

IN THE
BREAKING
of the
BREAD

COMMUNION ON
THE LORD'S DAY

GREGG STRAWBRIDGE



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*P.O. Box 585 * Brownstown, PA 17508*

WORSHIP, LIFE, AND THE TABLE

I still remember the smell of fried chicken in my grandmother's kitchen and setting the table with the good china for Sunday dinner. We were Baptists and therefore had chicken, but I am told that Presbyterians had roast beef. The idea of not having such a Sunday dinner was unthinkable. It was part of our Christian life. We go to church and we come home to Sunday dinner.

I am grateful for what all of those meals have written into my life's story. Knowing God through Jesus Christ means goodness in all of its southern fried savoriness. At the time the only connection between worship and Sunday dinner was the rumbling of my stomach during the sermon. I now understand a lot better now how Sunday worship and Sunday lunch go together.

Eating and Drinking

Worship is to encompass all of life and be emblematic of all of life. But how so? The things we do in the Lord's Day service are to shape our life throughout the week. We praise and we are to become better praisers. We confess sin and we are to become those who acknowledge our short comings, standing on forgiveness granted through Jesus. We recite truth (Creeds and Biblical statements) and we are to become those who profess the truth always. We hear the Word and we are to grow in being transformed by the renewal of our minds. We pray and we are to pray without ceasing. We listen and we are to become good listeners. We give and we are to be those who give of ourselves and possessions to others. In all of these we are to grow, practicing to apply worship. But one aspect of worship which we certainly do without practice is that *we eat and drink*. No sermon is needed here. Life assumes consumption and nutrition.

The connection is so basic that we can overlook it. Many aspects of worship prepare us to serve God in ordinary callings and in extraordinary opportunities if we are faithful to practice them. However, the simple life-sustaining actions of eating and drinking at the Table of Lord extend to our ordinary lives without practicing. We are very good at eating and drinking.

God has given us ordinary bread and ordinary wine to confirm to us the infinite provision of Jesus. In gratitude, we eat and drink at the Lord's Table and every other day we give thanks, eating and drinking at all of the lesser tables of His Great Table. The kingdom of God is most like a Great Feast. This is very instructive about the nature of our faith.

Jesus was truly man. He was not a spirit hologram. He came to redeem

men, not ghosts. The basic action of eating and drinking is creational. So Jesus has given the Table to earthly, fallen people who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For those who faithfully receive His bread and wine, there is a promise of the future consummation of the kingdom at the Lamb's High Feast. This promise means that, like Jesus, we will gain resurrection bodies. In the future consummation, we shall be more physical, not less physical. Our physicality will be glorified. The "heavenly" will be much more earthly than we can imagine. The promise of glory is not a gnostic, de-material glory, but a glorified new heavens and earth.

This truth is implicit even in our ordinary meals. We eat that which is dead, but God makes us live through it. Every meal is a kind of resurrection lesson in that way. We receive the lesson of resurrection by gratitude. The promise of an incarnate, resurrection life in a renewed world is the future of life for the redeemed world. Therefore, Jesus's death is "for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

Feasting

For most of Christian history, the Table has been called the Eucharist. This Greek word is from the phrase, "when He had *given thanks*" (*Eucharisteo* in Matt. 26:27, Mark 14:23, Luke 22:19, John 6:11, 1 Cor. 11:24). This is not a name for communion that Protestants should give over without a fight. Gratitude is the delicious fruit of redemption. Nothing changes our disposition like giving thanks with a grateful heart. When we give thanks we know that we have need of Another's help. We receive Something outside ourselves as a gift. When we open our hands to receive, we must release what we are holding. Even so, coming to the Table of Gratitude reveals that we are undeserving of a seat at the King's banquet. We do not deserve to be welcomed and yet we receive the invitation by grace. We are seated at the King's Table, like lame Mephibosheth. "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet" (2 Sam. 9:13-10:1).

The sabbath was about such a feast, as well. "Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation . . . These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times" (Lev. 23:3-4). Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost all begin with a day of sabbath celebration, "from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath" (Lev. 23:32).

The Lord's Supper language is drawn from this context. St. Paul says, "Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of

malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:8). The chief reason is that Christ is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). His body is bread, indeed and His blood is wine, indeed. The Great Table is about joy and not mourning. It is about feasting and not fasting. It is about a completed sacrifice and not a re-sacrifice. It is about a completed work and not working our way to the Table. It is about grace and not about merit. We come to a Table and we cannot buy or earn the bread or the wine.

As we remember the sabbath, ceasing from our labors, and knowing of the full redemption we have in Christ, we are to celebrate at tables great and small. Such celebration is a joyful, spiritual discipline. To eat and drink in this way reminds us that we are creatures who must be dependent for our continued life. Gratitude for all of God’s provision flows from such tables to the One to whom it is due. Like those disciples on the Emmaus road, “He was recognized by them *in the breaking of the bread*” (Luke 24:35). To eat and drink with gratitude is to have worship extend to all of life.

