

CHAPTER VIII.

OBJECTIONS TO CHURCH COMMUNION REVIEWED.

I. *“Paul and his eight companions, belonging to different churches, communed with the church at Troas.”* 2. *A local church has the RIGHT to invite members of other churches to her table.* 3. *It tends to destroy fellowship between the churches, and creates an extreme independency.*

THE only Scripture adduced to justify the intercommunion of the members of different churches, is the claimed example of Paul and his eight attendants communing with the church at Troas (Acts xx: 7). This is a most serviceable passage, being used by theorists to sustain diverse and **opposite** practices.

I. It was first forced into service against the Sabbatarians, or Seven-Day Christians, as a proof that the apostles and the churches they planted observed the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath, which day they spent in preaching, and hearing the Word, and observing the Supper.

But this coming together at Troas was at the **close** of the day, and not in the morning.

(1) It is the main reliance of the advocates of **weekly communion**. The church at Troas communed weekly, and, therefore, all churches should now.

(2) It is the chief and only authority of the advocates of **Intercommunion**. They argue: Paul and his eight companions, belonging to different churches, communed with the church at Troas, and, therefore, it is right, and the duty of members of different churches, to intercommune now.

(3) It is the only passage quoted in support of **social communion**. They argue that, since there was no church at Troas in the first century—which they prove—Paul and his brethren celebrated the Supper **socially**, without the presence of a church, and so may Christians now.

It is evident that these opposite theories can not be sustained by this one passage; and I confidently affirm that they are all equally unsupported by this passage since they rest upon one or both of these two bald assumptions, viz.:

1. That there was a church at Troas.

2. That the Lord’s Supper was celebrated by Paul and his traveling companions.

I am satisfied, after a patient examination, that—

There was no church at Troas in the lifetime of Paul—

Because, 1. There is no intimation in the New Testament that Paul, or any apostle, or missionary, ever preached a sermon in Troas before Paul’s last visit. If they did visit and preach there, 2. There is no evidence a church was ever organized or existed there; nor 3. Mention of any brother residing there, or belonging to it; while the proof, both from the New Testament and the earliest ecclesiastical writers, seems conclusive that there was no church there in the first century, at least. Those who contend for a church believe that it was gathered by Paul in one of his missionary tours, which the Holy Spirit did not prompt Luke to record; and a tour of which Luke either never heard, or regarded too unimportant to describe! I have no theory or exegetical

difficulty that requires what the Holy Spirit has not revealed. Luke nowhere intimates that Paul ever visited Troas but **twice**.

1. In his first missionary journey (Acts 13 and 14) he did not go west so far as Troas.

2. In his second, he visited Troas with the intent to preach, but the Holy Spirit forbade him to preach in “Asia,” of which Mysia was a province, and Troas its chief city. Here, in his perplexity, being straitly shut up, the Lord opened a door for him into Macedonia; and, leaving Troas, and the friends he had made there, he entered that door **immediately**, and departed to Philippi, and there planted a church. For this account, see Acts xvi: 6-12.

3. The next intimation we have of Paul’s visit to Troas is in Acts xx: 3-6, at which visit one claim that he, or his fellow ministers, organized a church.

4. But it is confidently asserted and contended that Paul made a missionary journey intermediate between these two, during which he visited Troas, and remained some time, and planted a prosperous church. This is purely **inferential**. If the Acts of the Apostles is the Word of God, I do not presume to add to it; nor am I prepared to charge Luke—who, if the Acts are Holy Scriptures, wrote under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit—with gross unfaithfulness. All that is important and useful for **us** to know, we must believe that the Spirit indited. The discussion of this question, and the important questions connected with it, show that it is more **important** for us to know that there was, or was not, a church at Troas, than at any other place, or all other places, in proconsular Asia.

It is mainly upon Paul’s reference to a door being once opened to him, when he was in Troas (2 Cor. ii: 12), that this whole theory of an intermediate unrecorded missionary visit is based, and the intimation contained in Acts xx: 2. But this passage is quite fatal to a missionary tour in Asia, since it expressly states that he departed to go into **Macedonia** and spent his time going over “those parts.” My space does not allow me a further suggestion concerning that opened door, and into what place it opened, than the one above. It is enough for me that the Scriptures are silent as the grave touching a church, or a disciple, being at Troas, and I leave speculations to speculators. Some thirty-eight years after this, Christ commanded John, then on Patmos, to write letters to **the seven** churches that were in Asia, which clearly implies that there were seven there, and only seven in Asia at that time. From the earliest ecclesiastical writers we learn that, though there had been others, as the one at Colosse and at Hierapolis, they had been destroyed by earthquakes—fourteen cities having been destroyed in fourteen successive years in the reign of Nero (see App. B); and that there was not a church at Troas in the first century. I have no theory that requires me to **infer** a church at that place against the teachings of both the Word of God and ecclesiastical history.

