



“Innovations and the Divine Pattern”

Part VIII: Innovations in Communion

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Lately, we’ve been talking about man’s departures from the Bible pattern in the doctrine, work, and worship of the church. God has always had a pattern for man to worship Him by and His pattern for the church today is revealed in the New Testament scriptures. Today, I want to talk about another important part of our worship and that is the Lord’s Supper. Like many other teachings and practices of the apostles and the early church, change has taken place in this divinely instituted ordinance as well. I would remind us of what Paul said in **I Corinthians 11:2** that we are to “*keep the ordinances*” delivered by the apostles in the very way they were given--not changing them to suit our own desires. Later in that same chapter, Paul writes this:

I Corinthians 11:23-26 “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”

Paul’s account of the supper instituted by Christ can be easily compared and is very much in harmony with the records given to us in the synoptic gospels. All four records of that night when Jesus gathered with His disciples when He instituted this perpetual memorial set forth a pattern for us to follow today, for Jesus Himself said, ***This do*** (or *Do this*) ***in remembrance of Me***. As we continue our series, I want us to look closely at God’s pattern for the Lord’s Supper because I don’t believe that most people are following the Bible pattern very closely.

Using His last Passover meal as a backdrop, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with His disciples. He established a perpetual feast to be observed by the church on a regular basis until He comes again. The church upon its Pentecostal establishment soon began to observe the feast that Jesus had established on the eve of His crucifixion.

Acts 2:42 “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

The Bible later tells us that the apostle Paul delayed his departure from the city of Troas so that he could meet with the church there and commune with them.

Acts 20:7 “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow...”

The historical literature of the postapostolic age indicates that during the years following the establishment of the church, the church observed the Lord's Supper each and every Sunday. It was certainly intended by the Lord to be a regular part of their worship and a perpetual memorial service. Even though the Corinthian church was not observing it correctly, or in the right frame of mind and the right spirit, they were coming together to observe their flawed version of the Lord's Supper (**I Corinthians 11**), and the apostle Paul takes them back to the original pattern. He corrects their abuses and shows them how Jesus instituted the supper and the meaning and intent behind it when He did. The questions before us today are, is that pattern still binding on us? How did Jesus institute the supper? How did the early church observe it? Can we find a pattern in the scriptures for the observance of the communion and, if so, what is that pattern? And finally, are you following that pattern today? First, let me emphasize that all that we know about the scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper is based upon five passages of scripture in the New Testament. There are three gospel accounts given in the synoptic gospels. There is one account given by Paul later by inspiration since he was not a follower of Jesus when Jesus actually established the supper. Rather, Paul later had it revealed to him by the Spirit. And then there is another reference by Paul to the design of the Lord's Supper given in his letter to the church at Corinth. All the accounts that are given of the institution of the feast are parallel accounts of the very same event and they are recorded by inspiration under the oversight of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew records the events of that night (**Matthew 26:26-30**). Mark tells us what Jesus did in **Mark 14:22-25**. Luke records another account in **Luke 22:17-20** and Paul later said that he *received his account from the Lord*, according to **I Corinthians 11:23-26**. Paul also speaks of the Lord's Supper in **I Corinthians 10:16-17**. I challenge you to take the time to look up and read all those passages and very carefully compare them. They all very concisely show how Jesus used three simple things to represent three great components of the gospel. All four accounts say that Jesus took a loaf of bread and said that it was to represent to them His body which would be sacrificed upon the cross.

Matthew 26:26 “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it (that is, He took a piece for Himself), and gave it (the remainder of the loaf) to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.”

All four writers then say, without exception, that Jesus took a cup. That cup, according to Matthew and Mark, contained grape juice or *fruit of the vine*. Jesus shared that cup with those assembled with Him

and in so doing, He was symbolizing the new covenant that was about to be established between them and God and His blood, which sealed that covenant.

Matthew 26:27-28 “And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Luke 22:20 “Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

You see here that on one occasion, Jesus says *this*, referring to the fruit of the vine, *is my blood of the new testament*. And then Luke tells us that He took the cup and said, *This cup is the new testament in my blood*. So, there are three things in all: the body of Jesus (represented by a loaf of bread), the New Testament or new covenant/agreement (represented by the cup which we share), and the blood of Jesus which ratified the new covenant (represented by the fruit of the vine). All three are mentioned by Jesus and Paul and are to be remembered and commemorated by us when we observe the Lord’s Supper.

Later, Paul referred to the same representative elements by inspiration of the Spirit.

I Corinthians 10:16-17 “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.”