WORSHIP IN THE CONGREGATION

How sweet and awful is the place
With Christ within the doors,
While everlasting love displays
The choicest of her stores.

While all our hearts and all our songs
Join to admire the feast,
Each of us cry, with thankful tongues,
“Lord, why was I a guest?”

“Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there’s room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?”

’Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.

Pity the nations, O our God,
Constrain the earth to come;

Send Thy victorious Word abroad,
And bring the strangers home.

We long to see Thy churches full,
That all the chosen race
May, with one voice and heart and soul,
Sing Thy redeeming grace.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Many people today express reservations about congregational worship or the “organized church.” So is real worship to be found more individually or corporately? Is it more on the porch swing or in the pew? To answer this, we must pull back the veil of our visible world and believe in the invisible. In profound passage, the writer of Hebrews tells his readers,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant . . . (Heb. 11:22–24).

The gathered congregation is like the tip of an iceberg surfacing above the water with the massive invisible spiritual world below the water’s surface. We only see familiar faces or unfamiliar people. We look at the wall paper, the carpet, the pews, and the pulpit and sometimes lose the grand vision of the “church of the first-born.” Worship is a meeting of the highest heavens with “middle earth.” This picture is captured in C.S. Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters*. He writes from the point of view of an elder devil instructing a younger devil,

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with a rather oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a

number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like “the body of Christ” and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the Enemy’s side. No matter. Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. . . . Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords.¹

Lewis brilliantly depicts our problem in coming to worship. We are encumbered with all the sterility of a public meeting, often forgetting that the very Resurrected Christ promises to be present. Even the most energetic and vibrant services are still encumbered by the people in the pew. The most inviting atmosphere of transcendental architecture (if such a thing still exists in America) and the brightest and best arrangement of events, complete with professional sound and lighting, inevitably yields to the simple poem: “the church is not the steeple, but the people.” Our eyes are often distracted by “the people” in worship. Yet it is just those people that *are the Church* and represent the most profoundly significant realities. Jesus said, “I will build My church (*ecclesia*); and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18).

The book of Hebrews is perhaps the last formal appeal to first-century Israelites from the God-revealed redemptive worship from the Older Covenant. It culminates in the final word of the argument of the book of Hebrews:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship (*latreuo*) with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:28b–29 NRSV)

When we come to meet with the gathered people of God, we come with the recognition of receiving permanent kingdom and know that God is a consuming fire. We come to a much more awful and glorious sight than a

mountain quaking with the divine fire, we come to new covenant manifestation of heavenly Mount Zion.

For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . (Heb. 12:18–22)

When God's people gather, it is to be seen in the most profound terms. When we think of what is *real*, we think of our houses, family, jobs, lawns, and cars. But the profound truth which is just as *real* is that presently there are myriads of creatures we cannot fathom giving glory to an incomprehensible, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent Triune God whose presence pervades all of reality. They solemnly declare, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" in a language we cannot comprehend. The church's gathering for worship, which invokes His special presence, is a visible projection of that greater Congregation which, though unseen, is quite *real*. It is as though we stand on the shore and look out over the ocean. We cannot see the other side. We do not know that the other shores exist by sight, but we know the water stops somewhere. We cannot see the magnitude of the *greater worship service*, that of the invisible world. But we are assured by the unshakeable truth of the living God that a great host (for God is the "Lord of hosts") utters His praise continually.

Thus, worship on the Day of Resurrection as a congregation is to participate in the truly *awful* reality of Mount Zion. To properly worship is to acknowledge the reality of the occasion and the reality *behind* the occasion. We must be like the Apostle John who was able to look into heaven and see the worship of heaven (Rev. 4–5). Yet, it is just in this occasion that we see that it is both *sweet and awful*. It is sweet because, Our Judge, because of Christ, sets a grace-Table for us. As Isaac Watts wrote, "While all our hearts and all our songs join to admire the feast, each of us cry with thankful tongues, Lord why was I a guest. 'Twas the same love that spread the feast that sweetly drew us in, else we had still refused to taste and perished in our sin."

What a shame and distortion it is, then, that many Christians opt for a Disney version of worship which is cotton candy sweet with no sense of the awe and wonder. On the other hand some churches stress a complete

solemnness and exceeding reverential awe of worship, without the sweetness of the feast. Awful without the sweet. But biblical worship is a feast of Word and Sacrament, sweet and full of awe is *this place*.

