throughout the city.

Within these private meetings there was an activity known as the κλῶντές ἄρτον. With regard to the interpretation of this phrase there are two alternatives. The first states that this phrase refers only to a common meal. The second states that reference is made here to the communion service.

Among those who believe that the reference is to a common meal are Lenski, Harrison, and Longenecker.¹ Of the three, Lenski is the only one to offer a substantial reason for his view. He states that in such a brief description of the early church as Luke has given here, that there would not be a repetition of the mention of communion. Because Luke has already mentioned the practice in verse 42, Lenski does not believe that it would be repeated in verse 46.²

¹Everett Harrison, Acts: The Expanding Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), pp. 65-66; Lenski, Acts, p. 119; Longenecker, "Acts," p. 291.

²Lenski, Acts, p. 119.

However, this argument is weak. In his desire to explain away the repetition between verses 42 and 46, Lenski has caused a repetition within verse 46 itself. For within verse 46 there is already a reference to common meals in the phrase μετελαμβάνον τροφῆς. Therefore, the argument of repetition which Lenski offers is not valid, because in applying it between verses 42 and 46, he automatically violates it within verse 46 itself.

With respect to the view that there is reference to communion made in the phrase κλῶντές ἄρτον, the argument is grammatical with contextual considerations.

Grammatically, similar phrases are used in the gospels (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19) and in 1 Corinthians (10:16, 11:24) where the reference is obviously to the communion celebration.

There are also in the Bible instances where these phrases are used and the reference is not to communion. These occur in passages describing the feeding of the multitudes (Matt 14:19, 15:36; Mark 8:6, 8:19), the meal taken at the conclusion of the Emmaus journey (Luke 24:30), and the blessing of the food during Paul's storm tossed journey to Rome (Acts 27:35).

In each of these latter three cases the context shows that there was no indication of a communion service intended. At the feeding of the multitudes, the communion service had not even been inaugurated. The incident at the end of the Emmaus journey has been discussed in the previous section

and been shown to be a reference to a common meal. The incident on board the ship is simply the account of Paul distributing food to those on the ship who had not eaten for fourteen days.

Within Acts 2:46, however, there is no such contextual evidence to counter the grammatical pattern which indicates a communion service. On the contrary, the context within the verse supports the grammatical evidence. Knowling acknowledges that the question is raised as to whether the phrase refers to a communion celebration, or to ordinary meals. He then states that "the additional words μετελάβανον τροφῆς have been taken to support this latter view, but on the other hand if the two expressions are almost synonymous, it is difficult to see why the former κλῶντες ἄρτον should have been introduced here at all."¹

Grammatically, there is no reason to reject this verse as a reference to communion because of the lack of the article before ἄρτον. Meyer simply states that, "the article might stand as in ver. 42, but is here not thought of, and therefore not put."² Alford, in commenting upon verse 42 says, "the construction here requires it, and below, ver. 46, where not required by the construction, it is omitted."³ Knowling, in rejecting the idea that the lack

¹ Knowling, "Acts," p. 97.

² Meyer, Acts, p. 71.

³ Alford, Testament, vol. 2, p. 29.

of the article makes reference to communion impossible, finds support in an extrabiblical source stating,

In the Didache the expression κλάσατε ἄρτον, chap. xiv. I, certainly refers to the Eucharist, and in the earlier chap. ix., where the word κλάσμα occurs twice in the sense of the broken bread, it can scarcely refer to anything less than the Agape.¹

Therefore, with regard to the grammar, the evidence supports the interpretation of the Lord's Supper. This support has been shown to be twofold. First, there is a similarity of the phrase used in this verse with phrases used in other verses to refer to communion. With regard to this, there is nothing of a contextual nature to prohibit the phrase from being used to refer to the Lord's Supper, as there is in other verses where the phrase does not refer to communion. Second, there is nothing grammatically significant about the lack of the article in this phrase which would prohibit it from being a reference to the Lord's Supper.

As with Acts 2:42 there are purely contextual considerations which support the interpretation of the communion celebration being referred to here. The first of these is the fact that a comparison is being made between the public worship and the private worship. Because there is a comparison, or rather a contrast, being made, the contrasting parts must be identified. From the evidence of Acts 3:1 and 21:26 it is evident that the public worship consisted of prayers and sacrifice. The private worship of the Christians of that

¹Knowling, "Acts," p. 97.

time consisted of prayer and the Lord's Supper. Therefore, it would seem appropriate that the breaking of the bread in this verse would refer to the Lord's Supper.

Second, with regard to the social context, it would not be appropriate or convenient for the believers to take communion in the temple. As Bruce notes, the believers worshipped publicly in the temple, but then "took their fellowship meals in each other's homes and 'broke the bread' in accordance with their Master's ordinance."¹

With regard to the frequency of these events, Bruce and Longenecker² indicate that the entire verse is governed by the phrase καθ' ἡμέραν. The preposition κατά is used here in a temporal sense, and indicates that the activities were practiced during the course of every day.³

It is not surprising that these activities did take place on a daily basis, if we remember the social context within which they occurred. The believers who are being discussed in this passage are converted Jews. As such, they would have traditionally been accustomed to praying three times a day, as Daniel did while in Exile (Dan 6:10). This

¹Bruce, Acts, p. 81.

²F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles (Chicago: The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1952), p. 101; Longenecker, "Acts," p. 291.

³BAGD, p. 406; George Winer, A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1897), p. 401.

tradition of praying three times daily is also mentioned in Psalm 55:17.

Although Mosaic Law does not stipulate the time of prayer, Luke 1:10 indicates that by the time of Christ it had been established that prayers would be offered at the time of the sacrifices. These were offered at the third, the sixth, and the ninth hours of the day.

It is evident from the book of Acts that this tradition of praying three times daily did not cease with the conversion to Christianity. In Acts 2:15, on the day of Pentecost, the believers were gathered together at the first hour of prayer, which is the third hour of the day, or nine a.m. In Acts 10:9 it is mentioned that Peter went to the roof of the house to pray at the second hour of prayer, which is the sixth hour of the day, or noon. In Acts 3:1 Peter and John are going to the temple at the third hour of prayer, which is the ninth hour of the day, or three p.m.

