



MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

Volume 10, Issue 1

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

November 2008

THE LORD'S DAY

Occasionally someone may talk about the Lord's Day assembly, referring to the Sunday gathering of the church. Many writers use the phrase "the Lord's day" to refer to the first day of the week. At least one writer has stated that by the time the Revelation was written Sunday had come to be known as the Lord's day. Of course, he makes this statement with no proof of its validity. Just what is the Lord's day?

Many people assume we call Sunday the Lord's day because it is so designated in scripture. That assumption would be wrong. Sunday is frequently called "the first [day] of the week." The first recorded instance of it specifically and indisputably being used to refer to Sunday did not occur until over a hundred years after John wrote the Revelation. In fact, the phrase appears only once in the Bible. Revelation 1:10 says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet." There are at least three possible interpretations of this passage.

One, of course, is that John saw all of his visions on one Sunday. As proof, some point out the similarity of the phrases "the Lord's supper" (1 Cor 11:20, also a unique usage) and "the Lord's day." Since the Lord's supper was observed at a minimum on the first day of the week, the similar phrase must relate to the same day, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. This ignores the possibility (probability) that the Lord's Supper was observed more frequently. (Acts 2:46 may refer to daily observance.) Others point out that early Christian writers from at least 170 AD onward used the phrase to refer to Sunday. That, however, may simply be because they also made an assumption based solely on their interpretation of Revelation 1:10.

The second most common view is that John was not talking about the specific day of his visions. Instead, he may have said, "I was, in the Spirit, on the Lord's Day [meaning the day of God's judgement]." This would be like saying that although he was on the Isle of Patmos he was, in the spirit, in Jerusalem. This is based on the idea that "the day of the Lord" is commonly used in prophecy to refer to any day in which God brings punishment or judgement on the earth. It is so used in Joel (2:31)/Acts (2:20) to refer to the beginning of the church. Thus John

may be speaking of the subject of the vision, rather than the date on which he saw it. The problem is that the phrasing is wrong. In English, the day of the Lord and the Lord's day virtually mean the same thing. In the Greek, however, the scriptures consistently speak of the day of the Lord (*hamartia kurios*) but only once of the Lord's day (*kuriakos hamartia*). If John meant to relate his vision to others of "the day of the Lord" he would most likely have phrased it in the same way the others did.

The third possibility is related to the first. John may have been speaking of the date of his vision, but thinking in his native (Jewish) idiom. That would make the Lord's day the Sabbath (seventh) day rather than what early Christian writers called the eighth day/first day. As with choice one, there is little real support for this option. Nowhere else in scripture or Jewish literature is Sabbath referred to as the Lord's day. The only support for this idea is that John was Jewish. If any day were to be designated as belonging to the Lord, it would most likely be the Sabbath. This was the day of rest, based on God's rest. It was the day given to the Jewish people by God. Having grown up with this knowledge, it is only proper that as an old man, as most assume he was, John would revert to his established patterns of thought.

We have no way of knowing exactly what John meant by "the Lord's day." Because this is the only, and ambiguous, use of the phrase, we should be careful of using it in an unambiguous way to refer only to Sunday, although Christian writers of subsequent centuries did so. Perhaps we should not use the phrase at all. We know Saturday was called Sabbath; we know Sunday was called the first of the week. Maybe we should just leave it at that.

CONTENTS

The Lord's Day	1
Congregation of Christ	2
Enough Is Enough	4

All articles Copyright 2008 by Tim O'Hearn unless otherwise noted

CONGREGATION OF CHRIST

A number of years ago I agonized over what was at the time a vital question. I had served for some time as a deacon of the El Cajon Boulevard church of Christ in San Diego, California. While still recognized as a deacon at that location I was asked to be a deacon of the congregation of the church onboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70). The question I had to ask was whether I could hold that office in two distinct congregations at the same time. Since I could find nothing in scripture to forbid (or allow) such a practice, I, selfishly perhaps, agreed to be the deacon of the congregation on the ship. At the same time I wrote a letter to the elders at the San Diego congregation and offered to resign as deacon there for as long as I was onboard the ship, if they felt it to be scripturally necessary. They, fortunately, responded that they could find nothing wrong with being a deacon in both places. It was a situation not likely to have come up in the first century, since people tended to remain in one city most of their lives.