WORSHIP ON THE LORD'S DAY

What creates the awe and wonder is that in the midst of us is a Resurrected Person. This leads us to the connection between Christian Worship and Sunday. Is there something special about Sunday? Did Jesus intend for His church to regularly gather in His special presence on an appointed day? Or was this left to mere circumstance and preference? We must consider not only the Biblical evidence (which is authoritative), but also the way the historical church understood the Biblical evidence (which is significant). *I will argue that the same warrant to worship on the Lord's Day compels us to break bread on the Lord's Day.*

The Biblical Material on the Day of Worship

The New Testament uses the term, "Lord's day" only once. John writes in the Apocalypse, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet . . ." (1:10). The notable Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson says "the word *kuriakos* was in common use for the sense 'imperial' as imperial finance and imperial treasury . . ." It was used in connection to "Augustus Day" and "Emperor's Day." "It was easy, therefore, for the Christians to take this term, already in use, and apply it to the first day of the week in honour of the Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection on that day (Didache 14, Ignatius Magn. 9)."²

The term for "Lord's Day" (*Kuriakos*) (literally "Lord's") is used only twice: once in reference to the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10) and once in reference to the Lord's Supper (*Kuriakos deipnon*, 1 Cor. 11:20).³ It appears that Christ met with his disciples in His post-resurrection, pre-ascension state on the first day of the week (Sunday) on several separate occasions (Matt. 28:9, Luke 24:34ff, John 20:19-23). For example, "When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week . . . Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:17). One week later we are told, Jesus met with the disciples again on Sunday. "And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:26).

A particularly instructive resurrection text is found in the Emmaus road passage in Luke 24:27ff. It is clear in this passage that is the first day of the

week (Luke 24:1).

Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. *Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him*; and He vanished from their sight. . . . So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and *how He was known to them in the breaking of bread*. Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." [emphasis mine]

In Luke the last time Jesus had taken bread and "given thanks," he promised He would not be at the Table again "until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:18). Jesus fulfilled His promise of being with His disciples on the other side of His cross on the Day of Resurrection. Jesus needed to reveal Himself and there is a progression throughout Luke 24: Jesus "opens" (*dianoigo*) their eyes at the Table (v31); their hearts burned as He "explained" (*dianoigo*) the Scriptures (v32) and finally their minds were "opened" (*dianoigo*) in His resurrected presence (v45).

Continuing in Luke-Acts we find the continuing of "breaking bread" after Pentecost (Acts 2:42, 46) and the explicit connection of congregating on Sunday to celebrate the Table. "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7). Moreover, Paul instructed the church at Corinth regarding receiving collections, "On the *first day of every week* let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16:2).

The Biblical Material on the Sabbath Day

The significance of the scattered references to the resurrection, first day of the week, breaking bread, and the Lord's Day comes into sharper focus when we see that they stand upon the foundation and as a fulfillment of the Sabbath.

Back in Genesis, we first find the idea of sabbath. "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day

from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen. 2:2-3).

It is surprising to think through the creation pattern. Adam was created on the sixth day, thus his first full day of life was not a day of labor, but a day of sabbath. Unlike the day of sin when they “hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God” (Gen. 3:8), after the first man and woman were created, they awoke to a day in their Maker’s presence. Adam’s *first day of the first week* was sabbath. Sound familiar?

I believe this is a clue to the purpose and full meaning of the sabbath. No one works to earn rest in the presence of God. It is a gift before one labors. Originally it was not a six-then-one day pattern for Adam, it was a one-then-six pattern. This should remind us of the structure of salvation. It is redemption then service. The order is always grace—then faithful obedience—not works, then grace. The sabbath gift was certainly not a meritorious reward of rest for Adam’s works. At this point we may need to adjust our thinking.

Later in the Old Testament, the sabbath commandment was expressed in the fourth commandment. It is striking that among many, “Thou shalt nots”—the form of this command is, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). The Jewish sabbath observance included their synagogue *convocations* (Lev. 23:3). That is, they were to gather in *congregations*. There is an explicit connection to table celebration. The next verse says, “These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times” (Lev. 23:4). Following this Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost are addressed. Each of these begin with a day of celebration. The sabbath was for instruction and feasting, as well as rest.

The very heart of the sabbath is “remembering.” The word here (*zakar* in Hebrew) means “call to mind” or “recall.” What do we recall? This is a little clearer in the second giving of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy. The sabbath was a memorial occasion for the emancipation proclamation of Israel. They were to remember their release from bondage by the power of God. “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deut. 5:15). This release from bondage even applied to the land, which also was to be given sabbaths (Lev. 25:4). It applied to debtors in the cycle of restitution, the Jubilee, which is a sabbath (Lev. 25:8-10).

Rolling ahead, the fulness of this rest and release from bondage is the work of Jesus (Col. 2:16–17). We can see this in the anticipation of His coming. The very paradigm of the “fulness of time” (Gal. 4:4, coming of Messiah) is a sabbatical pattern (“seventy sevens,” Dan. 9:24). Jesus is our sabbath. “For we who have believed do enter that rest . . .” (Heb. 4:3).

Against this, the deeply heretical view of the sabbath held by the Pharisees, explains the force of the frequent conflict over the sabbath in the Gospels. After doing works of healing and restoration on the needy, Jesus was accused of sabbath-breaking. But it was the Pharisees who misused the sabbath (Mark 2:24–28). The sabbath, ironically, had become a kind of slavery. Exactly contrary to Deut. 5. What was meant for the celebration of freedom was made into a yoke of bondage. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). It is just because of this that the True Man, the Last Adam was “Lord of the sabbath” (Mark 2:28).