It is evident from this that just as worship in the temple did not cease at conversion, neither did the observance of the hours of prayer. These were a daily observance, and there is no reason to believe that the converted Jews of this time would celebrate the Christian ordinances at any less interval than they had the Jewish ordinances. Therefore, it is clear that the gatherings and communion services did take place on a daily basis.¹

¹F. R. Bernard, "Prayer," in Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, ed. by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 44; C. W. F. Smith, "Prayer," in The

The above discussion has shown that Acts 2:46 does refer to the communion service, and that this service was practiced on a daily basis by the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem. As with Acts 2:42, there is no command that this frequent practice should continue, but this is simply a record of the practice of the early church.

Acts 20:7

Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συνηγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον ὁ Παῦλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς, μέλλων ἐξιέναι τῇ ἐπαύριον, παρέτεινέν τε τὸν λόγον μέχρι μεσονυκτίου.¹

Two phrases in this verse are pertinent to the question of frequency of communion.

The first phrase, which establishes that communion was being celebrated, is κλάσαι ἄρτον. Phrases similar to this have already been discussed, and there is no need to repeat in detail the arguments which establish this as a reference to communion. There is, however, one point which does reinforce the fact that this is a reference to communion.

This phrase is an infinitive of purpose, being used with the verb of motion συνηγμένων.² As such, it explains why the believers were gathered together at that time. With

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 3, ed. by George Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 866; ISBE, s.v. "Hours of Prayer," by Henry E. Dosker, 3:1434.

¹Nestle, Testament, p. 497.

²Robertson, Grammar, p. 989.

such an emphasis upon this phrase, Lenski is correct in stating that "this was evidently not merely to dine together but to dine in the Agape which was followed by the Lord's Supper in the usual manner of this time (2:42, 1 Cor 10:16)."¹

Robertson notes this significance, stating that this is the "infinitive of purpose of klaō. The language naturally bears the same meaning as in 2:42, the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper which usually followed the Agapē."²

Having shown that the verse does speak of communion, it is necessary to determine what significance, if any, it has with regard to frequency. This aspect is contained within the second phrase of importance in this verse, 'Εν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων.

In examining this phrase there is a temptation to compare it too closely with a similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 16:2. Many commentators³ have noted the similarities of these phrases and have rightly concluded that in both of these passages the first day of the week was set aside as a special day of worship.

However, for the purposes of this investigation there is a crucial difference between the verses. For, in 1 Corinthians 16:2 the phrase includes the preposition κατὰ,

¹Lenski, Acts, p. 826.

²Robertson, Pictures, vol. 3, p. 339.

³Bruce, Acts, pp. 407-08; Alford, Testament, vol. 2, p. 223; Hackett, Apostles, p. 330; Harrison, Acts, p. 310; Robertson, Pictures, vol. 3, pp. 338-39.

used in a distributive sense,¹ and in Acts 20:7 there is no such preposition. The effect which this has upon the phrase in 1 Corinthians 16:2 is to define the interval of the collection of offerings. They were to take place on every first day of the week.

The phrase in Acts 20:7 has no such definite time limit. This passage was not intended to instruct in the frequency of any church practice, but is simply a narrative of what happened on a particular day at Troas. The practice of some denominations to defend their custom of weekly communion by comparing these two verses is grammatically inaccurate. This verse does not define an interval of communion.

There is certainly a great difference between the daily communion mentioned in Acts 2:46, and the fact that no such practice is mentioned here. If the church at Troas did celebrate communion only on a weekly basis, there are two possible reasons for the practice.

First, there is a time span of approximately 25 years between this verse and the verses which have been mentioned previously. During this span the early practices of the church may have changed.

Second, and much more likely for the change is the fact that the setting is no longer Jerusalem, but is on the western coast of Asia Minor. The scene has changed from a

¹BAGD, p. 407; Robertson, Pictures, vol. 4, p. 200.

Jewish setting with all of the customs which that entails, to a Gentile environment completely devoid of the patterns of Jewish worship.

As was pointed out in the discussion of Acts 2:46, the Jews observed daily prayer hours which corresponded to the hours of sacrifice. When these Jews were converted, it was evident that these prayer hours were simply transferred to Christian worship and communion services. In the setting of Troas, though, the Gentiles had no such tradition of daily prayer hours. This would make it much less likely that they would engage in communion with the same frequency with which the Jerusalem Jews did.

It is almost certain that the Gentile setting, and not the lapse of 25 years, is the reason for a possible weekly celebration in Troas, rather than a daily one. This is because in Acts 21:26, when Paul has returned to Jerusalem, he goes to the temple to offer sacrifices. This event is obviously in the same time interval as Acts 20:7, and shows that the Jews of Jerusalem were still attending the temple services. Along with these services, it is likely that they were continuing the daily communion. Thus, it appears that there were two different cultures acting simultaneously. That of the Jews, with a daily celebration, and that of the Gentiles with a less than daily celebration.

As shown, the evidence for frequency of communion in this verse is nebulous. In Acts 20:7 those at Troas did gather on the first day of the week for communion. It is

possible that because they were Gentiles they had no heritage of daily religious acts, and therefore celebrated only once a week. There is, however, no clear evidence concerning the frequency of communion in Troas. It may have been more frequent than a weekly observance. It was probably not, considering the establishment of Sunday as a day of worship, less than a weekly observance.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

As with the other passages, it is important to look briefly at the context within which the verses are found. Previous to verse 23, Paul has rebuked the Corinthians for the manner in which they have gathered for the communion service. In Corinth that service included a love feast, and it is clear from Paul's comments that there were divisions during the meal. Beginning in verse 23 Paul explains the proper way in which to celebrate communion.

There is no agreement as to the exact manner in which Paul received the revelation referred to in verse 23. There are three main explanations for this revelation, with some scholars believing that it may have been through a direct personal revelation from Christ.¹ Others believe it was a revelation, not directly from Christ, but through an angel

¹Robertson, Pictures, vol. 4, p. 164; Leon Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, vol. 7, in The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), pp. 159-60.

or other means.¹ A third group believes that it was not through revelation, but through the instruction of the apostles or others from whom Paul received the information.² Finally, some scholars simply do not commit themselves to any theory.³

Robertson and Plummer note correctly that it is not the mode, but the source which is important, stating that "in some way or other St. Paul received this from Christ, and its authenticity cannot be gainsaid."⁴ With this in mind, the sections of verses 24, 25, and 26 which are pertinent to this study will be examined.

Verses 24 and 25 contain the strongest command in scripture that communion should be perpetuated. Although this command is contained in Luke 22:19-20, there is some dispute over its validity, as some MSS do not contain the

¹Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, trans. by Douglas Bammerman (Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), pp. 261-62.

