

December Questions and Answers

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
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PM Worship

Introduction:

May we have an alternate assembly on Saturday evening in which brethren take the Lord's Supper?

On November 5, in its weekly newsletter, *LoveLines*, the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ announced its intention to begin a weekly Saturday assembly in an article entitled "Saturday-Night Assembly for 2004." The same newsletter presented another article entitled "The Lord's Day" attempting to provide biblical authority for such an assembly. Someone has asked if such an assembly is authorized scripturally. We will begin by reading the two articles. Then we will address the question, demonstrating that this alternate assembly on Saturday evening violates God's pattern in two ways. (The articles are attached to this outline.)

Discussion:

- I. The concept of divided and alternate assemblies violates the biblical pattern.
 - A. **Hebrews 10:25** says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Further, we learn from **I Corinthians 5:4; 11:18; 14:23**, that this concept of assembling is not just the idea of having some kind of service on the church's property. The assembling that we are supposed to do is a gathering of the whole church. In a system with four alternate assembly times, when does the whole church gather?
 - B. According to the articles, the Woodmont church does not have four different assemblies, but rather four alternate occurrences of the same assembly from which the members choose a convenient time to attend. "[The Saturday evening service] will be programmed like the three that will follow on Sunday morning—same themes, biblical texts, music, etc." By design, the whole church never comes together in one place. Rather, different portions of the congregation come together at different times. Certainly, it is not wrong to have classes or meetings in which only portions of the congregation meet together. But if that is all a congregation offers, then it has forsaken the assembling of itself together because it does not have a time for the whole church to come together. The fact that some may sinfully forsake or that some may legitimately miss the assembly does not make it any less the assembly of the church. But dividing the assembly and cutting people out of it certainly does.
 - C. To drive this point home, notice two quotes from the respective articles. The first article said, "Several of our key volunteers in both teen and children's ministry, for example, are too frequently unable to make it to the Great Hall for worship on Sunday mornings. The reason is not lack of desire on their part but such heavy involvement with the needs of both groups and individuals under their charge that they simply use up the entire morning in ministry!" The second article said, "...we are initiating a Saturday-night service for volunteers who staff Sunday classes and who are 'cut out of' our assemblies ..."
 - D. What has happened here? The Woodmont Hills church has set up classes and "ministries" that cut some of their members out of the assembly. Certainly other avenues of ministering to one another aside from the congregational assembly can be established. But why break up the God commanded assembly to establish these other avenues. Instead of setting up alternate assembly times for those who are staffing classes and "ministries," why not let the whole congregation minister to one another during the assembly, as **Hebrews 10:24-25** says, and set up a different time for those other classes and ministries?
- II. Taking the Lord's Supper (and, presumably, a collection) on Saturday violates the Lord's pattern.
 - A. According to **Acts 20:7** and **I Corinthians 11:20; 16:2**, we learn that these aspects of congregational worship were authorized for the first day of the week—Sunday. The two paragraphs with which Rubel Shelly attempts to "extend the concept of the Lord's Day from 24 to 36 hours" give a nod and a wink to **Acts 20:7**, but really fall short of providing biblical authority. Refer to the second and third paragraphs of the article entitled "The Lord's Day."
 - B. Instead of providing true biblical authorization for the Saturday Lord's Supper, the article actually appeals to the teachings of men ("the majority of New Testament scholars"), says the Bible is unclear (there are two options, either of which challenges our modern concepts), presents a

false dilemma (there are two and only two options for when the Supper was eaten and we have to choose one of the ones he presented) and concludes by slanderously labeling everyone who disagrees with him (if we do not agree, we are legalistic).

- C. The crux of the problem lies in the false dilemma which Shelly presents. He writes as though there are only two options for us to consider. Either the disciples met on Saturday evening, intending to take the Lord's Supper then, but because of Paul's long sermon did not take it until Sunday, thus authorizing Woodmont Hills' new practice. Or the disciples did in fact gather on Sunday but because of Paul's sermon did not actually eat the supper until early Monday morning. But these are not the only options. There is another option.
- D. First, we must clearly note that the disciples gathered on the first day of the week in order to break bread (**Acts 20:7**). For all the rhetoric we put forth and for all the confusion we might try to cause by talking about Jewish days vs. Gentile days, we must still come back to this, the disciples believed they were gathering on the first day of the week. If we are going to follow their pattern, we also must gather on what we believe is the first day of the week.
- E. Further, note that Paul was planning on departing the next day. This next day is set against their meeting on the first day of the week. It refers to the second day of the week, not just the idea of the next period of sunlight. The assembly of the church continued on until midnight, then Paul spoke with the brethren until daybreak and departed (**vs. 11**). If the disciples actually met on what we call Saturday evening, believing that the first day of the week began that sundown and continued until the following sundown, then Paul did not depart on the next day, but on the same day. Thus, despite what the majority of New Testament scholars say, the disciples must not have gathered on Saturday evening believing it was the first day of the week. That rules out the Saturday night option.
- F. What about the second option? Did they actually eat the supper early Monday morning? No. The disciples did exactly what they intended to. They gathered on the first day of the week to take the Lord's Supper and they did exactly that. Pay careful attention to the text and you will notice that the church did not take the Lord's Supper after midnight. In fact, their assembly did not even continue past midnight.
 - 1. The disciples met to break bread together on the first day of the week. Additionally, Paul "spoke (dialegomai)" and "continued his message (logos)" until midnight (**vs. 7**). These terms together present a picture of an extended, unified sermon. However, at about midnight, Eutychus fell asleep and fell out of a window (**vs. 9**). This disrupted the assembly. Paul went down to Eutychus, and raised him from the dead (**vs. 10**). In **vs. 11**, the assembly is not continued, as some suppose, with the taking of the Lord's Supper and Paul preaching another sermon. Instead something else takes place.
 - 2. Notice, in **vs. 11**, the text says Paul "talked (homileo) a long while, even till daybreak." The term translated here is a word that indicates conversation. Paul is no longer preaching; he is now having a conversation with the brethren. The assembly was not continuing; the brethren were simply visiting with Paul, just as we do after our assemblies are over. Secondly, notice in **vs. 11**, only Paul broke bread and ate. Does that sound like the Lord's Supper? No, this is Paul eating a meal, not the church eating the Lord's Supper. When Paul left the brethren he was going to make a 20 mile hike to Assos to meet his companions that have already left (**vs. 13**). The brethren were feeding Paul before he left. This is natural considering where they were meeting. They had their assembly in someone's upper room, once the assembly was over, they lingered on visiting with and feeding the preacher in preparation for his trip.
- G. Option two is ruled out, leaving us with exactly what we ought to do today—take the Lord's Supper on Sunday.

Conclusion:

We can have assemblies anytime we want to. The Jerusalem church had them every day according to **Acts 2:46**. We can have classes or meetings of different groups within the congregation any time we want to. But we have to have regular assemblies of the whole congregation together and we may only participate in the Lord's Supper on Sunday. Our answer then is, "No, we may not have an alternate assembly on Saturday evening in which brethren take the Lord's Supper."