

Last Sunday, I received an article from Bob Greene concerning the 553 churches of Christ, “having a combined membership of 18,929,” which use only one cup in the communion (average of 34 members per church).

WHY?

“To preserve this divine ordinance ‘just as it was delivered,’ as we read in 1 Corinthians 11:2.” (--BH)

1Co 11:2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

“Because the scriptural precedent for how to observe the Lord’s Supper — with one loaf and one cup — is as weighty as for when to observe it (on ‘the first day of the week,’ as we read in Acts 20:7). The Scriptures regarding how to partake of the Lord’s Supper are even more emphatic (‘do this’), including Mark 14:23, Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24-25.” (-- BH’s comment)

- Because Jesus' instructions on how to "divide" (share) the cup in Luke 22:17 authorize only one cup. "Drink from it, all of you," he says in Matt 26:27.
- Because the cup containing the fruit of the vine has spiritual significance, as we read in Luke 22:20 and 1 Cor 11:25.
- To safeguard the sharing, joint participation and intimacy inherent in the word "communion" (1 Cor 10:16). The phrase "individual communion" is a contradiction. (-- BH's comments)

“When we insist on assemblies with hundreds of Christians when we commune, do we lose something special that Jesus expected us to experience as the family of God?” (-- BH’s comments)

A brother who wrote a tract on the subject tells us “The Bible does not contain one single example of anyone using individual communion cups. It does not contain a command concerning their use, nor does it infer that they were ever used under any circumstances. The Bible uses the word cup – not cups.

Our brother erred – every individual at the Passover meal has their own cup. The wine is distributed to each person's cup.

Are we to understand that “the cup” is an expression used for the contents of the cup or does Jesus speak of the cup itself?

Matt 26:26 And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing (KJV ASV NIV NKJV gave thanks), He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."



Certainly the word
“cup” is used and is
singular.



First let's consider the size of the church. Our brother preaches at a congregation of about 76 members in Lewisville, TX.

One cup will hold plenty of fruit of the vine for that group.

The church in Jerusalem started
with 3000 members – Acts 2.41

A little later, the number of men in
the church was at 5000 – Acts 4.4

Some 24 years later, the number is
“many thousands” Acts 21.20

If we assume the makeup of the church in Jerusalem was like most today, there would have been many women and young people, thus making the church in Jerusalem in A.D. 35 have about 10-15,000 in attendance. They met on the Portico of Solomon (Solomon's porch Acts 3.11), a colonnade on the Eastern side of Herod's temple, about 1500 feet long and 60 feet wide.

One church in Jerusalem with one set of elders Acts 15.2

Now if the brethren (15,000) were served just one teaspoon of fruit of the vine each, the total volume of the one cup needed to hold such would have been 19.8 gallons (75 L). The weight of the contents of such a cup would have been 165 lbs. On the other hand if only the men of Acts 4.4 were served, the contents would have weighed 55 lbs.

How long would it have taken to pass the cup – say 6 seconds each assuming each person is strong and quickly drinks their teaspoonful from the 20 gallon container – 25 hours! We won't even consider what if some brothers drank a tablespoon (multiply by 3).

The inner dimensions of the cup would have been about 3 feet tall and had a distance across of about 1 foot for the 15,000 attendees and or 29 inches tall and 7 inches in diameter for the 5,000 men.

I don't know who served such a cup, but I know that none of us here would have been able. Since Jesus handed the cup to his disciples – and they took it – if we are to do the same, each person would have to be capable of handling the cup.

This is all absurd!

Of course they had multiple, smaller containers. How many, we do not know, but we know that there were multiple cups used in the church in Jerusalem.

Brother Brewer may have been the first to use multiple cups in the church in the US, but he was not the first to use multiple cups in church, for that was done from its founding on the day of Pentecost.

3000 were added to them that day (Acts 2.41). How would each take a sip of just one teaspoon from a cup 18 inches tall and 8 inches in diameter weighing 33 pounds contained in a cup weighing more than 10 lbs.

Our brother then goes on to say “the Lord’s day morning service is the time when Christians meet to eat the Lord’s supper.” He disputes the idea that some may partake of it in the “night service” as this is not a time for “the congregated disciples ‘to break bread.’”

Acts 20:6 And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. 7 And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. 8 And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together... 11 And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.

Notice carefully that Paul begins speaking at night, because there “were many lamps there.” At daybreak, Paul leaves town. Luke calls this the “next day.” This was Roman time for in Jewish time, the day went from sundown to sundown. If Paul started preaching in Jewish time at night (after sundown), leaving at daybreak would be leaving the same day. Again Jews counted time from sundown to sundown.

If Paul is doing this on Roman time,
the day is over at 12 midnight and
daybreak is the next day – as Luke
records Paul's intentions.

Thus, a morning service is not when
this church met – it was an evening
service.

Consider some reasons for this evening service. The common workweek was 7 days except for the Jews, who rested on the Sabbath (not the 1st day of the week). Slaves (Eph 6.5) who attended would have had to fulfilled their duties to their masters.

All would have had to walk, with no clocks to tell the time to arrive (which later led to the introduction of church bells to signal service times). Only slave masters (Col 4.1) could have come at the time they wished.

Thus, the Holy Spirit guided Paul to tell brethren to “tarry for one another.” (wait - NASB, NIV) 1 Cor 11:33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

The same Greek expression is used in Joh 5:3-5 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. (4) For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. (5) And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

The reason for us to come together on the first day of the week is to proclaim the Lord's death. To whom? Our brethren and our God.

Our easy transportation makes it possible to space out the assembly so that those who have to work (as the slaves did) might come with their brethren (the assembly) and partake (it is still the first day of the week).

With whom do we commune as we gather
around the table of the Lord?

1Co 10:16-17 The cup of blessing that we
bless, is it not a participation in the blood of
Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a
participation in the body of Christ? (17)
Because there is one bread, we who are many
are one body, for we all partake of the one
bread.

Some have said that we all have to
take it at the same time!

That is not possible, even if everyone
has their own cup and all strive to
take it at the same time. Some will
start and end before others. How
much different depends on the agility
of the partaker.

Some have said there can't be that much time between some taking the Lord's Supper and others. What verse says that?

What is necessary?

The first day of the week.

An assembly of brethren.

The emblems.

1 Cor 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25

In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

"This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

It should be clear that Jesus was not talking about the cup but the contents or else we would have to use the one He used – the “Holy Grail,” because Paul quotes Jesus as saying “this cup.”

They don't have "that" cup in Lewisville, TX, or anywhere else. Jesus used a figure of speech.

We do not drink "this cup" but the contents of "this cup." If the cup has no contents, we cannot drink.

The contents of the cup are the "fruit of the vine" and not the cup itself!

I met with brethren where one cup was used – in London. A young woman who said she graduated from Abilene Christian University looked at the cup and a number of brethren from Nigeria on the front row and said, “Should we move to the front?” I replied, “perhaps they will start at the back.”

Let us remember, we may use one cup if we desire to do so, but if we bind it on someone else, we have bound where God has not. We have sinned.

If we emphasize the cup rather than the contents,
we sin!

The idea that we must use “one cup” is simply a doctrine made up by men.

Matt 15:9 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

If you are not a member of Christ's body, you cannot share in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the fruit of the vine, for you do not believe that Jesus died and rose again.

Why not obey now, that you may partake of His body and blood, proclaiming His death?

Act 2:41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ... 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.