²F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 269.

³G. G. Findlay, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in vol. 2 of The Expositor's Greek New Testament, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 880; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1937), pp. 461-63; A. T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, in The International Critical Commentary, ed. by Charles Briggs (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), pp. 242-43.

⁴Robertson and Plummer, Corinthians, p. 242.

verses. Therefore, 1 Corinthians is a textually stronger witness to this command.

Verse 24 contains the phrase τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, which establishes the perpetuation of the bread. The verb used here is a present, active, imperative, second person, plural. As Lenski remarks, this is a "durative present tense and denotes indefinite repetition: 'This do again and again.'"¹

Robertson and Plummer state that "the passage implies that repeated celebrations were already a firmly established practice"² at the time Paul wrote the epistle. They base this conclusion upon the fact that the authority of Paul was inadequate to initiate a repetition of the communion services, and that Paul was simply restating what was already common in the churches.

It is clear that this phrase commands that communion be repeated. However, there is no indication of the frequency of this repetition.

Verse 25 contains the same verb as verse 24, but adds the phrase ὁσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε. In determining the meaning which this phrase has with regard to frequency, the context and grammar of the verse must be considered.

Contextually, Paul is concerned about the manner in which the communion service is being conducted. He expresses

¹Lenski, Corinthians, p. 468.

²Robertson and Plummer, Corinthians, p. 245.

this concern in verses 17-22. Then beginning in verse 23 he repeats to the Corinthians the instructions for communion, underscoring its solemnity by the phrase, "in the night in which he was betrayed." Verse 24 contains the command to perpetuate the bread, and then in verse 25, which is now being considered, the command concerning the cup is given.

Grammatically, ὡςάκις is an adverb used only three times in the NT.¹ It occurs in 1 Corinthians 11:25, 26, and in Revelation 11:6. It is used with the particle εἰς in all three instances, and is translated, "as often as." Robertson states that, "ὡςάκις is only used with the notion of indefinite repetition,"² and Winer says it "exhibits something in itself future simply as a fact."³

From the preceding contextual and grammatical remarks, it is possible to conclude the following concerning verse 25. The phrase "as often as" does not give a specific time interval, but only states that an action will be performed repeatedly in the future. The action which will be repeated at this indefinite interval is the taking of the cup.

More specifically, Paul is stating that at this indefinite interval the cup should be taken in remembrance of Christ. This command is most likely the result of the

¹G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 324.

²Robertson, Grammar, p. 973.

³Winer, Grammar, p. 308.

frivolous manner in which the Corinthians had approached the service in the past, and was an attempt to correct it.

Robertson and Plummer state that "every time that they partake of the sacramental cup . . . they are to do as He has done in remembrance of Him. He does not merely give permission; He commands."¹ Other commentators have expressed similar views,² namely that the indefinite temporal clause is tied directly with the command. This stresses in the temporal clause the idea of every time, rather than the idea of an interval of time.

Verse 26 continues with this thought. Meyer states that the γὰρ refers "to the whole preceding account of the origin of the supper,"³ and Lenski remarks that "'for' intends to say: 'This is what you must consider when you assemble for the Sacrament.'"⁴ Paul is summing up the institution of this ordinance, and is stating that "whenever you eat this bread or drink of this cup . . ."⁵ you proclaim the Lord's death. The stress is again on every time rather than upon interval of time.

¹Robertson and Plummer, Corinthians, p. 247.

²See Lenski, Corinthians, pp. 472-73; Meyer, Corinthians, p. 265.

³Meyer, Corinthians, p. 265.

⁴Lenski, Corinthians, p. 473.

⁵J. B. Phillips, The New Testament in Modern English (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962), p. 368.

The discussion has shown that this verse is a recapitulation of the institution of communion, as given originally by Christ in the gospels. The emphasis of this passage, as seen by the context, is upon the manner in which the gathering takes place, and is not upon the frequency. The phrase "as often as," does not refer to the frequency with which communion is celebrated, but refers to the fact that every time it is celebrated it must be celebrated in a proper manner. Therefore, there is no insight here into the frequency of communion.

In commenting upon these verses, various commentators have remarked concerning frequency.

Robertson and Plummer, in commenting upon verse 25 state, "The Lord commands that the Supper be often repeated, and His Apostle charges those who repeat it to keep in view Him who instituted it, and who died to give life to them."¹ Later, in commenting upon verse 26, they say,

St. Paul gives no directions as to how frequently the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, but he implies that it is to be done frequently, in order to keep the remembrance of the Lord fresh. We may conjecture that at Corinth celebrations had been frequent, and that it was familiarity with them that had led to their being so dishonoured.²

Findlay, speaking of verse 25 states, "Our Lord prescribed no set times; P. assumes that celebration will be frequent, for he directs that however frequent, it must be

¹Robertson and Plummer, Corinthians, p. 248.

²Ibid., p. 249.

guided by the Lord's instructions, so as to keep the remembrance of Him unimpaired."¹

Finally, Grosheide, in paraphrasing verse 25, renders it thus, "Drink frequently the cup of the Lord and do so always in remembrance of Me."²

From the above comments, it is clear that some commentators do believe that this passage makes reference to the frequency of communion. There is a general consensus among the three quoted above, but none give specific data which corroborate their remarks. Therefore, it must still be maintained that this passage does not speak directly to the issue of frequency of communion.

Summary of the Biblical Evidence

Scripture clearly indicates that the early Jerusalem church celebrated communion on a frequent, even daily basis. This daily communion was very likely the result of the Jewish heritage which the early Christians incorporated into their new faith.

In the Gentile churches there is no mention of a daily celebration, and there is no evidence to indicate with certainty their frequency. Acts 20:7 records an instance at Troas when the church met on the first day of the week to celebrate communion. Because this church did not have a heritage of daily religious acts, it probably did not

¹Findlay, "Corinthians," p. 881.

²Grosheide, Corinthians, p. 272.

celebrate as frequently as the Jerusalem Christians. However, because Sunday had been established as the day of worship, and because the communion celebration was an important part of that worship, the church at Troas likely celebrated on at least a weekly basis.

First Corinthians 11 gives no insight into frequency, as the passage is concerned with the manner of the celebration, and not the frequency.

