Five Reasons Why I Will Not Have Communion at Home if I Cannot Assemble With the Church

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Every day I am shocked by some new announcement by the local, state, or federal government. Perhaps I should expect to be shocked, it seems to be the new normal. One of the “new norms” is the shelter-in-place ordinance. As billions globally are staying at home, our people are trying to figure out how to have a time of devotion on their own. I have observed some on Facebook associated with the church of Christ who have their Sunday morning worship live streamed and each family has a loaf and a cup for communion. As more and more of our brethren begin to face shelter-in-place laws that are strictly enforced, they may be wondering if they can do the same.

I’d like to offer a word of encouragement. I believe we all agree that we should do our best to assemble with the saints every Sunday (Hebrews 10:24-25). These verses teach that we should greatly value our time together for two reasons: stirring one another up to love and good works and not forsaking the assembling together. For this reason, I believe we should continue to offer a time of public worship even as the government passes ordinances that temporarily ban our worship.

Additionally, we must have mercy with one another. Some are sick. Others are infirmed. Others fear they may carry or be exposed to the infection. Some of our brethren around the country are banging their swords and shields about these as weak in faith. But for some, Scriptures like Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 give powerful Scriptural reasoning to shelter in place as the government has ordered. Dear friend, we should not question one another’s love and devotion to Christ. I believe the best approach is to encourage each family to do what they think is best according to the Scriptures. There should be no judgment between families, but mercy and longsuffering with one another.

James 2:13 | *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

With that in mind, here is the main purpose of this brief essay: If I am somehow forced to stay home and cannot assemble with the church, I will not participate in the communion at home. I will not make small loaf and a cup of grape juice for Marissa and me to share. And I believe that you and your family should not do this either. Why not? Here are five reasons for you to consider.

First, the communion is the sharing and joint participation of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. It is shared when the church comes together in one place. When the communion is mentioned beyond Jesus’ Last Supper, it *always* referred to when the church had come together.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | *Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.  (18)* ***For first of all, when you come together as a church****, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.  (19)  For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.  (20)* ***Therefore when you come together in one place****, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. … (33)* ***Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat****, wait for one another.  (34)  But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.*

Second, I cannot find any examples of individuals taking communion on their own. Some might say Paul did while on the ship to Rome (Acts 27), but he merely ate bread with the entire ships’ passengers. Besides, he said that no one had eaten anything for 14 days prior to that. From this, we can necessarily infer that Paul did not commune while on board the boat.

Third, I have heard some say that since the Bible doesn’t specifically say that we cannot commune at home, we therefore have the liberty to do so. Dear brother or sister, please take a moment to consider the ramifications of that line of reasoning. It is the exact line of reasoning for instrumental music and any other innovation in the church. The reasoning is: *if the Bible doesn’t specifically forbit it, I can do it*. The truth is that the Bible does say something about it. The Bible teaches “what- when-where-why-who” and how we observe the communion. If we add to clear teaching, we are like Nadab and Abihu who offered strange fire to the Lord. It didn’t end well for them (Lev. 10:1-2).

Fourth, if each family has their own bread and cup of grape juice, and we’re all members of Denton County, can we really say that we are using one bread and one cup? This follows the exact line of reasoning that our brethren use who have left sound doctrine and regularly worship with multiple breads and cups. They believe they can use many and yet it still is the body and blood of Jesus. If we have 20-30+ families meeting at home and using a “family bread and cup,” our congregation would effectively be using multiples and disregarding the Bible pattern.

*But Jonathan, how do we obey the commands that God has clearly laid out for us?*

 In short, you are not disobeying God when you do not commune at home. You are unable to commune because you did not come together with the church. Think about the perspective of consistency during flu and stomach bug season when you stayed at home sick. Did you commune then? I cannot answer that for anyone but myself. If I was ever too sick on a Sunday morning to assemble, or in family quarantine because someone has the flu, I have never made a loaf and cup of grape juice for our at-home worship.

 I would further argue that observing communion at home disregards the pattern of the communion. So, if you are concerned that you are not obeying God, be further concerned that by having your own communion bread and cup at home, you are doing something that disregards clear teaching from the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach that the communion is for the body of Christ who assemble together in one place.

 Fifth, some may cite Matthew 18:20 about *where two or three gather in My name, there I am in the midst of them*. I appreciate the genuine concern of beloved Christians who want to worship God but also be safe from viruses and government officials. However, we cannot use Matthew 18:20 to justify at-home communion. Matthew 18:20 has nothing to do with assembly and worship. It has everything to do with church authority. Please read verses 15-19. Jesus was encouraging that He would **approve** of any disciplinary action that two or three faithful Christians undertook in the face of a rebellious and actively sinning Christian who will not repent.

 In conclusion, what should you do if you are forced to stay at home over a Sunday? First, devote time to God with your family. Pray fervently. Sing songs that encourage and edify each other. Read from the Bible together. If you have children, the routine of Sunday worship is critical. Please do not lose that routine but continue as best you can at home.

Everyone forced at home may also have a special time of prayer for God’s mercy concerning the communion. Pray for mercy and affirm to God that as soon as it is possible, you will gather again with the saints. Acknowledge before the Lord how you long for the opportunity to commune with your brethren again.

Psalm 84:2 | *My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God*.