

BIBLE AUTHORITY AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

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One of the ways the New Testament authorizes is by example (pattern). Regarding when to observe the Lord's Supper, Acts 20:7 is a pattern that must be followed. It is, therefore, a sin to observe the Lord's Supper on any other day other than the first day of every week. However, found in the same context of Acts 20:7 are the following items of interest.

- 1) The church at Troas assembled in "the third loft."
- 2) There were many lights in the room where the church assembled.
- 3) Paul preached until midnight.

In the light of these facts, some might pose the following question. ***How is it that "the first day of the week" is an example (pattern) that must be followed, and the matters of points 1, 2, and 3 are not of the same obligatory nature?*** Let us see if we cannot answer this very important question.

ACCOUNTS OF ACTIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Many activities of the first century church are recorded in the New Testament. These constitute inspired accounts of the actions of the Lord's church at that time. How does anyone know which of these inspired accounts of actions done by the first century church are examples (patterns)? Moreover, having determined that an account of an action of the first century church **is** an example, how does one determine whether the example **must** be followed or whether it **may** be followed? Let us pursue the answers to these questions.

In the case of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), not one of the accounts of the Supper's institution mentions **when** to observe it (Mat. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). The preceding passages: 1) authorize the observance of the Lord's Supper, 2) teach the emblems to be used in its observance, 3) authorize the significance of the emblems, 4) set forth the attitude of the persons observing it, 5) teach the giving of thanks for the emblems, 6) reveal its observance in the kingdom of the Lord, 7) teach that it is a communion between the Lord and the citizens of His kingdom, and 8) point out that it is to show forth Christ's death until His return. Again, when to partake of the Lord's Supper is not addressed in these passages. Therefore, how does one determine when to partake of the Lord's Supper?

A PART STANDS FOR THE WHOLE

Luke records in Acts 20 that Paul is rushed for time when he reaches Troas (Acts 20:16). However, he waits seven days for the church to assemble on "the first day of the week" for the purpose of "breaking bread." The phrase "to break bread" is a **synecdoche**. This term means that a part stands for the whole or a whole for its parts. In the case of the Lord's Supper in Acts 20:7 a part of its observance is used to stand for the whole thing. Furthermore, the phrase under consideration is figurative. In actuality the church did not come together to only break bread into pieces. Moreover, "breaking of bread" had long been used of a common meal. However, the "breaking of bread" of Acts 20:7 is an action done by the assembled church once a week. Hence, it is obvious that the phrase means something other than a meal the design of which was to provide physical sustenance.

APOSTOLIC APPROVAL AND INSTRUCTION

The inspired apostle Paul would not sanction that which was not authorized by the New Testament (Col. 3:17). We, therefore, conclude that the conduct of the church at Troas, regarding the day on which the Supper is observed, reveals when God wants the Supper eaten. Paul had instructed the Galatians and Corinthians that the church was to give of its means in their worship assembly on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1, 2). Paul also taught the same thing to all the churches (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17).

THE TOTALITY OF BIBLE TEACHING

When we, therefore, put together the totality of the information in the New Testament regarding the Lord's Supper, we conclude that the account of the action of Paul and the church at Troas observing the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week constitutes an example or pattern regarding when the Lord's Supper is to be observed. Since there is no other information found in the New Testament revealing any other day on which brethren partook of the Lord's Supper we are constrained by the meaning of inspired words to conduct our observance of the Lords' Supper only on the first day of the week.

WHEN DOES THE BIBLE ACCOUNT OF AN ACTION CONSTITUTE AN EXAMPLE THAT MUST BE FOLLOWED?

An account of an action constitutes an example (pattern) that we **must** follow when we find the church with general apostolic approval and teaching (authority) practicing whatever it may be that is right within itself and essential to Christianity. In our present study, this would be the brethren in Troas, along with the apostle Paul, assembling on the first day of the week for the express purpose of worshipping God, a part of which is the observance of the Lord's Supper. This, as well as contributing of their means, they must do. Paul knew the doctrine that guided them in this matter and, though in a hurry to get to Jerusalem, he waited for seven days until they assembled to do as they were authorized (1 Cor. 16:1, 2; 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17).

EXAMPLES THAT MAY BE FOLLOWED

Why are the aforementioned accounts of the Troas brethren's actions found in points 1, 2, and 3 not a part of the imperative pattern (example) of Acts 20:7-9? The answer is, because they are not essential to one's discharging his scriptural obligation regarding the observance of the Lord's Supper. Point 1, 2, and 3 **may** be done, but they are not necessary for one in discharging his obligations to God in his observance of the Lord's Supper.

CONCLUSION

To do anything as service to Christ without His authority from the New Testament is to sin. To observe the Lord's Supper on any other day of the week other than Sunday (the first day of the week), is to do so without apostolic authority. Therefore, to attempt to partake of the Lord's Supper on any other day than the first day of the week is to sin.

Let us put forth the necessary mental effort to learn **how** to rightly divide the word of truth, then to determine that we will do **only** that for which there is New Testament authority (2 Tim. 2:15; Col 3:17). A part of such study means that we will learn **when** the account of an action in the New Testament of the first century church constitutes an example.~