From the preceding discussions, it is impossible to dogmatically state a Biblical rule for the frequency of communion. It is certain that the churches recognized communion's importance, and the need to repeat the practice. However, there is no Biblical command regarding frequency for the contemporary church.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

The First Six Centuries

The first six centuries of the Christian church contained many changes in the practice of the communion celebration. Many of these changes were attributable to the fact that the church itself underwent a considerable transformation during that period of time. Among the factors which contributed to that transformation were: the change in setting of worship from an ordinary house to a specialized building, the change in acceptance from a church persecuted by the Roman government to a church recognized and supported by the Roman government, and the change in worship from a gathering dominated by spontaneity to a gathering directed by a more regulated liturgy.

The First Century

The Apostolic period, as shown by the analysis of Acts 2:42, 2:46, and 20:7, was characterized by daily or nearly daily communion celebrations in the Jerusalem church and less frequent celebrations in the Gentile churches. Many of these celebrations were held in conjunction with the love feast. As the church continued to grow, the unity which had characterized these early feasts was lost, and the

factionalism of 1 Corinthians 11 became more apparent. As a result, the feasts were gradually discontinued and only the bread and cup were retained.¹

There were several common features of the first century communion services. Many of these features were a result of the character of the church itself, and as the church changed, so did the communion services.

One important mark of the first century church was that it met in the homes of the believers. This practice preserved the original setting of the Last Supper which Christ partook of in the upper room of a house. Also, in this house setting it was quite likely that early Christians celebrated communion around a table, in much the same manner that Christ and the disciples had done.

Because of this informal setting, the sense of participation for the early communicants was more intense than that which followed in later centuries. Participation was also heightened by the practice of allowing the communicants to bring homemade leavened bread with them. This bread was then used in the communion service. After the first century, there was a gradual movement to use unleavened bread prepared by the clergy.²

¹Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910), p. 473.

²Philippe Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," Worship 52 (September 1978):50.

Finally, it is likely that the first century celebration took place in the evening, as originally established by Christ. This practice was later changed in the third century, and an early morning service was instituted.¹

There is very little extant material from this period, other than the Bible, and possibly the Didache, which is probably dated from the very early second century.

One possible document from this century has been attributed to the evangelist Mark. It consists of a liturgy for the communion service, and contains within it a section wherein the priest beseeches God that "this holy day"² might be kept in reverence. From this statement, it may be concluded that a day of communion was a unique day, a day set apart from others as holy, and that communion was not an everyday occurrence. The reader should be aware that this document is questionable in nature and that no dogmatic conclusions concerning first century communion practice may be drawn from it.

The Second and Third Centuries

Didache

During the second and third centuries there is the occurrence of the earliest eucharistic prayers contained

¹Rouillard, "Human Meal," p. 49.

²Mark, "The Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark, the Disciple of the Holy Peter," in vol. 7 of The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), p. 551.

within a verifiable source. These are found in the Didache, and mark the beginning of a transition from the freedom characteristic in the previous period to the ritualism characteristic in the later periods.

The Didache was written in the early part of the second century, and gives a detailed account of the communion service. Much of chapters 9 and 10 of this document are concerned with the form of the worship. They are helpful in tracing the development of the liturgy, and the theological basis which this liturgy reflected.¹ However, it is chapter 14 which is directly concerned with the frequency of the communion. In this, it is stated that "on the Lord's Day, after you have come together, break bread and offer the Eucharist."² Obviously, the writer of this document expected the Christian to celebrate communion on at least a weekly basis.

In addition to the Didache, many of the church fathers of these two centuries wrote concerning the communion celebration. From them, it is possible to establish an accurate view of the communion service of that time.

¹James Kleist, "The Didache," in Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York: Newman Press, 1948), pp. 6-13.

²"The Didache," trans. Francis X. Glimm, in vol. 1 The Fathers of the Church, ed. by Ludwig Schopp (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), p. 182.

Ignatius

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, has left a series of writings dating from the early second century. These writings were composed while he was on a journey to Rome to be executed, and are in the form of seven letters. One of these, the letter to the church at Ephesus, mentions the importance of the communion celebration. In it, Ignatius states that the people should "make an effort, then, to meet more frequently to celebrate God's Eucharist and to offer praise."¹

Two points should be noted with regard to this statement. First, there is no specific time interval given for the celebration of the communion. Rather, Ignatius simply states that the service should be held at more frequent intervals than was common at that time. Second, the communion was not being celebrated on a daily basis, or there would have been no possibility of increasing the frequency.

Justin Martyr

In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr wrote a defense of Christianity to the Emperor of the Roman Empire, Antoninus Pius. In this, his "First Apology," there are many references made to the eucharist and its place in the Christian services of that time. These references are

¹Ignatius, "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians," trans. James Kleist, in Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York: Newman Press, 1946), p. 65.

written in a clear and understandable style, because they were intended as an explanation for the pagans of the time. Thus, because of this, their value is also increased for this age.

Within his essay, Justin gives two main occurrences of the communion service. The first of these occurrences is at the Baptism of a new believer.¹ After the baptism has been performed, the neophyte is taken to the assembly of the believers, and prayers are offered up for him. Then, bread and wine are presented to the presiding officer and the communion is celebrated. The importance of the communion service is emphasized, first, by the fact that it is the first event after baptism within which the neophyte participates, and, second, by the fact that the Eucharist is taken to those who are absent from the service.

In this description of the baptismal service, it is not said that every baptism was followed by communion. However, there was no need for that statement to be made. Rather, in his defense of Christianity, Justin simply relates the normal way in which a baptism was conducted. It is possible to infer from this that the usual procedure was to include communion at the close of the baptism service.

¹Justin Martyr, "The First Apology," in vol. 6 of The Fathers of the Church, ed. Ludwig Schopp (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), pp. 104-05.

The second occurrence of communion which Justin mentions is in the regular Sunday assembly.¹ At the conclusion of this meeting, after the prayers have been offered, a format identical to the conclusion of the baptismal service is followed. In this, the bread and wine are presented to the presiding officer and he in turn oversees the distribution to the assembly and to the absentees.

From this description of the Sunday assembly, it is evident that the communion celebration was a normal event.

These accounts by Justin are the most complete extant description of a second century worship service. Also, because of the circumstances surrounding the writing of the "Apology," and because of the acquaintance which Justin had with the surrounding areas, these accounts may be taken as representative of Christian services at that time.²

Tertullian

Following Justin, Tertullian was one of the next major writers to emerge in the church. Writing from Carthage, the capital of Rome's African province, he was the author of many works. Among these was his "Apology," written at the end of the second century, and wherein he briefly mentions the love feast which was celebrated at that time. In this, he does not give a definite time interval at which the feast occurred. He only describes the manner in which it

¹ Justin, "First Apology," pp. 106-07.