I have lately come to the same conclusion but based on a different reasoning. I have come to realize that most men who are elders or deacons in the current

We are permanently members of Christ's body, but temporarily of a local congregation.

conception of the church may be elders or deacons in multiple local congregations.

What, after all, is a church? What is a congregation? It appears that they are, in some respects, the same thing. The Greek word often translated "church" has as its basic meaning a congregation. In ancient Athens, when a decision had to be made about the community, they used the first, and so far only, democracy. (The United States is not a democracy; it is a republic.) Every man in the city-state had an equal vote in government affairs. So when a decision was to be made, the men were *ekklesia*, or called out. (This is the word translated "church.") Whether fifty or 500 men assembled to vote, each had an equal say, but only those who came to the assembly had a vote on that issue. Thus one law might pass with 100 men voting, and another law with 1,000.

What in most English-language Bibles is called the church, then, is more properly translated the assembly or the congregation. Jesus spoke of his church in a broader sense. The congregation of Christ universal is that body of believers who are called out of the world. They are a congregation in the sense of spiritual unity, whether or not they ever physically assemble together. One can be in this congregation whether or not he ever meets, or meets with, another believer. It was in this broad sense that Jesus referred to building his church (Matt 16:18). It was in this broader sense that Saul and Herod persecuted the church (Acts 8:3; 12:1). But there is also the sense of individual local congregations. Sometimes this appears in the plural (Acts 9:31; Rom 16:16. Sometimes it appears in the singular, but with a limiting qualifier (Rom 16:1,5; 1 Cor 1:2). Sometimes it appears without a qualifier, but the context makes it clear that it is an individual local congregation (Acts 14:27; 15:22-24). Most of what follows relates specifically to the local congregation, rather than to the congregation universal.

Which congregation?

What I am beginning to realize is that a congregation is constituted by those who congregate. Thus in the place where I currently worship there are actually multiple congregations. The largest is the Sunday morning congregation. There is a smaller Sunday evening congregation, and an even smaller Wednesday evening congregation.

The idea that a congregation is made up only of those who congregate leads to several effects. One has already been alluded to. The elders and deacons in one "place" actually hold those offices in multiple congregations at the same time. Thus, when I was resident in two places at the same time, I could be a deacon to multiple congregations, based on residence rather than the modern conception of church. Indeed, Paul told Titus to ordain elders in cities. (Titus 1:5) This has led some people to believe that there was only one congregation per city. Others might as easily conclude that the elders were in a place, regardless of the number of congregations in that place.

Membership in the Body of Christ is independent of membership in a particular local congregation. We are permanently members of Christ's universal congregation; we are temporarily members of any local congregation of that body. Our membership in a local congregation changes each time we choose to assemble with Christians and ends each time we choose not to do so.

Placing membership

In many groups there is a practice known sometimes as “placing membership.” When a person moves to a different location or changes “churches” for whatever reason, they are expected to place their membership with the congregation where they finally decide to settle. They are then put on the roll of that congregation in whatever form that roll may be (in some places it is a church phone directory; in others it may be a more formal listing). They then are considered to be part of that church, whether or not they ever again attend a service. They are supposed to be under the authority of the leaders of the church in that place. They may be expected to contribute to the work of that congregation. Some people may even place their membership in a prestigious congregation for business reasons, and never darken the door of the building.

When one views a congregation for what it really is, a group of people who assemble together, this whole concept goes out the window. One places membership in a congregation by attending that congregation, not by placing his name on a list. If he never congregates, he cannot be part of a congregation. He has no membership in an assembly if he never assembles with it.

What is sometimes called “church discipline” would be affected. The concept of universal excommunication is not a scriptural one. No individual or group of individuals was ever given the right to state that a person no longer had the privileges of membership in the Body of Christ in all places. Not even the apostles appear to have been given such authority. Instead, Paul tells the Corinthians that a sexually immoral person must “be taken away from among you.” (1 Cor 5:2) He tells the Thessalonians to withdraw themselves from some “which walk among you disorderly.” (2 Thes 3:6, 11) The key in these verses is that the individual must be “among you” to merit such corrective action. One who never congregates with you cannot be considered among you, regardless of whether his name is on your list.

In some congregations of the churches of Christ I have heard the person presiding over the collection of the weekly contribution say, “this is only for our members; visitors are under no obligation to give.” Looked at in a new way, which is really a very old way, this statement is meaningless. If they are present in the assembly, they are members of that congregation on that day. They are under as much an obligation to give, if any, as those who may have regularly assembled there for years. And if they are not present, of course they cannot make a contribution.

