

Are Christians Commanded to Worship on the First Day of the Week?

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This article is in response to a letter I received concerning passages which are sometimes used to promote special first day worship for believers living under the New Covenant.

I appreciate your diligence to study the Scriptures in regards to a day of worship or rest. This is a response to your letter concerning the texts of Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2 and Romans 14:5. We hope you will continue to study this important topic.

ACTS 20:7-11

⁷Now 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. (NKJV throughout unless otherwise noted.)

We immediately learn from the text that the disciples came together to break bread and that Paul spoke to them. We also learn that this took place on the **first day of the week**. Most Sunday or first day keepers point out the phrase “break bread” and contend that this has the meaning of eating the Lord’s Supper; this in an inaccurate assertion. The breaking of bread was done on a daily basis (Acts 2:46). This refers to merely sharing in a common meal and not partaking in the Lord’s Supper. Indeed, the phrase “break bread” at least refers to the Lord’s Supper one time in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 which reads:

¹⁶The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? **The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?** ¹⁷For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; **for we all partake of that one bread.**

With this being the case let us explain why we do not believe the phrase “break bread” has the meaning of the Lord’s Supper in Acts 20:7. At this point a comparison chart will be used so as to illustrate the differences between Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-34.

Acts 20:7	1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-34
The phrase “break bread” is not accompanied by anything in regards to Christ’s body.	(10:16) Breaking of bread is referred to as the communion of Christ’s body.
Simply says, “when the disciples were come together”.	(11:17) Says, “When ye come together in the church”
Simply says, “to break bread”, does not call it the Lord’s supper.	(11:20) Calls the meal the Lord’s Supper.

The breaking of bread in Acts 20:7 actually did not take place till after midnight (Acts 20:11, and is associated with the verb “eaten”; implying hunger. Paul was hungry after speaking that night and needed to satisfy his hunger. The Lord’s Supper was not a meal eaten to satisfy hunger at all (1 Cor. 11:17-34). One could say that the disciples coming together in Acts 20:7 means that it was the Lord’s Supper, but the disciples could come together to eat a common meal too. There is nothing wrong with coming together with brethren to eat a common meal and talk about the Bible. Furthermore Paul, by *Apostolic* tradition, delivered unto the Corinthian Assembly what the Savior had delivered unto him:

²³For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Yeshua **on the same night in which He was betrayed** took bread... (1 Cor. 11:23)

Here Paul delivers unto the church the time in which the Lord’s Supper is to be eaten, i.e. the same night in which the Messiah was betrayed. We know that the Passover lambs in Israel were killed on the 14th day of Aviv, between the two evenings, which would be around what we call 3:00 p.m. (Ex. 12:6; 2 Chr. 35:1, 14). The Messiah, our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7-8) was killed at the same time (Jn. 19:14, 31). Seeing that the Messiah died around 3:00 p.m. on the 14th day of Aviv, this means that he ate the Last Supper (which Paul calls the Lord’s Supper) at the beginning of the 14th day of Aviv, in the evening. This is when the Lord’s Supper is to be eaten today according to 1 Corinthians 11:23.

The point is this: Paul and company sailed away from Phillipi after the days of unleavened bread which were in turn after the slaughtering of the Passover lamb (Lev. 23:4-6). Seeing that the 14th of Aviv had already taken place, Paul and the disciples did not eat the Lord’s Supper in Acts 20:7. They rather came together at night (Acts 20:7-11) because Paul was ready to depart the next day.

What about Paul preaching? Many first-day keepers point out that Paul indeed preached to the people here on the first day of the week, and thus feel they find authorization to do the same. However, Paul did not preach to them as we think of preaching today.

The Greek word for preached in Acts 20:7 is taken from #1256 in Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance and is defined as follows:

G1256 διαλέγομαι *dialogomai* *dee-al-eg'-om-ah-ee* Middle voice from G1223 and G3004; to *say thoroughly*, that is, *discuss* (in argument or exhortation):—dispute, preach (unto), reason (with), speak.

This word is used in the Greek New Testament a total of 13 times. It is translated reason or reasoned 4 times as in Acts 18:4 which says, “*And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.*” It is translated disputed 3 times as in Jude 1:9 which says, “*Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses.*” It is also translated disputing (Acts 19:8-9; Acts 24:12), speaketh (Heb. 12:4-5), and preached/preaching (Acts 20:7,9). The word in Acts 20:7 should most likely be translated reasoned. Paul reasoned with them and was long reasoning with them. This is why his speech lasted until midnight and continued till the break of day (Acts 20:11).