The second assumption of a communion service held at Paul’s last visit (Acts xx) is equally destitute of support from the narrative, and in violation of Paul’s own teachings, as set forth in this book. (See p. 111, Chap. III.)

Let us, without prejudice, examine Luke’s narrative—using the Bible Union version:

“And there accompanied him unto Asia, Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, a Berean; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These, having gone forward, were waiting for **us** [Paul and Luke] at Troas. But we [Paul and Luke] sailed forth from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came to **them** [the above-named brethren] to Troas in five days; where we [Paul and his company] abode seven days. And on the first day of the week, **we** [Paul and all his companions], having come together to break bread, Paul discoursed to **them** [the self-same persons—the last “them” refers to Paul’s companions], being about to depart on the morrow, and continued his discourse

until midnight. And he [Paul] having come up, and had broken the bread, and eaten, he talked a long while, even till break of day, and so he departed.”—(Acts xx: 4-12).

There is not the slightest intimation that Paul’s disciples at Troas met Paul on his arrival, or brethren received him into their houses; not the slightest, that on that Saturday or Sunday night, when Paul and his companions gathered for their last meal and discourse from Paul, that any person, save that company of fellow-travelers, came together. The “we” of the seventh verse relates to the same persons that the “we” of the sixth verse does; and the “them” of the seventh verse refers to the self-same persons that the “them” of the sixth verse does. It was with these fellow-travelers that Paul and Luke assembled, and it was specifically for the instruction of these young ministers, as they were, that he discoursed, expounded the Scriptures and reasoned with them through that long night. There is not the least intimation that a single soul was present in that **third** story—the most unlikely place for a public meeting—save Paul and his fellow-travelers, for the “we” of the eighth verse logically embraces no more than Paul and his companions. “But a young man, Eutychus, was in the window.” Certainly; and it is singular that he is not claimed as one of the members of the church at Troas, as Carpus is for its pastor. It is far more probable that Carpus was the innkeeper, with whom these travelers lodged; and Eutychus the servant appointed to wait upon them. Heinricks and Rosenmuller hold that it was a common name, belonging to servants and slaves. Paul, it seems, did not seek an introduction to him after his resuscitation.

Another item that supports the above, is the verb translated, in the seventh and ninth verses, “to preach,” which is nowhere else, in the New Testament, so translated, but “to reason with” (Acts xvii: 2; xviii: 4, 19; xxiv: 12), and “to dispute” (Mark ix: 34; Acts xvii: 17; xix: 8, 9; xxiv: 12; Jude 9); and it is significant that, later on, Luke says, “he **talked** on, even until daybreak.”

It is my conviction if the Holy Spirit designed to use an expression that would not have misled, he would have employed the same one used in every other place where **arton**, bread, is the direct object of **klan**—to break; in every such case we find (in the Greek), the definite article before **arton**, “**ton arton**”—**the** loaf—a particular kind of bread, and not simply **arton**, a loaf, or bread, the bread of a communion meal. It seems reasonable that a distinction should be made between a common supper or meal and the Lord’s Supper, else there will be uncertainty in the minds of even scholars, as there is touching Acts ii: 42 and 46. With those who recognize no distinguishing phrase, I think the distinction is marked in those passages. In v. 42 we read “and in the breaking of **the** loaf,” as artos should be rendered with the definite article—“**tee klasei ton arton**.” Here we have **the** before bread—where the Lord’s Supper is undoubtedly meant. In v. 46, “And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread** from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness,” etc. Here where a common meal is referred to, **arton**, bread, is without the definite article.

In Acts xx: 11, where Paul undoubtedly took a common meal, we have “**klasas arton**,” without the definite article.

In 1 Cor. x: 16, we have “**ton arton hon kloomen**,” “**the** loaf which we break,” the definite article before bread. In the next verse we find “**ex tou henos artou**,” we all partake of **the** one loaf—the definite article before bread, and the supper is undoubtedly referred to.

