

Questions/Answers and Practical Matters Pertaining to Partaking the Lord's Supper

In the previous lesson, we considered the *doctrinal* aspects of *what, when, how, and why* regarding Communion. Now, let's go a little deeper into some related questions of a *practical* nature, and include a few brief suggestions of how to help receive the full benefit of partaking. Unless otherwise noted, we will be considering the text of **Matt.26:26-30**.

A. What did Jesus say, exactly, in His prayers of blessings and thanks for the emblems?

In preparing for the *unleavened bread*, v.26 says, "after **blessing** it..."- the word translated as *blessing* is the Greek term *eulogeo* from which our word *eulogy* comes. *Eulogeo* means "to speak well of" or "to bless." It is not the same word used to characterize Jesus' words for the *fruit of the vine*, which was *eucharisteo*, and means "to give thanks." Is there a point to be made from these things? Perhaps only a couple of them:

- 1) The *giving of thanks* for everything that God has done for us, or the full recitation of the spiritual significance of partaking these emblems was not the basis of Jesus' prayer- nor should they probably be so of ours either. The prayer is presumably being made **to God**, and He is already fully aware of their significance. The only things we **know** that Jesus included in these prayers for the emblems come from just these two words, and of course, their corresponding meanings.
- 2) So, in following the example of Jesus, it is probably best if we limit our prayers for the emblems to *giving thanks for them* (from *eucharisteo*), and *entreating God's blessing* upon them for their intended purpose (*eulogeo*). We all would do well to remember that we are speaking to God in these prayers, not delivering a sermon to the audience outlining their significance.

B. Does the *bread* and *cup* literally become the *body* and *blood* of Jesus when they are partaken, **vv.26,28**?

The doctrine that these *emblems actually become* the body and blood of Jesus is called "transubstantiation." Catholics are primary proponents of it, although other groups likely also adhere to it to one degree or another. However, there are considerable problems with the notion:

- 1) How could these emblems have literally become the *body* and *blood* of Jesus since neither had yet been *broken* or *shed*? The physical requirements of such are contrary to His being alive and in good health at the time!
- 2) Transubstantiation ignores the common Jewish use of metaphors by requiring a literal translation, cf. 1Cor.10:4. The simple rule of interpretation is: Start with the literal meaning **unless** circumstances require a *figurative* one. As Jews, the disciples would have been forbidden by the Law to have partaken of *literal* blood, Gen.9:4; Lev.3:17; 7:26; 17:10,14; 19:26; *et al.* And obviously, the Spirit-guided apostles forbade such after the death of Christ also, Acts 15:19-20,28-29.
- 3) It misses the *spiritual* significance of the emblems- salvation through Jesus' sinless body and blood, by giving them a *physical* significance. The *blood of animals* (and certainly of man) was forbidden because it contained their *physical* life, Gen.9:4. But the *blood of Jesus* was about much more than His *physical* life- it was about our *spiritual* life that was redeemed by it, John 6:48-58.

C. Should the *bread* be symbolically *broken* before the participants partake, v.26?

While some say "yes" to this question, there are other factors that bear consideration. While Jesus could "break" the bread that *symbolized* His body- because He did just that for us (cf. John 10:11,15,17-18), **we** have not the power to do so. There may indeed be a *symbolic* gesture included in His "*breaking*" of the bread, but remember that 1Cor.11:24 (KJV) also says, if we want to get that

specific, that it was “*broken for you*” not *by* you. I fail to see how a man presiding at the table can symbolically *break* the bread in a way that would represent what Jesus did on the cross.

Furthermore, by the same logic and reasoning, should the man presiding at the table also *symbolically* pour out the fruit of the vine to represent Jesus *shedding* His blood? What proves too much proves nothing at all.

D. Should partakers of the *fruit of the vine* (cf. v.29) all drink from the same cup, v.27? Why, or why not?

The requirement (made by some) that all partakers should drink from the *same* (one) *cup* misses the basic point of metonymy. Metonymy is a simple figure of speech “consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated (as in ‘lands belonging to the *crown*’),” Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary. In this case, Jesus uses the word “*cup*” to represent its *contents*. We know this because the disciples were told to drink “*the cup*”- which only makes sense when metonymy is understood. Besides, v.28 includes, “*for this is My blood of the of the covenant....*” Without metonymy, *the cup* rather than *its contents* becomes the emblem representing Jesus’ blood, which, again, makes absolutely no sense.

Also, this “one cup” notion has real problems in Luke 22:17 (KJV, the version usually preferred by those advocating the doctrine) when Jesus said of the cup, “*Take this and divide it among yourselves....*” How can *a/the cup* be “*divided*” and *partaken* unless it refers to the *contents* rather than the *container*?

E. Should the “*fruit of the vine*” used in the Lord’s Supper be fermented (wine)?

There are several factors that force a “no” opinion on this one for me.