² Ferguson, Early Christians, p. 84.

took place. It is evident, however, and may be concluded, that the love feast and the accompanying communion were a normal part of the meetings of the Christians. This conclusion is sustained by the remark which Tertullian made after he had described the love feast. He simply states that "such is the gathering of the Christians."¹ The love feast and the communion which it contained were consistently practiced by the Christians.

Hippolytus

Hippolytus, writing from Rome in the first half of the third century, has left much valuable information concerning the communion celebration.

In an appendix to his works, Hippolytus records his thoughts concerning the time when the Lord will return. He envisions the scene when Matthew 25:31-34 takes place, and he lists those whom the Lord will call to His side. After listing the prophets, the patriarchs, and the martyrs, Hippolytus pictures the Lord calling upon the hierarchs who "did me sacred service blamelessly day and night, and made the oblation of my honourable body and blood daily."²

¹Tertullian, "Apologetical Works," trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, Edwin A. Quain, in vol. 10 of The Fathers of the Church, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950), p. 101.

²Hippolytus, "Appendix to the Works of Hippolytus," in vol. 5 of The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 252.

Whether or not Hippolytus has correctly dramatized the scene from Matthew is irrelevant to the purpose of this paper. The import of this statement is in the fact that as late as the third century daily communion was regarded as a favorable practice. Thus, although some of the earlier writers such as Ignatius¹ have intimated that communion was not being practiced daily, Hippolytus regards the practice in high esteem. However, there is no indication by Hippolytus that daily communion was widely practiced at that time. Rather, this statement is an encouragement to do so, without any indication of the prevalence of the practice.

In another writing, Hippolytus relates that after baptism neophytes were immediately given the eucharist. The bread was given first, followed by three cups, the first containing water, the second milk mixed with honey, and the third wine.²

This account of baptism followed immediately by the eucharist compares favorably with the account given by Justin,³ who writes nearly a century earlier. There is not enough evidence to draw any specific conclusions, but it is obvious that baptism and communion were closely related in some areas of the early church.

¹Ignatius, "Ephesians," p. 65.

²Kenneth Latourette, A History of Christianity, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1953), p. 201.

³Justin, "First Apology," pp. 104-05.

In the "Apostolic Tradition,"¹ which Hippolytus is generally credited with authoring, there is an early liturgy preserved. In this, there is no definitive statement concerning the frequency of communion. However, there are two important facts to be learned from it.

First, the liturgy is given within the context of the ordination of a bishop. It is placed there in order to guide the new bishop as he celebrates the communion after his ordination. This concern that the service be held in an orderly manner underscores the importance that the church placed on it.

Second, the fact that a liturgy is included is a significant portent of the ritualism which would dominate in the centuries to come. Although Hippolytus does clearly state that the bishop was allowed to offer his own prayer, the expressions soon became stereotyped and subject to repetition.²

Fabian

Among the more puzzling documents of this time period is a decree issued by the Bishop of Rome, Fabian. During his reign (238-249), he stated that "although they may not do it more frequently, yet at least three times in the year

¹F. F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 196-97.

²Ferguson, Early Christians, pp. 95-97; Burton Easton, The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (Cambridge: The University Press, 1934), pp. 35-40.

should the laity communicate, unless one happens to be hindered by any more serious offences, to wit, at Easter, and Pentecost, and the Lord's Nativity."¹

In commenting upon frequency, Aquinas states that, "Later on when the fervor of faith diminished, Pope Fabian allowed that if not more often, all should communicate at least three times a year, at Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas."²

This interpretation of the text makes more sense than that given in the volume of The Ante-Nicene Fathers. From the interpretation given by Aquinas two conclusions may be drawn. First, the laity of the church were allowed to celebrate communion more than three times a year, in contradiction to the interpretation given in the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Second, even in this early period of church history there were those who had to be compelled to celebrate even three times a year.

Cyprian

The last major writer during this period was Cyprian. Holding the position of Bishop of Carthage during the middle of the third century, he implies that daily communion was

¹Fabian, "Decrees of Fabian," in vol. 8 of The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 640.

²Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 59, trans. by the Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), p. 79.

offered in that region. In an allegorical interpretation of the Lord's Prayer (very similar in many respects to the interpretation of Augustine¹), Cyprian states that "we petition that our bread, that is Christ, be given us daily."² As with many of the church fathers, the interpretation of the passage may be errant, but the fact of daily communion remains.

A Synopsis

The evidence has shown that the second and third centuries were a time of great variation with regard to the frequency of the communion. The writings of the church fathers show that some areas offered the eucharist on a daily basis, while others did so less frequently. Schaff states quite correctly that "the communion was a regular and the most solemn part of the Sunday worship . . . in many places and by many Christians it was celebrated even daily."³ Thus the historical evidence of the second and third centuries is similar to the Biblical evidence of the first century. Namely, that the communion service, although very important to all congregations, was not celebrated with the same frequency in all congregations.

¹Augustine, "The Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Book Two," trans. by John J. Jepson, in vol. 5 of Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York: Newman Press, 1946), pp. 112-13.

²Cyprian, "The Lord's Prayer," in The Teachings of the Church Fathers, ed. John R. Willis (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1966), pp. 444-45.

³Schaaf, History of Church, vol. 2, p. 236.

Ferguson, in his writings on the early church fathers, states that there is "no second-century evidence for the celebration of a daily eucharist."¹ This may be true, but Cyprian, writing in the third century does mention a daily communion;² therefore, there seems to be no point to Ferguson's statement, because it is likely that the daily communion was practiced during the second century even though there is no written evidence of it.

During this time period, two other factors which were to influence communion frequency in later centuries had their beginnings.

First, with regard to the liturgy, its germ appears in the writings of Hippolytus,³ and it is obvious that the spontaneity of the early church was being replaced by ritual.

Second, during this period the Roman doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice was initiated with the writings of Cyprian. This doctrine was further developed in the next two centuries and finally solidified under Gregory the Great.⁴

¹ Ferguson, Early Christians, p. 96.

² Cyprian, "Lord's Prayer," pp. 444-45; J. G. Davies, The Early Christian Church (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1965), p. 200.