In the next chapter, v. 26, Paul, referring to the bread of the Lord’s Supper, says: “As often as ye eat this bread (in the Greek) “**ton arton toutou**,” this **the** loaf, etc. In v. 27: “Whosoever shall eat **this** bread,” “**ton arton – the** loaf.” In the next verse, “And so let a man eat of **that** bread,” “**ex tou artou**,” “of **the** loaf.” This, to my mind, means something, *i.e.*, the

designation of a particular kind of bread used for a specific purpose—the Lord’s Supper. Had the inditing Spirit used the phrase, *klasai ton arton*, in verse 7, and *klasas arton*, as he did in verse 11, every mind would have been satisfied, but he used the self-same phrase, *klasai arton*, that he uses in acts ii: 4, and xx: 11, where a common meal is designated. I feel justified in believing that a common meal—Alford suggests a **love feast**, which was a full meal – is intended to be designated in verse 7, as well as in 11. Can any one conceive why the same phrase should be used in these two verses of the same chapter, if one is the Lord’s Supper and the other a common meal? From the above introduction of facts, I conclude that **klan** (infinitive), **arton** is never used to designate the Lord’s Supper, but **klan ton arton** is always used when **arton** is the **direct** object of **klan**, where the Supper is undoubtedly alluded to.

There is no proof that there was a church at Troas. There is no proof that Paul and his companions observed the Lord’s Supper at Troas.

2. It is objected that should the Supper be observed as a **church** ordinance, a majority of our preachers could not commune with the churches they preach to, since they serve three, four, and sometimes five.

But this comes of our departure from apostolic appointment and practice. In their day there was then a pastor to **every** church, and elders in them all, and these belonged to the churches they served, and it **should** be so **now**, and then this objection would fall. But shall we bend the scriptures to our bad practice, or conform our practice to the scriptures? Is there a minister pastor of four churches who claims that he has a right to participate in any **other church** privilege, in churches of which he is **not** a member, save this? He, as their official servant, administers their baptisms, but does he claim the right to vote on the reception of candidates for baptism? He, as **pastor**, is the moderator of their business meetings, and can preside and put motions, but can he vacate his chair and vote with these churches, or as moderator, in case of a tie? Certainly he can not. He **knows**, if he knows enough to be a pastor, that he can not enjoy church rights and privileges save in the church of which he is a member, and no church has the authority to give him the right to do it.

3. Another objection—and I expect lies at the bottom of all the objections and opposition to **church** communion—

“It is a new thing, and contrary to our denominational usage.”

This is singular language in the lips of Baptists who oppose infant baptism and affusion! Tens of thousands of Pedobaptists would renounce affusion and infant baptism today were it not for the argument from “usage of the church.” The teachers who mislead and cause them to err, reason thus with them: “Can you believe that infant baptism is unscriptural and injurious, when the church (this means Catholic as well as Protestant), for so many ages has practiced it, and so many thousands of their most learned and pious ministers have taught and administered it? Will you say that the church has, all these ages, been in deadly hostility to God’s word, and these, the most learned ministers of earth, all ignorant of God’s word, and the few illiterate Baptists alone right?” It is a powerful argument with the multitude. And then their ministers, in renouncing either error, would have to humiliate themselves before the people and confess that, for years, they had taught and practiced contrary to the teachings of God’s word. The cross is fearful. Yet there are Baptist ministers who are using this self-same argument (?) with their own brethren to prejudice them against **examining** the **scriptures** to see if these things are so!

But I have shown that church communion is not a **new**, but an **old**, practice, from which our churches have been turned aside in these latter days.

No **true** man can feel that it is a shame to him to confess and turn from an error, when he is satisfied it is an error, though he may have advocated it for years, but it is the mark of a conscientious, Christian man, who loves the truth.

The objection implies that our churches have been and are **infallible**, which is not the exact truth. Paul was compelled to correct the erroneous faith and practices of the churches in his day. John, in addressing all the churches in Asia, found something to correct in the practice of the very best of them, and of these were symbols of the churches of Christ in seven different ages of this dispensation. Then it is unscriptural to believe that the churches of Christ have ever been infallible. But it is well known that within this century our fathers were wont to close their District Associations with the observance of the Lord's Supper; the Association appointing the ministers and deacons to administer it. Nor was this practice discontinued without sharp discussion and powerful opposition. The present practice of **denominational** communion retained by some associations and conventions is a relic of **associational** communion. Convinced that it is a church ordinance, it is virtually contravened by indirection. The church appoints a communion to be observed at the close of the session, and then invites all the members of the Association or Convention, with all the visiting Baptists present, to commune with her! The West Tennessee Convention, a quarter of a century ago, consented to this, and the Alabama State Convention still is wont to observe such communions, or was until recently, and how many Associations we know not. There are several other unscriptural practices that our churches were **generally** guilty of thirty years ago, as sending their licentiates to the Association to be ordained by a council appointed by the Association, or a standing presbytery, on the reception of alien immersions as valid baptism, and several other quite as unscriptural, and evil practices. We have lived to see many of these abandoned, and many who read this book years hence will wonder what could have influenced our churches to practice Intercommunion.