The Pharisaic accusations did not end with minor infractions of permissible sabbath activities. Their zealous bondage created murderous hostility to the Life-giver and Healer. After healing a man, we read, “For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath” (John 5:16). Christ’s answer to this charge is very interesting. “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will” (John 5:17–21).

In other words, the Lord is working for our redemption and that redemption is in the resurrection. *Here is the explicit connection between the sabbath and resurrection.* He became a slave so that we might be free. He died so that we might live. Jesus is our sabbath. We were slaves, but now we are free. This freedom was ratified on the Day of Resurrection.

The very heart of this is rejoicing in the grace of God and the reality of new life. Like the Jubilee, we need a fresh start. We need the weekly renewal of taking to heart our freedom and life in Christ. This refreshment, this celebration, is not to be without the Table. Jesus promised His presence in the breaking of the bread on the Day of Resurrection.

Just as the Table is a deep theme in Luke (above), it is deeper still in John. John’s Gospel unfolds a series of signs. The exact pattern of signs is sometimes debated, but here is my arrangement and I explain their parallel relationships below. The hinge of the structure of these signs is the giving of bread and its accompanying “Bread of Life” discourse in chapter 6.

THE SEVEN + ONE NEW CREATION (SIGNS IN JOHN)

1. New Creator: Water into wine (2:1–11)
2. Redeemer/Healer: Prevents death of nobleman's son (4:46ff)
3. True Sabbath: The paralyzed man at the pool (5:2–9)
4. Bread of Life: Multiplication of loaves (6:1–14)
5. Light of the World: Born blind, healed on Sabbath (9:1–7)
6. Resurrection & Life: Delays/death then raises Lazarus (11:1–44)
7. Living Water: Water & blood on the cross (19:34–35)
- + 8. New Adam/Gardener: The resurrection (20:1–29)

These signs have a chiasmic structure, that is, they are arranged in parallels with the center (X) often marking the emphasis. The wine of new life, encompassing the first and seventh signs are “third day” signs (2:1), pointing to resurrection on the “third day.” The power of Jesus to prevent and undo death which are showing in the second and sixth signs happen “after two days” (John 4:43, 11:6), alluding the “third day.”

The third and fifth signs show Jesus as True Sabbath in healing the paralyzed man at the Sheep Gate pool (5:2–9) and the healing of the man born blind (9:1–7). Note they are both on the Sabbath (John 5:9; 9:14). John goes out of his way to make this point. “And that day was the Sabbath” (John 5:9). John 9:14 says, “Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.” Both of these events involve pools for cleansing (John 5:2; 9:7). These Sabbath signs indicate true cleansing and rest from our inabilities and defects through entering His sabbath in faith.

The center of John's signs is the fourth sign of John's Gospel, Jesus is feeding the five thousand which strongly alludes to the Eucharist. John 6:10–11:

Then Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and *when He had given thanks He distributed* them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. (emphasis mine)

Jesus provided for the physical needs of these people. But His teaching on the next day was that He was the eternal bread which comes down from heaven and which is paralleled to the Eucharist. John 6:52–56:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

We do not need to embrace the error of transubstantiation in order to appreciate John's framing of this as Eucharistic. The words sound like the Eucharist: "when He had given thanks He distributed them" (parallels: Matt. 26:27, Luke 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24). Later in the passage John recites again the term *eucharisteo* though it is not necessary. "There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread *after the Lord had given thanks*" (*eucharisteo*, John 6:23). This is a literary patterning.

Moreover Jesus claims to be true manna. He claims to give his body for food and blood for drink. Jesus fed the people and called for faith. It should not surprise us that the chiasmic (X) sequence of the signs places this as the center of chiasm, while the first is the new creation wine (after all He is the true vine) and the last is the cross/resurrection. The structure of the signs is Sacramental, outlining Christ as the Source of wine from water (sign 1), bread (center sign 4) and water and blood from Him (sign 7).

The Eucharist rite and action is feeding upon Jesus by faith at the Table and experiencing His presence in the breaking of the bread. This shows that we are abiding in Him. This is proof that we believe He is the Bread of Life.

The overall pattern of the "third day" (2:1) (1st water into wine and 7th the cross: water/blood), point to resurrection on the "third day." This culminates in the resurrection of the first day of the week (or the typological eighth day). On the new creation "eighth day," the restoration will be complete. The seven signs then point to the culminating sign of the resurrection which just happens to be on the "first day" or "eighth day." It is a 7 + 1 sequence.