- 1) Jesus used either “*the fruit of the vine*” or “*the cup*” to refer to the emblem rather than using the word “*wine*.” While it is true that the Greek term *oinos* can refer to either *unfermented* or *unfermented* grape juice, this is not the term Jesus used.
- 2) One of the requirements of the Passover celebration was the purging of all *leaven* (yeast) from the place it was to be eaten prior to its observance, cf. Ex.12:15. Since *yeast/leaven* was either added to grape juice to hasten its fermentation, or was more slowly produced in the juice by natural fermentation, it follows that any *fermented* wine would have been removed from the premises prior to the observance of the Passover meal. Evidently, the Jews typically utilized a drink made from reconstituting raisins by boiling them the night before for the Passover meal.
- 3) Symbolically, *leaven* is used to represent *sin* in other texts, cf. 1Cor.5:6-8. Since *leaven/yeast* was typically added to produce wine more quickly, or allowed to develop more slowly, it does not seem to “fit” as a representative of the *pure/sinless* blood of Jesus Christ.
- 4) Strictly speaking, grape juice is “*the fruit of the vine*,” while wine is the *fruit of fermentation*. (An Exposition of the Four Gospels; Herschel H. Hobbs, p.369).

F. When Jesus said, “*this is My blood of the covenant*” in v.28, what did/does He mean?

(The KJV utilizes “*new testament*” instead of “*covenant*” in this verse.) The former “*covenant*” of God and the Jews was ratified and sealed with blood, cf. Ex.24:3-8; Heb.9:15-22. Perhaps this may have been a “*vow of blood*” representing the sworn oath of man to uphold this covenant even to the shedding of his own blood, but it surely represented the *blood of animals* which would be the sacrifice for sin that enabled the fellowship between God and man through this covenant.

That imagery was surely in play when Jesus uttered the words of v.28. The “*covenanted fellowship*” between God and man would be made possible by His own *shed blood*, cf. Heb.9:11-14! Jesus’ own death would supply *the blood* to ratify and seal His covenant of salvation and fellowship with those who came to God in faith.

G. What did Jesus mean when He said, “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,” v.29?

This was not the last time Jesus *physically* shared a meal with the disciples, Lk.24:29-31; 36-43; John 21:8-15; but, it was the last time He shared either the Passover or Lord’s supper meal with them *physically*. However, a *physical* sharing of a meal is not what is under consideration in His words of v.29. He is saying that He will never again share *this meal* (the Supper just instituted) with them ***in this same way***. Such begs the question, “In what way, then, would He share it with them in the future?”

Before going further, it should also be pointed out that there is no biblical record of Jesus ever *physically* partaking of the Lord’s Supper after His resurrection either. But again, this is not required by His words. Jesus is simply alluding to the *fellowship* He shares with His disciples when they properly and mindfully partake of the emblems “*in remembrance of Me,*” 1Cor.11:25,26. This *spiritual* fellowship in the partaking of the Supper isn’t prevented by Jesus’ death, or His ascension into heaven. In fact, His death, resurrection, and ascension are exactly what make our *spiritual fellowship* with Him (and the Father) possible! By partaking in remembrance of His sacrifice, we remember the benefits of His death toward us “*until He comes.*”

Practical Suggestions

For those presiding/serving:

- 1) Limit your prayers for the emblems to *thanksgiving* for and entreating the Father’s *blessing* upon them. There are other prayers offered during the services for the *sick, blessings, and forgiveness*- stick to the essentials as Jesus did.
- 2) Before partaking, we typically have someone explaining what these emblems represent, and why we are partaking of them. Remember that in prayer you’re talking to God- He already knows these things, so you don’t have to remind Him.
- 3) When unprepared, we revert to what we’ve heard and said before- whether it is right or not. Plan ahead (and even practice?) what you are going to say in the prayer (*thanksgiving* for and *blessing* of the emblems and the sacrifice they represent).
- 4) Be sure your dress and demeanor is appropriate to the activity. The Supper is a sweet and simple memorial to commemorate Jesus’ loving sacrifice and look forward to His return. Let’s be sure we do not detract from the importance or purpose of it.
- 5) Be cognizant of the physical limitations of some whom you serve. Hold the tray(s) for them while they partake if necessary (for the elderly because of the weight of the trays, or for those holding babies); present the tray(s) to them at a comfortable level for them; use both hands and be sure they have it secured before letting go. It’s better to be cautious and careful!

For those being served:

- 1) Keep your mind on what you are doing and why. While I do not necessarily believe that one commanded avenue of worship is more important than another, partaking of the Supper is the most poignant- “*do this in remembrance of Me,*” 1Cor.11:25.
- 2) Endeavor to keep all distractions- but especially the unnecessary variety, to a minimum both for yourself and others. Just because you have partaken of the emblem(s) doesn’t mean everyone else has. Be considerate.
- 3) You may find it helpful to read a passage related to Jesus’ sacrifice or the commemoration of it, or to read through the many wonderful hymns that so poetically remind us of these things.
- 4) This is not a “more holy than thou” opportunity. Though we partake of the Supper *individually*, we do so *collectively* (just like singing in this regard!). Avoid worrying about your neighbor’s devotion or piety. The memorial can produce tears for one person, and expressions of joyful appreciation for another. Worry about yourself in these regards.