Friends, all these accounts leave no doubt as to what Jesus did when He instituted the Lord’s Supper. It is a simple and easy example to understand and follow. Don’t read those passages through the lens of what is commonly practiced today; read it through the lens of the first century disciples and what they did as the Bible reveals it. It is a very simple pattern. There is no complication. There is nothing that is cloudy about what Jesus did.

You see, when the water becomes muddy is when we decide to do it a different way and try to justify our innovation by the Bible. That is the case with any other departure from what the Bible says. Instead of trying to make the Bible fit our practice--which leads us to performing all kinds of mental gymnastics and stretching, twisting, and changing the word of God, what we need to do is make our practice fit the Bible. Just simply follow the pattern as it’s given in the scriptures.

Let’s look very carefully at what Jesus did. The Bible says, first of all, that **He took bread**. The Greek word is *artos*, which literally means *a loaf of bread*. Jesus took a loaf of bread. He broke a piece of it for Himself, then gave the loaf to His disciples instructing them to eat of it in remembrance of His body. For the most part, people understand that Jesus used unleavened bread (bread without yeast) in the institution of the supper. That is necessarily implied within the scriptures because the apostles were gathered to observe the Passover when Jesus instituted the supper and, according to the original design of the Passover, the Jews were not to even have leaven in their houses during that week (**Exodus 12:19**). Throughout the Bible, leaven is a representation of sin and evil.

So, we know beyond a shadow of any doubt that Jesus used bread that was unleavened. As a result, I would assume that most of us recognize the need and appropriateness of using unleavened bread in the observance of the Lord’s Supper today. Have you ever wondered where men get the authority to change the communion to use multiple loaves or individual wafers to remember Christ’s body? That is the

common practice today, but is that what Jesus and His disciples did? Some will say, *does it really matter as long as we're using bread?* I believe that it DOES matter, for at least two reasons.

Jesus and His disciples shared a loaf. He took a loaf, and that is significant. Not only was Jesus giving a pattern that He told them to follow, but Jesus attached symbolic significance to that loaf, saying that it represents His body. More than one loaf destroys the symbolism of the supper as Jesus intended it. Friend, communion is not an individual thing. It is not just about ingesting elements for some mystical benefit. Rather, by the very essence of the word, communion is a *common union or sharing* in these elements. The loaf that we share represents the body of our Lord and His body was one, it was undivided.

I Corinthians 10:17 "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

We, the church, are His spiritual body and that is symbolized as well by the fact that we share a loaf: we are one body, the body of Christ. So, one loaf of bread aptly represents to us the body of Jesus, and the Lord intends for us to remember His body with a loaf of bread when we commune. If we are following the pattern, that is how we will do it. Multiple or individual loaves of bread set aside and destroy that very significant symbolism that Jesus attached here.

The Bible says that after Jesus gave them the bread to eat, **He took the cup**. Every Bible account of the Lord's Supper words it that way. In fact, the American Standard translation says that Jesus took a cup. The word *cup* is translated from the Greek word *poterion*. The lexicographers and scholars are very consistent in their definition of that word. A.T. Robertson says it means that He took "a drinking vessel or a cup." Young says that it was "a drinking vessel; a cup." Bullinger says that it was "a drinking cup." Liddell and Scott say that Jesus took "a drinking cup or a wine cup." And the list goes on and on. You might be thinking, why is he bothering to define the word *cup*? Doesn't everybody know what a cup is? You would think it would be that way, but there is a lot of confusion over that word today. The confusion comes from an attempt to justify the use of more than one drinking vessel in an assembly of the saints who have gathered to observe the Lord's Supper. The practice of using more than one cup in the Lord's Supper is not as old as the supper itself. It is an innovation or change later brought in by man. So, in order to try to justify the innovation of multiple or individual cups, those who yet try to insist on Bible authority for their practices must somehow make the word *cup* be symbolic or figurative. As a result, they muddy the water when it comes to what Jesus did and what He said.

The word *cup* can be used literally, and it can be used figuratively, and consequently in the communion text, it is used both ways. The New Testament uses the word *cup* in a figurative way when Paul said this to the Corinthians:

I Corinthians 11:26 "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

Obviously, we can't drink a vessel. But we can drink the contents of a drinking vessel. In this case, the word *cup* is merely being used as a figure of speech that we're all accustomed to using in our everyday language. It's called *metonymy*. But even when you use the word figuratively, it does not separate it from its use literally. Again, let's turn to Greek scholars on this. A.T. Robertson says that *poterion means a literal cup*. Edgar J. Goodspeed, professor of Greek and author of The Goodspeed Translations says that "in the clause *He took the cup*, it is used literally." F.R. Gay, professor of Greek at Bethany College,

says that “in every place where it is said that He took the cup, the meaning is that He took a definite, literal, material cup.” Listen to Mr. Lenski in his renowned commentary on the gospel of Matthew, in particular his discussion on **Matthew 26:27**: “The point is that Jesus instituted the sacrament with the use of one cup and that He bade all the disciples to drink out of this one cup. Any change in what Jesus did here, which has back of it the idea that He would not for sanitary or similar reasons do the same today, casts a rather serious reflection upon Jesus.”