THE SIX + ONE OLD CREATION (DAYS IN GENESIS)

1. Day One: Light from Darkness

2. Day Two: Sea & Sky
3. Day Three: Land, Plants, Seeds
4. Day Four: Lights-Sun, Moon, Stars
5. Day Five: Fish (in Sea) & Birds (in Sky)
6. Day Six: Land Animals & Man
- + 7. God Rested (Completion of Creation)

The new creation sequence (7 + 1) calls to mind the 6 + 1 sequence of the original creation which culminates in the sabbath. The parallels in Genesis are “Forming Days” (1–3) and “Filling Days” (4–6), since the earth at one point as “formless and empty.” Days 1 & 4 relate (Light, Light-bearers), Days 2 & 5 relate (Sea/Sea Critters; Sky/Sky Critters) and Days 3 & 6 relate (Land, Land Animals & Man). Then in addition there is the Seventh Day which completes the sequence. In John the “eighth day” (e.g., the first day of the week) completes the sequence of new creation. The Lord’s Day is the first day of the week, the numerical “eighth day” when one counts from the first creation day. If this chiastic structure is correct then we have a strong relationship between sabbath (seventh day) and Day of Resurrection (eight day/first day). God has reset the clock of time.

The Eighth Day Sabbath

The sabbath, resurrection, and communion are woven together into the new wine skins of the Church. Given that the first recipients of the gospel saw the weekly sabbath pattern of worship as divine law and yet the Church emerged from the first century worshipping on the first day of the week—how might this be reasonably explained?

But is there more specific warrant for this change of worship-day? It does not stand out in red letters, or does it? Jesus taught us that He had authority over the sabbath, the day of remembrance, “For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8). When He instituted His new passover supper, He said, “This is My body which is given for you; *do this in remembrance of Me*” (Luke 22:19).

Jesus required His disciples to remember His work of redemption, the antitype of the Exodus. However, His work of redemption was not complete until the first day of the week. Only after His redemptive work was complete, He met with His disciples. And His disciples continued to do this: “on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread . . .” (Act 20:7).

No great leap into the historical and theological unknown is necessary

to conclude that the apostolic church had warrant to worship on the Day of Resurrection. But what else did this warrant require? That when the new covenant people meet on the *eighth day sabbath*, they meet with Him in the breaking of the bread.

One should not hesitate in admitting that the explicit Biblical material is meager regarding the question of worship, including the Table, on the first day of the week. But, what the Scriptures suggests in seed, the universal church demonstrates in full bloom. The voice of these verses is joined by the deep chorus of the theological importance of the Resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week and with the specific requirement of the Lord's Supper: "Do this in remembrance of Me." His disciples should thus remember in Eucharistic participation His redemptive acts on the day that they were demonstrably complete: the Lord's Day. Thus, *the same warrant to worship on the Lord's Day compels us to break bread on the Lord's Day.*

The Historical Precedents

Would we but listen to them, our eldest brethren in the ancient Church would say this loudly. The earliest writings of the church are in accord with the priority of the gathered congregation with the Table on Sunday. Even the pagan Pliny the Younger reported that Christians meet "on an appointed day."⁴ The Didache commands that, "On the Lord's Day come together and break bread."⁵ The Epistle of Barnabas likewise says, "Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead."⁶

Ignatius of Antioch speaks of the early Jewish Christians as "those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death."⁷ *The Didascalia* states, "The apostles further appointed: On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and the oblation, because on the first day of the week our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven . . ."⁸ Victorinus says that "on the Lord's day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks" [after fasting] "lest we should appear to observe any sabbath with the Jews . . . which sabbath he [Christ] in his body abolished."⁹ Athanasius reasons, "The sabbath was the end of the first creation, the Lord's day was the beginning

of the second . . . we honor the Lord's day as being the memorial of the new creation."¹⁰ The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains the Eucharistic practice of the earliest Christian literature (after the NT):

The Ignatian Epistles show us the Eucharist as the focus of the church's life and order, the source of unity and fellowship" . . . Justin Martyr tells us that the Eucharist was celebrated on the Lord's Day, the day associated with creation and with Christ's resurrection . . . Irenaeus, also, emphasizes the fact that Christ taught His disciples to offer the new oblation of the New Covenant, to present in thank offering the first-fruits of God's creatures—bread and wine—the pure sacrifice prophesied before by Malachi . . . Cyprian, too, gives evidence of the same eucharistic belief, and alludes very plainly to the "Lift up your hearts," to the great thanksgiving, and to the prayer of consecration.¹¹

While more early witnesses to the Lord's Day worship could be called, one final word will suffice from *The Apostolic Constitutions*.

And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent him to us, and condescended to let him suffer, and raised him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day . . . in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food.¹²

The Church has Biblical foundation, theological implication, and overwhelming ancient historical precedent to call that meeting on the Day of Resurrection and to celebrate the Eucharist. Just as the ancient hymn of John of Damascus (ca 675–749) says,

The Day of Resurrection! Earth, Tell it out Abroad;
The Passover of Gladness, the Passover of God.
From Death to Life Eternal, from this World to the Sky,
Our Christ Hath Brought Us over with Hymns of Victory.

Our Hearts Be Pure from Evil, That We May See Aright
The Lord in Rays Eternal of Resurrection Light;
And, Listening to His Accents, May Hear, So Calm and Plain,
His Own All Hail! And Hearing, May Raise the Victor Strain.