³ Bruce, Flame, p. 196; Davies, Early Church, p. 200.

⁴ Davies, Early Church, p. 201; Schaaf, History of Church, vol. 3, p. 506.

The Fourth Through the Sixth Centuries

During this time period, many of the beliefs which became common to the Roman Catholic church were established. Among these beliefs were those concerning the communion celebration.

One of the primary developments of this period concerned the doctrine of the sacrificial nature of the communion. As this doctrine continued to grow and be accepted, it affected the frequency of communion in two ways.

The first of these was related to the institution of the eucharistic fast. In this, the communicant observed complete abstinence from all food and drink from midnight until the time of the communion celebration.

Christ Himself had instituted the communion at the close of a meal, and for many people during the first three centuries of the church this was the common mode of celebration. As early as the first century, many believers had adopted the practice of fasting on Wednesday and Friday, but this was not connected with the communion celebration. This custom was carried over from, but also in direct opposition to, the Jewish custom of fasting on Monday and Thursday.¹ The Didache mentions this, stating, "But do not let your

¹H. Achelis, "Fasting," in vol. 4 of New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Samuel Jackson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), p. 281.

fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on Monday and Thursday; but you shall fast on Wednesday and Friday."¹

The Wednesday and Friday fast continued with various degrees of participation throughout the first three centuries. In the fourth century, however, as the political climate changed, the practice became more common, and fasting was more closely associated with communion. The development was as follows:

From the 3rd cent. onwards manuals of instruction and worship now conveniently called 'Church Orders,' became common, basing their injunctions in most cases on supposed Apostolic authority. . . . Fasting accordingly was more exactly regulated. . . . The growth of strictness in fasting is especially observable in the 4th cent., the age of Councils and organization made possible by the cessation of persecution.²

Augustine, writing at this time, states that, "It has pleased the Holy Spirit that, in honor of so great a Sacrament, no other food should enter into the mouth of a Christian before the Lord's Body."³

The Synod at Hippo, meeting in 393, also endorsed the concept of a eucharistic fast, stating, "The sacrament

¹"Didache," pp. 178-79.

²A. J. Maclean, "Fasting (Christian)," in vol. 5 of Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 766.

³Augustine, "Answers to the Inquiries of Januarius," trans. by Sister Wilfrid Parsons, in vol. 12 of The Fathers of the Church, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrai (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1951), p. 258.

of the altar shall always be celebrated fasting, except on the anniversary of its institution . . . (Maundy Thursday)."¹

Thus, by the fourth century the fast was almost universally practiced. The communion celebration was identified with the sacrifice at Calvary and it was no longer to be in the context of a fellowship meal amongst believers.

The historical record indicates that fasting did in some instances decrease the frequency with which people celebrated communion. Although it was designed to heighten the respect which people had for communion, in some cases it replaced the celebration itself. This occurred when those fasting on Wednesday and Friday were given the opportunity to celebrate communion on those days. Within some Christians, however, there was the belief that they would break the fast if they took the communion. Therefore, some had the bread and wine reserved until after the fast was over, while others abstained.²

The second result of regarding the communion in a sacrificial light was the development in monks of an exaggerated respect for the eucharist. Many thought that if a communicant did not lead a life perfectly conformed to Christ,

¹Charles Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, vol. 2, trans. by Henry Oxenham (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1876), p. 399.

²Latourette, History, p. 203.

that the eucharist would harm him. This in turn also led to a decreased number of communicants.¹

In addition to these beliefs, concerned with the eucharist as sacrifice, there were several other influences from the church to prohibit frequent communion. Among them were: an influence from the east to celebrate only on Easter; a demand by Clement and seconded by Jerome which prohibited married couples from engaging in marital relations on any day they received communion (this prohibition was in effect through the middle ages, and certainly lessened the desire of people to commune frequently); a statement by Augustine that those who took the eucharist at infrequent intervals with great fervor honored the sacrament as much as those who received it frequently.²

In conjunction with these developments there was a basic change in the philosophy of the church. Prior to the fourth century, the church thought of communion as something to be done. It was a community time of participation and fellowship. In the fourth century, with the beginning of standardized liturgies, the communion began to be something which was said. It began to lose its participatory aspect, and started to become, instead, a rite of observation.³

¹F. Costa, "Communion, Frequency of," in vol. 4 of New Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. by Staff at the Catholic University of America (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 38.

²Ibid., p. 38.

³Robert Paul, The Atonement and the Sacraments (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 370-71.

After the reign of Constantine, the construction of huge church buildings also contributed to this impersonal sense. Some of these buildings were constructed with the sanctuary, containing the altar, bishop's throne, and seats for the clergy, separated from the laity by a screen.¹

The church had by this time also established the practice of celebrating communion in the morning. This was initially done to accommodate those who were unable to participate in a Sunday evening service, as Sunday was a normal workday for most Christians during the early years of the church. The early morning service allowed more to participate, but it also prevented much of the fellowship which the original supper communion had promoted.

In addition to the matter of work conflict, there was also a theological justification for changing the time of communion. Some of the early church fathers believed that because the risen Christ was first seen on Sunday morning, that it would be most appropriate to celebrate communion at that time. Cyprian, writing in the third century, states that "It was fitting for Christ to offer the Sacrifice about evening of the day that the very hour might show the setting and evening of the world . . . but we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord in the morning."²

¹Latourette, History, p. 201.

²Cyprian, "Cyprian to Cecil," trans. by Sister Rose Bernard Donna, in vol. 51 of The Fathers of the Church, edited by Roy Joseph Deferrai (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), p. 213.

As the change of time and the manner of celebration began to have their effect, the scenario became more and more common of a service where "the congregation of the faithful, instead of taking part in the communion, are mere spectators of the sacrificial act of the priest. The communion is frequently despatched at a side altar at an early hour in the morning."¹

Among the church writers of this time were Augustine and Chrysostom. The change that was taking place in the church with regard to communion is evident when their writings are examined.

Augustine

Augustine was bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, from 396 until his death in 430. His writings indicate that communion was still offered frequently, or perhaps even daily, in that part of the world. Although these writings do not explicitly command such a practice, they do reflect the fact that such a practice was common.

In an allegorical interpretation of the sermon on the mount, Augustine proposes that one possible meaning of the phrase "our daily bread" (Matt 6:11), might be "The Sacrament of Christ's Body which we receive daily."² Although this interpretation of the phrase is ultimately rejected by

¹ Schaff, History of Church, vol. 3, p. 511.