Friend, every scholar that we can consult seems to agree that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper using one cup that He drank from and gave to His disciples to share with Him. In fact, not only did Jesus take a cup and bless it or give thanks for it and give it to them, telling them all to drink of it, but Mark tells us that they obeyed Jesus’s command.

Mark 14:23 “And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.”

The word *of* is the Greek word *ek*, which means *out of*. *They all drank out of* what Jesus gave to them. Again, someone might say, what difference does that make? The difference first and foremost is that the Lord instituted it that way, and it is His Supper and not ours. He gave the pattern; we didn’t establish it. He took a cup, drank from it, gave what He took and drank from unto them, and told them all to drink from it, and Mark’s account tells us that *they all drank of (or out of) it*. Then He commanded them, “***This do in remembrance of Me.***” In other words, *Do what I have just done in remembrance of Me*. Do you observe the Lord’s Supper just exactly as Jesus instituted it? Or has the church where you attend changed it?

Let me speak for just a moment about figurative language. We have clearly shown that when the scriptures say that Jesus took the cup, it is referring to a literal drinking vessel—not just a drink element, but a drinking vessel containing a drink element. Paul referred to this as ***the cup of blessing***. Obviously when Paul instructs the church at Corinth to *drink the cup* (**I Corinthians 11:26**), the Bible is using that figure of speech called *metonymy*, where you name one thing to suggest another. Some say that erases the need to use one cup since the word is there used symbolically and that the cup is therefore immaterial because it is used figuratively in that instance. First, the word is not used symbolically every time it’s used. But, secondly, even when it IS used metonymically or figuratively, there is still a literal cup involved, else the symbolism or figure wouldn’t make sense.

I’ll give you an example: If I was to say, “Your radiator is boiling,” anyone would understand that I mean the water INSIDE the radiator is boiling, and not the actual radiator itself. We use that kind of figurative language all the time, and so is the Bible when it says to *drink this cup*. But what if your radiator was boiling and I said, “Hey, your kettle is boiling” or “Your thermos is boiling” or “You’d better look over there! Your glass is boiling!” That wouldn’t make sense because even though I’m referring to the water, it’s associated with the thing that contains it. So, even when Paul says to *drink this cup*, he wasn’t saying that a cup was not present or that a drinking vessel is immaterial; he is merely using a figure of speech that’s pretty clear when we use it in everyday language. Somehow, though, man has tried to make it complicated when it comes to the Bible and to the Lord’s Supper.

I want you to think about this very carefully. What if the scriptures said that Jesus took the cups and gave them to the disciples saying drink these all of you? The Bible could’ve said that if that’s what had happened. What if it did say that? Would you then say that that was just figurative language? Would not anyone challenged to give Bible for their practice of individual cups immediately cite that passage? Well,

of course they would. But, you see, the Bible doesn't say that. It says *Jesus took the cup and gave it to them*. To whom? To those assembled with Him.

Someone will reply, wouldn't that mean that all Christians around the world would have to share the same cup? Or even more than that, use the same cup that Jesus did? No, because Jesus is establishing a pattern and it's a pattern for Christians who come together in one assembly to observe communion. Communion is not observed on the universal church level. Communion is observed by each congregation that comes together to follow the Lord's instructions. His pattern is to do so with one loaf representing His body, one cup containing fruit of the vine to represent the New Testament as ratified by His blood. That's the pattern. May God give us the courage and the faith to follow it today. This brings our series on Innovations and the Divine Pattern to a close. These teachings are certainly not popular; I am aware of that. Change IS popular. But I am not interested in being popular; I'm interested in following what the Bible says and I hope that you are, too. I hope you won't be careless with divine matters, so as to take all of the things that we have referred to for granted, but that you'll seriously take a look at what the Bible has to say about them and not what it doesn't say. I remind you, along with the weeping prophet Jeremiah of long ago:

Jeremiah 6:16 "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls..."

Our plea is to restore the church of the first century, to do Bible things in Bible ways, to call Bible things by Bible names, to be what the first century disciples were—nothing more and nothing less.

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