Now Let the Heav'ns Be Joyful, Let Earth Her Song Begin;
 Let the Round World Keep Triumph, and All That Is Therein;
 Invisible and Visible, Their Notes Let All Things Blend,
 For Christ the Lord Hath Risen, Our Joy That Hath No End.¹³

THE COVENANTAL NATURE OF WORSHIP AND COMMUNION

Worship originally was precipitated by the covenant instituted by God. The very need for salvation itself arises from the transgression of the creation covenant.¹⁴ “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant” (Hos. 6:7). Beginning with Abraham the fundamental revelation to him was a covenant promise unfolded throughout the pages of Scripture (Gen. 12:1–3).

Abraham was justified by faith in the God of the covenant. It was more than a promise of a land, seed, and blessing. It was a promise of righteousness through *the Seed*. “Then he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:16; cf Rom. 4:3ff). Nevertheless, it was indeed a promise of a land, seed, and blessing. It involved the authority of God, his Word, His requirements, the commitment of Abraham, and the succession of the covenant in Abraham’s heirs.

In the Mosaic administration of the unfolding covenant, the regulations of the Levitical office led to a clear application of the covenant in a liturgy of sacrificial rites. The basic sequence is instructive: Purification offerings for cleansing the worshiper, then whole-burnt offerings which represent the ascent of the worshiper into the presence of God, finally peace offerings, when an animal is slaughtered for a fellowship meal. It has also been argued that the full sequence yields a definitive five-fold liturgy of worship: call, confession/pardon, word, table, and commission.¹⁵ This Levitical sacrifice pattern is the backbone of the new covenant service and to a great extent, the historical Church’s service.¹⁶

Worship, in the fullest understanding of Biblical revelation, should be conscious, then, of the covenant relationship between God and man, which was seen the types and shadows of the Old Testament, but which culminates in Christ. If we are servants of a new covenant, the Bible is the book of that covenant. Christ is the mediator of that covenant. His blood is the blood of that covenant. His cup is the sacrament of that covenant.

We are told by the writer of Hebrews that “even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship” (Heb. 9:1). This implies both that the new covenant has regulations of worship and that it is intimately connected with the

covenant. Worship should rehearse the terms of the covenant; it should be guided by the book of the covenant; it should focus on the mediator of the covenant; it should be the joy of those who share in the blood of the covenant; it should be covenantal in the fullest sense.

Worship as Covenant Remembrance

Let us bind together the suggestions of sabbath, resurrection, communion and covenant with the exegesis of a specific passage. First Corinthians II directly addresses the worship service in the intersect of covenant, communion, gathering, and purpose. Consider I Corinthians 11:25 as the place to begin unwrapping the whole subject:

In the same way, also, (He held) the cup, after eating supper saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; Do this (!), when you drink (the cup), unto My remembrance."¹⁷

When Paul addresses communion abuses in verses 11:17–34, he gives the words, "I received from the Lord" (11:23). Paul has "received" the words of the Supper, just as he "received" the gospel that Christ died and rose according to the Scriptures (15:3). There were "schisms" (*scismata*) (11:18), "factions" [literally, "heresies"] among you" (11:19). The nature of these divisions is illustrated in saying, "For each individually in the supper eats ahead (before others), one is hungry and another drunk" (11:21).¹⁸ In rebuking these problems Paul says they are to examine themselves and so eat and drink in a worthy manner (not unworthily, *anaxios*). By continuing in such sin they would be guilty of "sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (NIV) (*enochos*, worthy of, guilty of, sinning against, caught in, cf. Matt. 26:66) and thus be judged. The stipulations for such judgment are specified: "because of this, among you many are powerless and sickly and a considerable number sleep [are dead]" (11:30).

The "do this" phrase is variously translated: "this do ye, as oft as ye drink it" (KJV); "this do, as often as ye drink it" (ASV); "do this, whenever you drink it" (NIV). How often are they to eat the Lord's Supper? The "as often" (*hosakis*) term is a bit unclear.¹⁹ Does it mean "when you drink it" or drink it *often*? "To his exposition of the supper Paul adds his own emphasis, 'Do it often.'²⁰ "In its complete form the clause would read; 'Drink frequently the cup of the Lord and do so always in remembrance of Me.'²¹ On the other hand, others say, "In the ceremony Jesus does not say how often the communion was to be held but indicates that it is to be periodic—'whenever you eat . . . and drink' . . ." [emphasis

mine).²² As it turns out this term is only used once elsewhere (Rev. 11:6, “as often”). There is no clear warrant for deciding this question from mere grammatical considerations. Nevertheless, the question may be answered in the way Paul uses the term, *sunerchomai* – “come together” or “assemble.”

This term, *sunerchomai*, is used seven times in the span of chapters 11–14 and in thirty verses in the rest of the NT. Each usage in the Corinthian epistle is referring to the *gathering* of the church, (*ekklesia*) (e.g., 11:18, 22), the assembly of God’s called-out ones. This is especially clear in the combined usage of *ecclesia* and *sunerchomai* in verse 18: “when the church assembles.”