² Augustine, "Sermon on Mount," p. 113.

Augustine, the point is still valid that the communion was celebrated daily by him.

Augustine remarks in a sermon from the gospel of John that the communion is received "in some places daily, in some places at certain intervals of days."¹ There seems to be no thought given here to the possibility of partaking at an interval of more than a few days.

Finally, in a letter to Januarius, Augustine considers the question of the communion celebration at length. Within the discussion he states that "some receive daily the Body and Blood of the Lord, others receive it on certain days; in some places no day is omitted in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, in others it is offered only on Saturday and Sunday, or even only on Sunday."² From this comment, it is obvious that there was much variation within the church during the fourth and fifth centuries. Also, it is clear that all churches served communion at least once a week, for Augustine makes no mention of churches that do not serve it on Sunday.

From these comments it is clear that Augustine personally preferred a frequent offering and receiving of

¹ Augustine, "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John," trans. by John Gibb and James Innes, in vol. 7 of The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 173.

² Augustine, "Answers to the Inquiries of Januarius," trans. by Sister Wilfrid Parsons, in vol. 12 of The Fathers of the Church, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrai (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1951), p. 253.

communion. The interval between these events is spoken of in terms of days or a week, but never in terms of weeks. However, this was a personal preference on his part. The church did not have a general rule at this time, and the entire body was working out their beliefs on this point.

Augustine, conforming to this unsettledness, states concerning these preferential matters that

These are things of such sort that they are not prescribed by the authority of Holy Scripture nor by the tradition of the universal Church, and they serve no good purpose of amending one's life, but they are insisted on simply because somebody thinks out a reason for them, or because a man was accustomed to do so in his own country, or because he saw things done somewhere on a pilgrimage, and he esteemed them to be more correct because they were further from his own usage.¹

Chrysostom

Chrysostom, writing at the end of the fourth century from Constantinople, gives evidence that the eucharist was offered daily. Unfortunately, however, it is also evident that an indifference had set in among the people and communion as a ritual had replaced communion as a form of worship.

These developments are particularly evident in his "Homily on Ephesians," where he writes,

I observe many partaking of Christ's Body lightly and just as it happens, and rather from custom and form, than consideration and understanding. When, saith a man, the holy season of Lent sets in, whatever a man may be, he partakes of the mysteries, or, when the day of the Lord's Epiphany comes. And yet, it is not the Epiphany,

¹Augustine, "Januarius," p. 254.

nor is it Lent, that makes a fit time for approaching, but it is sincerity and purity of soul.¹

Commenting further upon daily communion, he says,

At the other times ye come not, no, not though often ye are clean; but at Easter, however flagrant an act ye may have committed, ye come. Oh! the force of custom and of prejudice! In vain is the daily Sacrifice, in vain do we stand before the Altar; there is no one to partake.²

The comments of Chrysostom vividly illustrate the state of the church at the end of the fourth century. His words also show the great change that had taken place in three hundred years, from a communion service marked by frequency and fellowship, to a communion service marked by infrequency and formality. These latter characteristics would mark the services of the church for the next several hundred years.

Gregory the Great

Serving as Pope from 590-604, the policies which Gregory established would shape the course of the church until the Middle Ages. Although he was not the first to formulate these policies, his reign occurred at a time when the church was particularly susceptible to strong leadership, and his influence was therefore great. Commenting upon this, Walker states that, "The time of Gregory's papacy was

¹Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on Ephesians," trans. by Gross Alexander, in vol. 13 of The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, first series, ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 63.

²Chrysostom, "Ephesians," p. 64.

propitious for an able Pope . . . he was the strongest man in Italy, and . . . far more a real sovereign than the distant and feeble Emperor."¹

With respect to the celebration of communion, Gregory was in concert with "the growing tendency to consider the Communion as a sacrifice of Christ's body and blood each time it is performed."² Thus, Gregory endorsed the belief which had been growing in popularity during the previous three centuries. This endorsement would affect the church in its future communion practices, for, "medieval theology bore the stamp of Gregory's thought."³

A Synopsis

At the close of the sixth century the sacrificial nature of the communion service had been established. The eucharistic fast was required of all who wished to participate, and the church had developed an exaggerated respect for the eucharist which deterred many from participating.

During the first six centuries, many of the doctrines concerning the communion had already been initiated. Although councils would later ratify them and officially

¹Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 174-75.

²Earle E. Cairns, Christianity Through the Ages (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 184.

³Ibid.

incorporate them into the church's doctrine, the groundwork had already been laid in these early centuries.

The Seventh Century to the Reformation

During this time period the rulings of the councils became stricter. The Quinisext or Trullan Synod (692), stated that "The African practice of receiving the eucharist on Maundy Thursday, after a meal, is disapproved,"¹ and that "love feasts . . . within the churches are forbidden."²

The frequency of participation in communion during this period decreased to such an extent that the church was required to act. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council declared that "every Catholic under pain of being debarred from church while alive and being denied Christian burial when dead, shall at least once a year confess his sins to his parish priest, and if only at Easter, receive the Holy Eucharist."³

Ironically, it was at this very council that the doctrine which caused much of the change in the communion practice was clearly defined.⁴ For, it was at this time that the term transubstantiation was used to express the change that takes place through the words of consecration, the

¹Charles Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, vol. 5, trans. by William R. Clark (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), p. 228.

²Ibid., p. 233.

³Philip Hughes, The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils 325-1870 (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1961), p. 218.

⁴Rouillard, "Human Meal," p. 52.

council stating that, "Jesus Christ is the sacrifice, whose body and blood are contained in the sacrament of the altar truly under the species of bread and wine, after by divine power bread and wine have been transubstantiated in the body and blood."¹

The confused state of the church during the thirteenth century is best illustrated by the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). In his Summa Theologiae the question is posed, is it lawful to receive the sacrament daily? His reply is, "It seems unlawful to receive this sacrament every day. . . . The paschal lamb . . . was eaten only once a year. . . . It is lawful to receive it only annually, not daily."² From this, an annual communion would be the proper frequency of celebration.

However, Aquinas then proceeds to discuss the arguments of Augustine and seems to indicate that it is permissible to take communion at a weekly or even more frequent interval. Finally, to completely confuse the issue, he states that it is also lawful to abstain from communion altogether.³

It is interesting that even at this point in the history of the church Aquinas does not turn to Scripture for

¹ Father Clement Raab, The Twenty Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959), pp. 92-93.