I conclude my defense with the latest expression received from Dr. Gardner on this subject:

“RUSSELLVILLE, KY., Feb. 18, 1881.

“REV. J.R. GRAVES, LL.D.,

“*My Dear Brother:*—In compliance with your request, I would state that I have long regarded **Intercommunion** among Baptists at the Lord's Table as **unscriptural, and of evil tendency**. It does no good, but **much harm**, and ought to be abandoned in all our churches. There is neither precept nor example for it in the New Testament; it is a modified form of **loose** Communion wholly **at war** with church discipline. The **limits** of church discipline are the scriptural limits of Communion at the Lord's Table.

“I take this ground in my Book on ‘**Church Communion,**’ and in the **new and revised edition** it will be more clearly and fully presented.

“Yours, fraternally,

“W. W. GARDNER.”

A late editorial expression of the “*Central Baptist,*” St. Louis, Mo., gives me additional encouragement to expect that the force of habit and prejudice touching this question will, ere long, give way. The editor, Dr. Ferguson, says:

“A local, ceremonial institution must of necessity be in the hands of a definite class. Jesus committed the Supper either to local churches or to the ministry. If to the latter, the priest is right in carrying the bread and wine from house to house, and in giving to, or withholding from, whom he pleases. If to the former, then Communion is **by the nature of the law restricted to the local**

church, and can not be carried beyond unless there is positive warrant. If any kind of Communion is to have a title to denote that it is exceptional or peculiar, that kind is 'loose' Communion. **Church** Communion, we repeat, is the indisputable law of the New Testament on the subject. Any invitation must be upon the wholly **gratuitous supposition of an implied, not expressed, liberty; and it does not then follow that the minister has any more right to invite than the humblest member."**

CLOSING WORDS TO MY BRETHREN.

Some of you have, and ere long many will cordially embrace the views herein set forth before possibly your pastor, or a majority of the church of which you are members; and, in your zeal, you may be tempted to **force** your church to change its long standing practice. I wish to caution you against rashness, and to advise patience and forbearance. All permanent reformations move **slowly** but **surely**. If you **faithfully**, but **kindly**, bear your testimony against Intercommunion at home and abroad as a good witness for Christ, you will not be partakers of her fault. Do you not commune with your church, although she retains in her fellowship, contrary to the explicit teachings of God's word, the hard drinker and the drunkard, the covetous and the dancer, with whom Paul commands it "not to eat?" (1 Cor. v). Labor, my brethren, in all kindness to convert your brethren, by presenting the truth to their understanding, and praying for them. In this way you will soon see, and rejoice in its triumph over deep-rooted habit and prejudice. It was in this way you secured abandonment of pulpit affiliations and "union meetings," and the rejection of "alien immersions," without the division of one church. Remain with your church, and thus labor and pray for another triumph. Very soon your brethren of sister churches will become so well informed that they will not offend you by accepting the invitation of your church, should it have so little regard for **your** feelings as to continue to invite them.

To the pastors and deacons of our churches who generally control these invitations without consulting the church, as such, let me in all kindness say: Granting that you believe it is **not wrong** to give Intercommunion invitations; if intelligent in our church polity, you know that you withhold no **right** from brethren of other churches be declining to invite them to the Supper of your church; because the Scriptures give them no right, and you also know it is wrong and sinful for you to **knowingly** do any thing that you may omit without blame, that will offend the least one of our brethren for whom Christ died. To do this because you have the power to do it, and when you know it will offend, you should remember Christ's words. Dear brethren, be considerate and kindly affectioned towards your brethren, and decide if you should not have more regard for the rights and the feelings of the brethren and sisters, and the peace and fellowship of your own church, than even for the feelings and questionable rights of strangers or members of other churches? Ought not brotherly kindness and respect for the rights and feelings of our brethren to begin at home? It certainly is not the spirit of the meek and loving Christ; because you can influence a majority in the church to sustain you to be willing to trample upon and wound the feelings of a minority of your brethren, and destroy their peace of mind and enjoyment of this sacred feast, by doing what you can leave undone without the least lame or sin.

May the all-loving Jesus, to whom the least of his flock is more precious than his own blood, influence us all to do those things most pleasing in his sight, and thus to dwell and to work together in unity

"TILL HE COMES."

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