What Paul asserts rhetorically is very instructive for our purpose: “Therefore when you come together (*sunerchomai*) in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper” (NKJ, 11:20). Paul has been correcting their abuses, especially on divisions and schismatic behavior. He has a strong exclamation of reproof about this: “What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God . . .” (11:22). Paul means you *should* assemble in order to eat the Lord’s Supper, but you are not doing that. Whereas, other congregations “gathered together in order to break bread” (Acts 20:7) and early on, the Church in Jerusalem was devoted to “the breaking of bread.” You should be ashamed of yourselves! The Corinthian’s factious activity was not the purpose of the assembly, but the (properly celebrated) Lord’s Supper was to be the purpose of the assembly.

Paul’s overall purpose in the passage is to rebuke the Corinthians for sinful divisions and schisms in celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Their factions were exceedingly inconsistent with the meaning of the Table. “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). The Supper signifies participation in Christ and unity with the brethren. Factions in the celebration of the Table are radically incongruent with the purpose of communion in the body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16), which was a central purpose of assembling.

Paul does not need to tell the Corinthians to drink frequently the cup or do it often (as some commentators suggest), though that is certainly a good word for modern skeptics of weekly communion. Rather, their very purpose in meeting *always* included partaking of the Lord’s Table. It is taken for granted that their meeting will include the Lord’s Table. So much so, that he could say with a cutting pastorally effective, rhetorical punch: “Therefore when you come together in one place, *it is not* to eat the Lord’s Supper” (11:20). Paul and the Corinthians knew, just as did the church in Troas (Acts 20:7), just as did the

original Jerusalem church (Acts 2:42), that when they assemble, they partake of the Lord's Table. That is not in question. Rather, when you eat and drink, each time you do this, you are to do it as (covenantal) remembrance of Christ. Thus, we must not act inconsistently with the unity embodied in the Supper.

THE REFORMERS AND WEEKLY COMMUNION

The Reformation was motivated in part, a large part, by Roman Catholic practices relating to communion. Rome had taken the cup from the laity as a result of the transubstantiation dogma (1215 A.D.). By the time of the Reformation, the necessity of faith was obscured behind a mountain of dogmatic sacerdotal apparatus. The result was believers were blocked from the free grace of the gospel received through simple faith in Jesus. His work alone made sinners acceptable before a holy God.

In Eucharist practices just prior to the Reformation the majority of the laity only participated once a year. This is likely due to the fears brought on by transubstantiation and related theories of the priestcraft. Much correction was due, namely: *sola fide, sola gratia, solo Christo, sola Scriptura* and *soli Deo gloria*.

In this context many Reformers found it difficult to implement the practice weekly communion in their churches, even if they were persuaded of it. And just about the only Reformer that did want weekly communion was Ulrich Zwingli. Eventually John Calvin's careful and even exposition of the faith won most Reformers to his views. The differences between Zwingli's views and Calvin's views are well known. While Zwingli held that communion is a mere symbol (to be celebrated infrequently), Calvin taught that Christ is really spiritually present in the Lord's Supper.²³ Calvin's views prevail today as the stated position of most Reformed churches.

Calvin's view of the frequency of communion, however, has not (yet) prevailed. "Despite his stated wishes, Calvin was not allowed by the city council of Geneva to implement weekly communion."²⁴ It is particularly difficult to see why churches which champion the Calvin's "spiritual presence" view would object to weekly communion. Virtually all of the Reformers applauded by Reformed churches today believed in weekly communion.²⁵

- Martin Bucer explains the ordinary service of worship: "On the Lord's Day . . . they celebrate the Lord's Supper."
- Heinrich Bullinger's Helvetic Confession of 1536 said "the holy assembly ought to be carried out in the following manner . . . celebrating the holy

Eucharist.”

- John Calvin said the Supper should be observed “at least once a week” (*Institutes* 4.1743).
- Peter Martyr Vermigli said, “On the first day of the week . . . we receive the sacraments, whereby is renewed the memory of that most excellent benefit: I mean the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- John Owen urged in his “Independents Catechism” wrote, “Question 40—How often is that ordinance to be administered? Answer—Every first day of the week, or at least as often as opportunity and conveniency may be obtained. 1 Cor. xi. 26; Acts xx. 7.”²⁶
- Richard Baxter in his *Christian Directory* wrote, “How often should the sacrament be now administered, that it neither grow into contempt nor strangeness? Answ. [1] Ordinarily in well disciplined churches it should be still every Lord’s day . . . It is a part of the settled order for the Lord’s day worship; and omitting it, maimeth and altereth the worship of the day . . .”²⁷
- Jonathan Edwards said, “It seems plain by the Scripture, that the primitive Christians were wont to celebrate this memorial of the sufferings of their dear Redeemer every Lord’s Day; and so I believe it will be again in the church of Christ, in days that are approaching.” He urged the administration of the Lord’s Supper every Lord’s Day.²⁸

But weekly communion is still the great minority practice in churches that would (ironically) value the theology of the above Reformers. I believe this is largely because we are still recovering from alien philosophical influences about our faith.

