

## THE COMMUNION CUP

Text: Mark 14:22-25

INTRO: It is the common practice of most congregations of God's people to use individual drinking vessels in dispensing the fruit of the vine in the Lord's supper, but there is a small minority of churches that insist that the Bible binds upon us the practice of using only one drinking container. Neither this nor any other religious controversy can ever be settled by majority practice or majority opinion. We shall now examine the arguments made by our brethren who insist on the use of only one container, in the light of what the Bible has to say on the subject.

One-container brethren believe that only they are in harmony with the scriptures, & they usually make 4 assertions:

1. That Jesus & His apostles used only one container when the supper was instituted & that when the Lord said "do this," He bound the singular container for the fruit of the vine.

2. That there are 3 elements in the Supper: bread, fruit of the vine, & the container for the fruit of the vine.

3. That communion is congregational in nature, & that there has been no communion until every lip has touched the same container.

4. That a plurality of containers in the Lord's supper is the invention of Dr. J.G. Thomas in 1894, & was introduced into churches of Christ by G.C. Brewer about 1915.

We will examine those assertions.

## I. THE ASSERTION THAT JESUS & THE APOSTLES USED ONLY ONE CONTAINER WHEN THE SUPPER WAS INSTITUTED.

A. It takes more than a mere assertion to establish that Jesus & the apostles used only one container. Let us weigh the testimony of the witnesses.

### 1. History.

a. Jewish encyclopedia  
(Passover): "Jugs or bottles of wine, with a glass or silver cup for each member of the family & each guest, likewise are placed on the table" (Vol. 11, pg. 144).

b. Jewish Services In Synagogue And Home, by Lewis N. Dembitz, pg. 358: "Wine is on the table with drinking cups for each person present, big or little."

c. Hastings Dictionary of the N.T., Vol. 2, pg. 327: "At the Passover supper each participant had his own cup to drink from."

### 2. The more important witness: The Bible.

Luke 22:17-20, Then He took the cup, & gave thanks, & said, "Take

this & divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And He took bread, gave thanks & broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

Note that the "cup" (beverage) was divided BEFORE the bread was broken. It was not consumed until AFTER the bread.

B. Even if it could be proven (which it cannot) that Jesus & the apostles had only one drinking container, it would need to be proven that the number of containers is an integral part of the supper.

1. There were no women or children present.
2. They reclined to eat, John 21:20.
3. They were in an upper room.
4. It was evening.
5. It was Thursday (to us), Friday to them.

NOTE: No one I know insists that we duplicate all these matters.

II. THE ASSERTION THAT THE CONTAINER IS A 3RD ELEMENT IN THE SUPPER, THEREFORE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE SUPPER ITSELF. Much is made of the statements, "a cup," "the cup," and "this cup."

A. The statements that the cup is "My blood of the New Testament" & the cup is "the New Testament in My blood," are two ways of saying the same thing. The "cup" Jesus was talking about was the fruit of the vine, not the container in which it was stored.

B. The literal cup, container, is not under consideration in any of these passages.

Luke 22:17 take this cup & divide it  
1 Cor. 11:26, drink this cup  
1 Cor. 10:16, this cup of blessing which we bless

C. The word cup is used 33 times in the New Testament, & only 4 times is it used literally of a container--& 2 of these times, the contents is the thing really being emphasized.

(1) (2) Mark 7:4, 8, washing of cups  
(3) (4) Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41, cup of cold water

MKT10:42. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. BUT what if he gives 2 cups? Or gives water to 2 of these little ones? Will he lose his reward then?

D. The one-container brethren say the literal cup represents the N.T. Since there is only one N.T. there must be only one container.

1. It is true there is a plurality of containers. Paul was in Ephesus, his readers in Corinth, when he wrote of the cup which "WE" bless.

G. Several passages make it abundantly clear that there are only 2 elements in the Lord's supper: the bread which pictures Christ's body, & the fruit of the vine (cup) which pictures His blood. The containers for these 2 elements are never significant. 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:26-28.

### III. THE ASSERTION THAT COMMUNION IS CONGREGATIONAL IN NATURE.

A. It IS to be observed when saints assemble together as a local congregation, Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20.

B. BUT communion is actually individual in nature, 1 Cor. 11:27-29.

C. Since communion is an individual matter between each saint & his Lord, each of us drinks of only one container. The Lord never emphasized the container, but even if it mattered, each of us drinks from only one container.

#### IV. THE ASSERTION THAT INDIVIDUAL CUPS WERE NOT INVENTED UNTIL 1894 & NOT USED BY CHURCHES OF CHRIST UNTIL ABOUT 1915.

A. That is simply not so. History says:

1. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 200 A.D. gives an example prayer: "We pray & beseech Thee, O Lord, in Thy mercy, to let Thy presence rest upon this bread & these chalices on the all holy table."

2. Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, Vol. 14, pages 138-139: "The others (deacons) bring & set up on the altar the breads & the chalices prepared for the sacred banquet..."

3. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church: "The first celebration of the communion after the Reformed usage was held in April, 1525... The communicants were seated around tables... They then received in a kneeling posture the sacred in wooden plates & wooden cups." (Vol. 8, page 60).

4. Lard's Quarterly, Vol. 4, pg. 56, 1867:  
"Some churches, especially in the country, prepare their tables with a sort of bar room furniture... A glass bottle with a long neck, a couple of cheap glass tumblers, & a couple of cheap plates. Now I grant there is no chapter & verse against this: but the feeblest dictates of good taste & moderate sense of propriety would suggest the securing of a decent communion service." (Thomas Munnell, writer).

B. In fact, what Dr. Thomas invented was a tray on which to carry the bread & fruit of the vine. A plurality of drinking vessels goes back far beyond the time of Dr. Thomas.

C. As the above quotations show, thru the ages there have been those who used more than one container for the cup of the Lord, & all during those ages, there were only 2 elements in the Lord's supper: unleavened bread & fruit of the vine.

CONCLUSION: God has made no law regarding the number of containers to hold the fruit of the vine. Where there is no law, there can be no transgression, Rom. 4:15. There is a unity throughout all the kingdom of God as Christians partake of the bread & the cup of the Lord, but the number of containers for these 2 elements is immaterial. There is one baptism, Eph. 4:5, but many baptisteries. There is

one N.T., but many bindings. There is one cup, 1  
Cor. 10:16, but many containers.

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