² Aquinas, Summa, p. 75.

³ Ibid., pp. 75-85.

support, but rather turns to the writings of Fabian, Augustine, and Gregory. It is the law of the church, rather than the law of the Word, which is of prime importance.

With such inconsistency among the leaders of the church, it is not surprising that there was confusion among the laity and an indifference to the communion service. As Costa has stated, "Throughout the 13th century frequent Communion remained a rarity."¹

The final major doctrine of the church before the Reformation was adopted at the council of Constance in 1415. At this meeting it was decreed that the laity should only partake of one element. This was a result of the "horror which believers felt if a crumb of the consecrated bread or a drop of the blessed wine fell on the floor."²

The practice had been common previous to this, and Aquinas mentions it 200 years earlier as being the custom of many churches.³ However, the council of Constance officially adopted the practice and therefore removed the communion celebration further from the form it had when instituted by Christ.

¹Costa, Frequency, p. 38.

²"Mass," in vol. 7 of New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Samuel Jackson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1910), p. 240.

³Aquinas, Summa, p. 83.

A Synopsis

In the period between the seventh century and the Reformation, the seeds which had been planted in the first six centuries bore fruit. Gregory (590-604) had endorsed the idea that the communion celebration was indeed a sacrificial act. Six hundred years later the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) adopted the doctrine of transubstantiation. Eight hundred years later the council of Constance (1415) withdrew the cup from the laity.

As these changes were taking place, the degree of participation by the laity decreased, making it necessary to issue decrees commanding their attendance.

The Reformation to the Present

With the reformation, Christendom was split into two separate groups. Surprisingly enough, though, both groups were similar in their beliefs concerning the frequency of communion.

The Catholic Church

Beginning in the fourteenth century, a revival in the frequency of communion started in the Roman Catholic Church. By the sixteenth century, at the Council of Trent, the leaders of the Catholic church stated that they desired all Christians to be able to receive communion at every Mass they attended. Generally, this trend has continued in the Roman church until this time. There have been some isolated leaders who have discouraged frequent communion, but

frequency has been generally encouraged and the relaxation of such requirements as those governing the eucharistic fast have helped implement this practice.¹

The Protestant Church

Luther

The Protestant leaders of that time also believed in frequent communion. In one of his works, Luther states, "It is Christ's will, then, that we partake frequently, in order that we may remember him and exercise in this fellowship according to his example."²

Calvin

Calvin was much more outspoken and definitive in his belief that communion should be taken frequently. He strongly condemned the custom of taking communion once a year and termed it a "veritable invention of the devil."³ Rather, he recommended that the communion be taken frequently, preferably weekly so that "the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually."⁴

¹ Raab, Twenty, p. 185; Costa, "Frequency," pp. 38, 39.

² Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods, 1519," trans. by Jeremiah J. Shindel, in vol. 35 of Luther's Works, ed. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), p. 56.

³ John Calvin, "Institutes of the Christian Religion," trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, in vol. 21 of The Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 1424.

⁴ Calvin, "Institutes," p. 1424.

Calvin supported his position by referring to the previously examined sources, namely, the Acts 2:42 passage and the early church fathers such as Augustine and Chrysostom. In particular, the Acts 2:42 passage is interpreted strictly, Calvin stating that "it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving."¹

Wesley

Among the major church leaders after the reformation, there was probably none more influential than John Wesley. Because of his importance in church history, it is interesting to note that in the 88 years of his life, it is estimated that he either celebrated or received communion on an average of once every four days. In addition, he believed it was "no imposition to admonish the newly-formed Methodist Episcopal Church in America to make weekly celebration its rule."²

Thus, it is clear that a frequent celebration of communion was not limited to the first five centuries of the church, or to the reformation era. Rather, it was highly recommended by the founder of one of today's major denominations.

¹ Ibid., p. 1422.

² Robert Nelson, "Methodist Eucharistic Usage: From Constant Communion to Benign Neglect to Sacramental Recovery," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 13 (Spring 1976):89.

Summary of the Historical Evidence

Historically, there is no doubt that during the first three centuries the communion was celebrated on at least a weekly basis. In many localities it was celebrated daily.

The fourth century brought many changes both from forces within the church and forces outside the church. The church itself was establishing the form of worship which would characterize it for the next several centuries, namely, the establishment of liturgies, the construction of huge buildings, and the change in theology which would view the communion as a sacrifice. Politically, the church had become accepted by the Roman government with the result that it was inundated with nominal Christians who had no real interest in the communion celebration.

Both of these influences, the political and the ecclesiastical, caused communion to become less and less practiced, with the result that by the fifteenth century the frequency of communion was at its lowest point.

The reformation brought forth Protestant leaders who believed in the practice of frequent communion, and the Roman Catholic church soon recommended this policy also.

CONCLUSIONS

An examination of the Biblical evidence shows that there are no scriptural imperatives concerning the frequency of communion. The sense of any passage is stretched if one attempts to find such a command.

The early Jerusalem church was influenced substantially by its Jewish heritage and this contributed greatly to its frequent communion celebrations. However, even in the Gentile churches communion seems to have been celebrated on a weekly basis.

Historically, the evidence clearly shows that the early church did practice frequent communion and attached great importance to it. However, as the church grew and the communion service became less a time of remembrance and fellowship, and more a time of ritual and sacrifice, the frequency of participation decreased.

Biblically and historically, it is evident that the celebration of communion has been important. This sense of importance is the common thread which runs throughout the centuries and ties the Biblical with the historical. Therefore, it is this sense of importance which must determine the frequency of celebration in each local church. There are no Biblical imperatives which give pat answers. History in itself cannot be depended upon to give correct guidelines.

However, both of these realms do stress the importance of the celebration, and this importance must be reflected in the contemporary church.

Each church must decide how frequently communion should be offered. If the decision is made to offer it frequently, then precautions must be taken to prevent the service from becoming a meaningless ritual. This will take the same type of diligence which is required to prevent teaching, fellowship, and prayer from becoming only a ritual.

If an infrequent celebration is decided upon, then one must be prepared to explain how this practice stresses the importance of the celebration as evidenced in the Biblical and historical evidence. It must also be explained why the example of the early church is not valid.

Contemporary practice demonstrates the disagreement concerning this ordinance. Whatever decision each church makes concerning their frequency of practice, that decision must reflect the importance which has been associated with the celebration throughout the centuries.

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