How creational or how *new creational* is your vision for the faith and life we have in Christ? If we envision our faith as a “philosophy” or a set of propositions, we find no place for a meal, even a small one. If we see worship as an emotion-fest, why eat and drink? If we see worship as an evangelistic crusade, why not wait until it’s over to dine? But if the new creation has broken into the world through the resurrection of Jesus, why not “do this” which He commanded, eating bread and drinking wine as a sign that Jesus lives and His kingdom is present. His kingdom presence is promised in the breaking of the bread.

Here, the pungent reproof of Philip J. Lee should be heard:

The irony of Protestant history is that although the sixteenth-century Reformers fought like tigers to restore the wine to the people, their descendants have now deprived the people of both bread and wine. The Protestant celebration, when it is on rare occasions held, has been spiritualized to the extent that it could scarcely be recognized as a meal at all. The purely symbolic wafer of the Roman celebration, which John Knox thundered against as a distortion of Christ's 'common bread' has in most Protestant churches been replaced by minute, carefully diced pieces of bread unlike any other bread ever eaten by any culture. The common cup which the medieval Church withheld from the faithful is, except among Anglicans, still the sole possession of the clergy. The unordained are now given thimble-like glasses filled with Welch's grape juice. The symbolism is quite clear. We all come before God individually; with our individual bits of bread and our individual cups of juice, we are not of one loaf and one chalice. Our relationship to Christ is private and personal. What may be even more significant is that by partaking of this unearthly meal with our unbreadly bread and our unwinely wine we are making a clear statement that the bread and wine of spiritual communion has no connection with earthly communion.²⁹

Conclusion

Having surveyed the landscape of Biblical thought, with exegetical detail, theological reflection, and with consideration of the practice of the Church fathers and the Reformers—they all concur: The Table of the Lord is to be included in the service of worship on each Lord's Day. The Table is the repeatable and tangible Gospel: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Do we really want to limit this gospel proclamation to merely quarterly or monthly? To reserve the Table to only a handful of times a year practically denies the significance that it is a *koinonia*, a fellowship in the body and blood and with each other (1 Cor. 10:16). When the priority of congregational worship on the Lord's Day is coupled with the covenantal realities underneath worship, the Lord's Table should be a central component of Lord's Day worship. If we "do this" we may, like those early disciples, see Christ manifest our worship through the eyes of faith. Then, may we discover "*how He was known to them in the breaking of bread*" (Luke 24:35).

Endnotes

- 1 *Screwtape Letters* Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 12–13.
- 2 Cited from the electronic edition contained in BibleWorks software, Norfolk, VA.
- 3 See any standard lexicon; I consulted Louw-Nida, Friberg, and Thayers.
- 4 *Letter 10* [c.a. 112], cited in James F. White's, *Document of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (Wesminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 18. Many of the citations I give can be found nicely arranged in White.
- 5 Section 14.
- 6 Section 15.
- 7 *Letter to the Magnesians* 8 [A.D. 110].
- 8 *Didascalia* 2 [A.D. 225].
- 9 *The Creation of the World* [A.D. 300].
- 10 *On Sabbath and Circumcision* 3 [A.D. 345].
- 11 International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) article on "Lord's Supper," from the electronic edition contained in BibleWorks software, Norfolk, VA.
- 12 *Apostolic Constitutions* 2:7:60 [A.D. 400].
- 13 Translated from Greek to English by John M. Neale, 1862.
- 14 A phrase from O. Palmer Robertson's, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980).
- 15 For example James B. Jordan's work on Leviticus and *Theses on Worship*, available from [www. BiblicalHorizons.com](http://www.BiblicalHorizons.com) (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons).
- 16 Even more, the definitive study on this is, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003).
- 17 My translation. This portion was presented as "Congregational Worship as Covenant Remembrance" at the Evangelical Theological Society's Eastern Regional meeting in Washington, D.C. in 2002.
- 18 Clearly then, the Biblical substance in the cup is fermented wine.
- 19 R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 472–473.
- 20 Clarence Tucker Craig, [Exegesis] *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 139.
- 21 F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 272.
- 22 W. Harold Mare, *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 259.
- 23 Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002).
- 24 Mathison, *Given for You*, 46.
- 25 To avoid some overly complicated endnotes, the following citations (Continental Reformers) are taken from Wes Baker's thoroughly documented text, "Weekly Communion in the Continental Reformed Tradition," made available here: www.wordmp3.com/files/Baker-ReformersWeeklyCommunion.pdf. Much of this material is presented in two recorded lectures from the 2002 PCA Reformed Liturgy Conference entitled, "The Importance of Weekly Communion" by Rev. Wes Baker, available through WordMp3.com.
- 26 Available online: <http://www.fivesolas.com/worship.htm>
- 27 *A Christian Directory*, 2:24:Question 2, p. 495, available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/baxter/practical.i.ii.html>
- 28 *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 428 available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.ix.vi.iii.html>
- 29 *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 272.