The fact that this took place on the first day of the week proves nothing in regards to the sanctity of the day. Furthermore, even if it could be shown that the first day of the week is to be a day of partaking in the Lord’s Supper and having preaching as we know it, it would not prove that the weekly Sabbath was abolished or no longer to be kept. In this case both the weekly Sabbath would be observed and then the first day appropriately.

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-2

Many 21st century “Christians” use this passage as a proof-text for a first day worship service, but in examining the passage carefully and properly, all such claims vanish. This is because of the purpose and intent of what the Apostle wrote in regards to the collection for the saints of the church at Jerusalem.

We find that Paul told the Corinthian Christians to do the same in the collection for the saints as he had instructed the churches of Galatia (1 Cor. 16:1). Notice the collection was for the saints. It was a collection that would eventually be brought in relief of the Christian synagogue at Jerusalem; a relief from the famine they were experiencing at that time. Notice what Paul wrote to the church at Rome concerning this same collection.

²⁵But now I am going to Jerusalem **to minister to the saints**. ²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make **a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem**. ²⁷It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister **to them in material things**. (Romans 15:25-27)

Paul here shows that it was not only the Corinthians and Galatians who were in this contribution (1 Cor. 16:1) but also peoples from both Macedonia and Achaia. We also see in the above verse that there were poor saints living in Jerusalem at that time and they were in need of being ministered to materially. A famine was occurring according to Acts 11:27-30. The famine was here prophesied of and it was said amongst the disciples that plans must be made for relief.

Paul spoke of this collection to the Corinthian assembly in a little more detail in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. The collection was specifically to be brought for relief of the Jerusalem church (1 Cor. 16:3) and was eventually brought by Paul himself to Jerusalem (Acts 24:17).

Take special note of the phrase “...*lay by him in store*...” in 1 Corinthians 16:2. This phrase in the Greek has the meaning of at ones home rather than in a “church collection plate” on “Sunday” morning. J.P. Greens Internlinear Bible reads literally, “...*Every first of a week each of you by himself let him put, storing up whatever he is prospered, that not when I come then collections there be*...” Some have objected to a storing up at ones home on the grounds that Paul said this was to be done so that no gatherings need be made when he came. If they stored it up at home then Paul would have had to gather it when he came. However, this statement disregards what the passage actually says. The passage literally reads “...*by himself let him put*...” therefore that is what is literally being said. The objection concerning Paul’s gathering is simple; Paul was concerned with telling them ahead of time what to do so that when he got there everything could be easily accounted for by each man and quickly obtained by Paul. Had Paul waited until he got there to give them instructions he would have to wait for everyone to gather their collections.

Why did Paul have them do it on the first day of the week? In answer to that question allow me to quote from a Dr. Daniel Botkin’s article entitled “*A Sunday Sabbath in 1 Cor. 16:2; An Example of Eisegesis*”

Why one the first day of the week? Wasn’t payday on Fridays? As a seventh-day Sabbath-keeper, I can understand the benefit of using the first day of the week to do my financial planning for the coming week. Monday through Friday I go to the post office each day to get the mail. If there are checks that come in from readers, I write thank-you notes and set the checks aside. I do not go to the post office on Sabbath, but I go after Sabbath is over, either Saturday night or Sunday morning. Then on Sunday, the first day of the week, I begin my weekly financial chores. I record the week’s donations in the books and in a card file; I endorse the checks, total them, and get the deposit ready for my weekly trip to the bank on Monday. (If I could, I would complete the task by making the deposit on Sunday, but of course the bank is closed that day.) At the same time, I also look at my own personal

expenses for the coming week and figure how much money I will need to deposit in my personal account to cover bills, and how much cash I will need for the week.

Because I am in the habit of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and doing my weekly financial chores on the first day of the week, 1 Corinthians 16:2 makes perfect sense to me. If I were to receive a letter from the Apostle Paul with these instructions, I would understand what he was telling me to do. And I guarantee one thing: I would not imagine that Paul was telling me to put my offerings into a public collection plate each week at a Sunday Sabbath service.