Elders and congregations

Some people object to Bible classes, multiple services in one location, or small group meetings on the

basis of the idea that they would then be multiple congregations under one group of elders. That appears to be valid as a statement, but invalid as an argument. Since the elders oversee an ever-shifting congregation, there is nothing to prevent them from shepherding these multiple forms of congregations.

A person is under the authority of the elders where he is assembled, regardless of how often he has assembled there. If one visits a congregation, he is a member of that congregation for as long as he is there. Since an elder is to shepherd “the flock of God which is among you” (1 Pet 5:2), that includes anyone that is gathered with them at that particular time and place. Nobody can properly say that they can sin with impunity in a congregation where they have not “placed membership,” because the elders have authority over all that are present. Conversely, that also means that elders have no authority over a person whose name is on their list but who refuses to assemble with them.

Then why congregate?

There will be some people who will think that if they never congregate, what is generally called “going to

To be a member of a congregation requires that you congregate.

church,” then they are free from being responsible to any elders. Others have taken the attitude that they can be just as good Christians without assembling with others.

It is true that one may be in Christ’s body without ever assembling with others, locally, in that body. It is true that one can avoid responsibility by not congregating. But why would you? Anyone who is so bent on avoiding the scrutiny of elders is probably doing something they should not be doing anyway. Elders, like governments, are a terror only to wrongdoers. Why would an arm choose not to be part of a body? An arm cut off from the rest of a body soon dies. Granted, it is Christ that gives life, and not the assembly. But the primary purpose of the assembly is to “to provoke unto love and to good works.” (Heb 10:24) In the absence of that encouragement or provocation it is easy to lose heart, or to lose focus.

To be a member of a congregation requires that you congregate. To be in an assembly you must assemble. Those that refuse to do so put themselves in danger of letting go of the profession of their faith. That would be letting go of their lifeline to Christ.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Jacob was on his way home. He had spent many years elsewhere for fear of his life. He had grown rich. Now he was going home. But he still feared his brother, Esau. So he prepared a sumptuous gift for his brother, and sent it ahead of him. When they met, Esau asked what all that treasure was that he had met, and Jacob said it was a gift for him. "And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself. And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it." (Gen 33:9-11)

The King James Version and some other English translations obscure a valuable lesson in this exchange. Indeed the Hebrew shows two different attitudes toward physical things that may be instructive. The question is, how much is enough? Jacob and Esau represent two opposite answers to this question.

Esau sees this great wealth, and answers his brother in a way that is true to his nature. In keeping with Eastern tradition, he at first refuses the gift, knowing it will be pressed on him and he will eventually accept what he has coveted from the beginning. So when Jacob says that this wealth is a gift for him, Esau replies, "I have enough." Actually, he uses the Hebrew word, *rab*, which means "much." To paraphrase his response with what seems to have been his intent, he says, "I really have a lot myself. You do

not impress me with this great wealth. But much is not really enough, so keep asking me to take the gift."

Many people take this attitude that enough is not really enough. They may have a lot or a little, but whatever they have is never quite enough. They have much, but not enough. They trust God, but not enough. They think that God owes them more, or that they cannot live on what they have. God may be saying, "You have enough." Instead they reply, "Yes, I have a lot. But think of what I could do for you, Lord, if you gave me more." Of course, if they get more very little, if any, would go to working for God.

Jacob has a different attitude. In offering the gift he says, "I have enough." He uses a different Hebrew word, *kol*, which means "everything" or "all." His response, then, could be paraphrased, "I have it all. I don't need this meager gift, because God has given me everything I could possibly want and more. So go ahead and take it, because it is really nothing to me."

Jacob says enough is everything. Whatever God sees fit to give us is what God considers sufficient for our needs. And if God thinks it is enough, it must be. The person with the attitude of Jacob may not have a lot of this world's goods. He may be considered by others to be quite poor. Nevertheless, he considers that any more than what he has would tempt him to be an Esau, so he is happy with whatever he has. Esau trusted in himself and his possessions. Jacob trusted God, and that was enough.

When I was young and my brothers and I had been arguing for a while, my father would sometimes say, "Enough is enough." I don't know if he knew how right he was.

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123