

An Apostolic Example

"The things which you both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do" (Phil. 4:9).

In our last article the question was raised, "Is it possible that we are obligated to follow an example, when the only directions regarding the matter are seen in the example itself?" In years past, brethren have been troubled by several different positions regarding examples. Some have taken the position that an example is never binding in the absence of a command which it illustrates. Some take the position that we must always have an example of what we do; that in the absence of an example nothing is lawful. These two positions illustrate extremes to the left and right, but are examples ever binding? Are they always binding?

Some examples are not binding because there may be two or more different things done following the same command. We are commanded to pray but we have examples of men standing as they were praying, and there are examples of men praying as they knelt. Clearly no one can do both at the same time. It is true that disciples came together in an upper room. It is also true that they met by a river side. Again, clearly no one can do both at the same time. In these examples the examples illustrates what we may do; not what we must do.

Nevertheless, we are persuaded that sometimes an example is binding: it is an example of what early Christians did which we must do. The most striking example is that of Troas Christians who came together on the first day of the week to break bread -- thus weekly first day communion (Acts 20:7). What evidence is there to support that this is an example of something we must do?

First, this is the only feast Christ commanded of His disciples. When God gave feasts for the Israelites to keep, always the date and frequency of that feast was specified: Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, Feast of weeks. It is unreasonable to suppose that Christ gave only one feast for men to keep, yet gave neither the day it was to be done nor the frequency it was to be observed.

Second, the importance of the first day of the week is that it was the day Jesus arose from the dead, the day the church began. Disciples met on that day in Troas, and in Corinth as well. Are we to suppose that the memorial of the heart of the religion of Christ was not an integral part of that assembly?

Third, the mention of the first day assembly of disciples at Troas is the only day specifically identified as "disciple related." There were other days disciples met, to be sure, but no other day is specifically identified. The Troas assembly was not the only time Paul, as well as other apostles, met with disciples, but it is the only day specifically mentioned.

Fourth, the Corinthians were accustomed to first day gatherings, as is clear from Paul's instructions regarding how to collect funds for the needs of saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1f). This latter was a command which did include the first day gatherings, but it was a command for contributions, not for communion. But while the Corinthians were meeting on the first day, Paul gave instructions of something else they were to begin doing in addition to what they already were doing on that day. What else had the disciples at Corinth been doing? They had been meeting ostensibly to observe the Lord's Supper, which they could not do because of their desecration of it (1 Cor. 11). Are we to conclude that some Sundays they kept the supper, while other Sundays they did not? The language hardly allows that. "*Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, wait on for another*" (1 Cor. 11:33). "*Eating*" in this passage refers to the eating of the Lord's Supper; study the balance of that chapter. Disciples at Troas came together to break bread; disciples in Corinth came together to eat: both to eat the same thing: the Lord's Supper.

Some of the earliest secular histories of disciples mention weekly communion as a mark of their identity. It was then and it is now. The example of Troas Christians gathering on the first day to break bread is an illustration of an example of something Christians must do.

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