

Positions on Communion

The Sunset congregation began meeting in 2010. Many of the (authorized) traditions of worship (such as times of worship, orders of worship, times of study, etc) necessary to worship in decency and in order were created at that time. This would include the observation of a second service, which the brethren of Sunset interpret as an authorized tradition; meaning, we have the liberty to observe a second serving of the Lord's Supper on Sunday, but not the obligation.

Our authority understanding is such:

Our congregation observes communion as spoken of in the Scriptures. We have found three absolute points of communion: **(1)** we must partake of it on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), **(2)** with Christians who come together in an assembly for that intent and purpose (1 Cor. 11:18,20,33), and **(3)** with the emblems given to us by Jesus (Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20). We refer to these as the three absolutes of communion.

The coming together for communion we define as the assembly is spoken of in I Corinthians 11:18 and I Corinthians 14:23, 26. We do not believe that Bible classes or other gatherings, either works of the church or not, are the "assembly" or coming together, and as such subject to that passage's authority.

(NOTE: this is also our understanding of permitting women to speak in Bible classes; we perceive the commandment of I Corinthians 14:34 pertains to the assembly to partake communion. However, the command that women cannot teach men stated in 1 Timothy 2:12 does apply to an assembly OR any activity)

Based on an examination of I Corinthians 11 with Acts 20:5-7, we do not perceive an unbreakable obligation for every member of a congregation to partake at the same time (in the same assembly on the first day). In other words, there are legitimate reasons some miss assembling and partaking (conditionally: sickness, travel, work, etc), and recognize that if we were obligated to only observe communion with 100 percent attendance, then we would not be able to do so most assemblies.

Based on an examination of I Corinthians 11, we believe that there is no authority to bring communion to those who are not able to attend services, or shut in. We find that the Scriptures indicated that communion has a threefold absolute revealed: it can only be on the first day of the week; it can only be taken with the Saints; it can only be the emblems described in Scripture.

Based on an examination of I Corinthians 11, we believe that the fundamental examination of permission to partake of communion falls not on the congregation, but on the person partaking communion. The key passage is I Corinthians 11:28: "*But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup*". From the same series of passages, we find that the

guilt for partaking in an unworthy manner is on the individual (vs 27), and the judgment for not observing is individual (vs 29).

Therefore, we conclude that the congregation is Divinely obligated (by necessary inference and direct commandment) to offer communion in the manner consistent with the authority it is given (on the correct day, in the correct order, with the correct emblems, in decency and in order), as well as to offer explanation as to the purpose and intent of the table. We also conclude that the individual is obligated (by direct command) to discern their place to partake of this.

Second Serving

The authority for a second serving is found in that it does not violate the nature of individual observation, nor does it violate the three absolutes of communion. Therefore, to offer it is consistent with the authority of a congregation.

One consideration of this authority is the example of Acts 20 and the partaking of communion by Paul with the Saints of Troas (or by any Saints who are visitors to another congregation). This reveals that it is within our authority to make the effort to partake of communion at a time and place not consistent with the congregation with which we have placed our membership. Meaning: Paul's waiting to observe communion with the saints in Troas, indicates the authority for an individual to make choice as to partaking of communion to their ability.

We hold that the authority to have a second serving of communion to those who were not able to partake is authorized as an expedience to the commandments of Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 19, and in I Corinthians 11. We hold it is an expedience because it permits the obedience to the commandments of these passages, and it does not violate the three fundamental consistencies of Communion in Scripture.

Questions:

Does a second serving violate our coming together for one mind and one purpose?

We recognize that there are some in our assembly who have a different purpose than others in the assembly. The unbeliever is permitted to be present in our assembly, but is not of the same mind (I Corinthians 14:23). The leaders of worship have a different purpose in worship than those following (in that they have the added duty of *leading* worship). The teacher has another purpose in the Bible study than the class. Therefore, if some assemble with us without the mind to partake when others have the mind to partake, this cannot be considered a violation of the unity of our purpose.

Does a second serving violate the command to assemble together and wait for one another?

Again we see an example in Acts 20:7. Paul was not a member of the church in Troas, but in Antioch. Yet as a visitor and not a member of that congregation he partook of communion; more to the point, he did not partake of communion in Antioch that day. We hold that it must be true that being legitimately absent of worship (sick, traveling, etc) does not mean the congregation cannot observe communion because not all are present. Thus "wait for one another" applies to the immediate context of the current assembly, and not all assemblies in general.

Does a second serving violate the unity of a congregation in general?

In I Corinthians 10:16-17 an appeal is made to the unity of the congregation using as an example the emblems of communion. Many use this appeal to exclusively authorize one cup and one loaf. However, we understand this to be an example that uses communion emblems, not a doctrine on communion. We note that Jesus used a similar example in John 6, and such does not support the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Does a second serving violate the use of authority, as there is no specific example of such in Scripture?

When we study authority, we find that the Bible reveals that God's permission comes in commandments, examples and necessary inference. We also understand that there are expedients in the authority of God. For example, there is no mention of song books, individual cups of communion, chairs, water fountains, buildings of worship, etc in the worship of the New Testament. We determine that these things are authorized as being expedient to the authority of God; they are the manners in which a command is observed, and do not contain an intent and purpose of themselves. If we are commanded to observe communion as a congregation, we have the authority to determine time, manner of distribution, and frequency of offering so long as these things are done in the authority of the three absolutes of communion.

Does a second serving encourage brethren to be absent for other assemblies?

No. We recognize that brethren who are not mindful of spiritual things might use a second serving for that purpose. However, as stated previously, the condemnation of communion is personal, not congregational, so long as the congregation has met its purpose in offering it. There are a number of things we do with authority some might see as "encouragement" to unfaithfulness; we have multiple Bible classes; we have multiple sermons; we offer communion early in the worship service time; we do not compel men to serve in a public way or as teachers. Any of these points could be seen as encouraging spiritual weakness. Fortunately, communion is placed as the responsibility of the member.

God authorized Christians to observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week in an assembly. There is no proof that every Christian in an assembly must partake at the same time, nor that every member must partake acceptably, for others to commune with Christ.

(Communion is with Christ, Mt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 10:16.) If one who has communed in an earlier assembly (such as a preacher who has preached at another congregation) can sit while others do what they came together to do - commune with Christ, any number may do the same thing. The Bible does not teach a "second communing," but it does teach that a Christian has the right, and the responsibility, to partake of the Lord's Supper in an assembly on the first day of the week. If a person conscientiously feels that he cannot commune on Sunday evening, he should not be pressured to participate in that when he does not believe to be scriptural, but no Christian has the authority to forbid others doing what they believe God authorizes them to do.