I should also note that the 1 Corinthians 16 passage deals specifically with the situation that was at hand concerning the present famine of that day. There is no suggestion elsewhere in Scripture that after the relief was taken to the church at Jerusalem the collections continued to be stored up in the same manner on the first day of the week. Had another situation arose where this was needed we could conclude that this would again be done, but nothing is said that it continued after the relief was gotten by Paul and taken to Jerusalem.

The passages of Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 16:2 speak nothing of regular first-day gatherings at all. They rather deal with specific instances of certain situations. Mind you, that even if it could be shown from these two passages that we are supposed to set aside the first day of the week as a day of worship it would not negate the keeping of the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, as the early Assembly did along with the new moons, and annual festivals (Acts 2:1; 13:42-44; 15:19-21; 18:21; 20:16; 24:11; 27:9; Colossians 2:16-17).

ROMANS 14

This particular chapter in Scripture is one which deals at great length with issues of non-essentiality; issues which are not binding upon all Christians, but rather are personal convictions or preferences for each individual believer. For instance in verses 1-3 we find that there is a weak brother who only eats vegetables, while another brother eats all things, i.e. meat. The weakness of the first brother is defined in 1 Corinthians 8:7 where it says that some people cannot eat meat offered to an idol for their conscience is *weak* and would be defiled. This is why the Gentiles of Acts 15 were commanded to abstain from things offered to idols (Acts 15:20). They had been stooped in idolatry and at that time would not be able to absolutely shake of the notion that an idol was actually a real being. Their consciences, being weak, would have been defiled had they partaken in meats offered to idols.

Concerning the subject of days in Romans 14 I've heard some people say, "Well, the Bible says don't esteem one day above another." However, the Bible does not make such a statement at all. The Bible rather says that *one man* esteems one day above another while the *other man* esteems every day alike. Nothing is said in the text that we are commanded to not esteem one day above another.

What were the men differing about? Was it concerning some keeping the Sabbath and others not keeping the Sabbath? Not at all; noticing the context and the older Greek manuscripts will allow us to arrive at the correct conclusion. Let us first quote Romans 14:5-6 in the King James Version:

⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. ⁶He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; **and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it***. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth (the) Almighty thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth (the) Almighty thanks.

Notice the emboldened sentence above. This sentence is lacking from the older Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. This is why the sentence does not occur in such Bibles as the ASV or RSV. In the American Standard Version, Romans 14:5-6 reads:

⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. ⁶He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord: *(missing text)* and he that eateth, eateth unto the Lord, for he giveth (the) Almighty thanks; and he that eateth not, unto the Lord he eateth not, and giveth (the) Almighty thanks.

We see here that the sentence is missing from the ASV seeing that this particular version of the Bible is based upon earlier manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. What is the significance? Notice verse six says that the man that regards the day does so to the Lord, then the next phrase says that he who eats, eats unto the Lord and gives thanks, but the one that does not eat, does so with thanks to the Almighty as well. It thus appears that the issue was that days were being set aside as special for fasting purposes. One man would esteem a particular day and not eat (fast) and do so towards Yahweh. Another man would eat and give Yahweh thanks and that was fine too. Each man was to be fully persuaded in his mind in regards to these personal preference days. Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi states in his book *From Sabbath to Sunday* page 365 the following:

Observe that the conflict between the “weak” and the “strong” over diet and days is only remotely related (if at all) to the Mosaic law. **The “weak man” who “eats only vegetables” (14:2), drinks no wine (14:21) and “esteems on day as better [apparently for fasting] than another” (14:5) can claim no support for such convictions from the Old Testament.** Nowhere does the Mosaic law prescribe strict vegetarianism, total abstinence from wine and a preference for fasting days... The whole discussion then is not about freedom to observe the law versus freedom from its observance, but **concerns “unessential” scruples of conscience dictated not by divine precepts but by human conventions and superstitions.** Since these differing convictions and practices did not undermine the essence of the Gospel, Paul advises mutual tolerance and respect in this matter.

I might point out that even from the KJV this understanding can be readily obtained. The earlier manuscripts of the Greek New Testament make it clearer in my opinion, but the same basic understanding is obtained from both versions. Thus we have nothing in the text insinuating that the Apostle was saying it was okay to not observe the Sabbath if you felt it was not needed. It was a commandment that was binding upon all Christians living under the New Covenant, and was kept by the early 1st century assembly.

Hopefully this short letter has been beneficial to your studies in regards to these issues of the Sabbath. Any further questions are readily welcomed, and we will do our best to answer accordingly.

Your friend in Messiah,

Brother Matthew Janzen

