

ON THE FREQUENCY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The comment that Jesus and the apostle Paul commanded that the Passover Christian celebration commonly called the Lord's Supper be celebrated only once a year requires more justification than merely giving the Bible reference **(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)** together with the bald statement that the words 'once a year' is 'the correct contextual interpretation.' It must surely be obvious that the Greek words 'hosakis ean' in **(vv 25,26)** mean 'as often as'. The NIV chooses to translate these words as 'whenever', which ordinarily has the same meaning as 'as often as'.

When I say, "I will come as often as I can", it means "I will come whenever I can." By choosing to translate 'hosakis ean' as 'whenever', the NIV did not mean it is for people to substitute the words 'once a year', which is said to be 'the correct contextual interpretation'. Is the substitution justified?

This substitution presupposes that the occasion (the Passover) used by the Lord to institute the new covenant in His blood begins and ends with that - and there is nothing more to add. It is to impute that the Lord Jesus cannot command anything new. Such as giving instructions on the need to remember Him, along with His precious death and its importance, as often as the disciples could manage. Which is what 'hosakis ean' (as often as) means. What is more 'often' than when a meal (like a supper) is eaten, especially when that meal is a communal meal shared among believers? The NT clearly shows that the Lord's Supper was celebrated much more often than once a year and had replaced the Jewish Passover as a Christian celebration.

Let's look at the evidence from Scripture.

(1) Luke tells us that the Lord said; "When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you. I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God'." **Luke 22: 14,15**

A simple rule of interpretation is that a Bible passage purporting to teach a doctrine must be compared with other relevant parts of Scripture so as to get the whole picture. The Lord chose the Passover for the occasion quite obviously because of the connotations of that first Passover when Yahweh delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt. It is entirely appropriate for Jehoshua (Jesus) to have done so because 'Christ, our Passover lamb' **(1 Corinthians 5:7)** was going to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. Apart from this fact and the timing (because of the Passover's significance to the occasion) there is no indication that the Lord intended that the feast He instituted was to be celebrated once a year as a modified form of the traditional annual Jewish Passover feast. The context is a Jewish feast (that is true) but the interpretation that all future gatherings to commemorate that evening's Supper must therefore be timed to the Jewish Passover is reading into the text that which the rest of Scripture does not support.

(2) On the contrary, Scripture teaches that the early Christians celebrated the Supper in the manner the Lord asked them to do. Not just to remember Him once a year, but 'hosakis ean', a frequency that the Lord communicated through Paul in the first letter

to the Corinthians, chapter 11. (By the way, what use or how much effort is there to remember someone, just once a year! It is the exhortation to remember Him ever so often that is what the Lord meant by 'hosakis ean'.) Look at the following verses on the frequency with which the early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper and draw your own conclusions.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes, and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." **Acts 2 : 42, 46** Do these verses sound like breaking bread and therefore remembering the Lord was a rare event?

"When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other?" **1 Corinthians 11 : 20, 33** Do these verses sound like Paul was dismayed by the annual show of bad manners only during an annual gathering? Or, what is more likely, he is reprimanding some of them for their lack of concern for fellow believers when they met for their regular fellowship around the table, outside their homes. Don't miss the point of the context of this meal. It is the meal where the remembrance of the Lord is celebrated 'when they come together as a church'. (**1 Corinthians 11 : 17, 18**). Again, in context, how often do people come together as a church ? Not once a year, surely.

And what of this verse from **Acts 20 : 7** describing Paul's visit to Troas? "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul preached to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight." Would not Paul have followed the practice of the remembering the Lord when they broke bread at this meal, as seems to have been the normal thing for the Christians at Troas to do on the first day of the week?

See what overriding presuppositions do to people when they interpret Bible passages even knowing original languages and the importance of contextual interpretation?

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"The Lord is risen indeed !"