



“A Discussion About the Lord’s Supper”

With Ronny Wade & Kevin Presley

We appreciate you taking the time to study the Bible with us for a little while today. I am joined by brother Ronny Wade. He may be a familiar face to you as he appeared on our program some time back, and he was the host of “Let the Bible Speak” for a good number of years until retiring from the program in 2008. He remains very active across the country holding gospel meetings.

We’re going to do something a little different today. We will be discussing the Lord’s Supper. Brother Wade has preached on this subject and he has held numerous public and written debates over the years on this very subject. It is a subject of great interest to many of our viewers; I know that because I’ve received a lot mail and messages from you throughout the years as we’ve discussed this topic.

Let’s begin by reminding everyone that there are four places that we can look in the scriptures to find out what Jesus did when He instituted His supper, how He instituted it, and the significance of the items that He used. Those passages are found in **Matthew 26**, **Mark 14**, **Luke 22**, and in Paul’s later account by inspiration in **I Corinthians 11**. Brother Wade takes the position, as I do and as we’ve stated many times on this program, that there is a pattern for the Lord’s Supper and that when the Lord established the communion with His disciples, He used what He desired to memorialize His body and His blood, as well as the New Covenant. He took a loaf of unleavened bread to represent His body and a cup containing fruit of the vine, which He said *is the New Testament in My blood*. Then He commanded His disciples, *This do in remembrance of Me*.

Kevin: So, we would agree today that there is a pattern for the Lord’s Supper. People have departed from that pattern in recent years. If you will, begin by going back and giving us a bit of the history as to how that departure took place, especially in modern times.

Ronny: You know, if there is no pattern, then it doesn't matter how you do it. It's just that simple. If you don't have a pattern, then it's hard to violate it. You must have a pattern before you can violate it. The origin of the changes that began to take place in the Lord's Supper is actually sanitation. That's what it was all about. Most people who read the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper know what Jesus did. The language is too simple and too plain to misunderstand. The controversy comes when people say, *Well, what did He mean by this or that? What is the cup and what isn't the cup?* Because of that, differences begin to arise.

If you go back far enough, to about 1915, there were no individual cups in churches of Christ. There was plurality in some churches—maybe two cups. Generally, men would sit on one side of the assembly and women on the other and a cup was passed down each side in some congregations. That sometimes graduated to four cups in order to facilitate the observance. But when sanitation became such a hot issue in society, people decided they didn't want to drink after anybody.

So, in 1915, for the first time, a church of Christ used a tray of individual cups. That had originated in some denominations, but if you go back and study the history of that, you'll find that it was strongly objected to. For example, the Methodists were adamantly opposed to the individual cups system, as were some of the other denominations. Even to this day, there is one branch of the Baptist church that still uses one cup, the Lutherans still use one cup, and there are various other religious organizations who have never gotten away from one cup.

I remember a few years ago, I noticed an article in our hometown newspaper about one of the Presbyterian congregations in Springfield, MO who were going to observe the Lord's Supper "just like it was observed by Christ," to quote the article. The advertisement stated that they were going to use one cup. Well, I called up the preacher and said, "I see you're going to have a communion service and you're just going to use one cup. Why?" He said, "Well, because that's the way Christ did it." I know by that that the English is easy enough to understand, and obviously he understood that, even though he thinks there's nothing wrong with using more than one.

The point is this: the major problem that people have with observing the Lord's Supper as Christ instituted it is sanitation. People in general don't want to drink after other people. We've reached a point in this country where many don't think they can do that because of the risk of disease and so forth. But I can tell you this: I've been preaching for over 65 years and I have never known of a single case where anybody ever got sick or contracted any disease from observing the Lord's Supper the way that Jesus said to do it.

Kevin: That's right. And you touched on the main issue: either there is a pattern or there's not a pattern. I think most people would have to acknowledge that there IS a pattern because most people believe in using unleavened bread and grape juice/fruit of the vine as the drink element. Therefore, they are acknowledging that there is a pattern. And if there is a pattern, there can be no doubt that Jesus actually used one drinking vessel when He shared the fruit of the vine with His disciples gathered there. Would you agree?

Ronny: I think that's correct. There can be no doubt. I don't know that I've ever had someone tell me that Jesus used individual cups or that He even used more than one cup. I brought along a Gospel Advocate Commentary, which will be familiar to some of you. This is the commentary on Mark's account written by C.E.W. Dorris. I want to read what he says about **Mark 14:23**.

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.”

“And he took the cup. A cup is one; not two, nor a dozen.”

When the Bible says *He took the cup*, He took a cup. One. He blessed that cup, He drank from it, and gave it to the disciples said, *Drink ye all of it*, or as some translations say, *Drink ye all from it*. That’s what they did and that’s what we do today. It’s not that we’re trying to be different or that we want to create a controversy. We just simply believe that that’s what Jesus did. Just as I believe that He took a loaf, not twelve loaves.

Kevin: The Greek word indicates that, doesn’t it?

Ronny: It does, and there is great significance in that because the one loaf represented His one body. And we all are partakers of that one body. In many churches today, there are individual crackers, I guess you’d say. And individual cups that they drink from. That is neither in the spirit nor in harmony with the pattern that Jesus set.

Kevin: Right. And people will respond, *True enough, but it’s incidental. You’re making mountains out of mole hills. What’s really important is that we remember Jesus*. How do you answer that?

Ronny: I answer that by saying if it is incidental, what about the time of observance? Is that incidental? Do we have to do it on the first day of the week just because of **Acts 20:7**?

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

Is it incidental that that day is named? Is it incidental that Jesus took a loaf of unleavened bread instead of steak? Is it incidental that He took a cup containing fruit of the vine instead of root beer or something like that? By the way, people have gone that far. Some religious people have communion on Tuesday night or Thursday night. They use Coca-Cola or water, and see nothing wrong with either. So, if we’re going to violate the pattern in any particular, we can violate it in EVERY particular, it seems to me.

Kevin: And we’re seeing such a departure today, even beyond the issues that we’re talking about, in so many things that involve the worship and work of the church because there is just no respect for a Bible pattern.

Back to the significance of these things that Jesus used: it’s not just a matter of *He used one cup so we use one cup*, although that is authority enough. But Jesus also gave symbolic significance to a congregation coming together and communing together out of that vessel when He said, *This cup is the New Testament in My blood*. There is a lot of confusion today concerning what He meant by that, and also confusion over the two statements *This is My blood of the New Testament* and *This is the New Testament in My blood*. What did Jesus mean when He said that and to what was He referring? How is that distinct from what He said about the fruit of the vine?

Ronny: I think many people misunderstand what Jesus said and what He meant. I’ve personally heard people make fun of the idea that a literal container represented anything. People will also make fun of

the idea that grape juice represents something. Jesus said that this cup containing wine, which was an emblem of blood, is rendered by the shedding of My blood, an emblem of the New Testament. The New Testament, of course, was ratified by the blood of Christ.

What we have when we observe the Lord's Supper is a cup containing fruit of the vine, and this cup containing fruit of the vine represents the New Testament in His blood. He didn't say that an empty cup represented the New Testament. It doesn't and we don't believe it does, nor do we teach that it does. But we DO believe that a cup containing wine/fruit of the vine is an emblem of the New Testament. The fruit of the vine is an emblem of the blood of Christ.

What Jesus said is hard to erase. He DIDN'T say *this fruit of the vine is the New Testament*. He said *This cup is the New Testament in My blood*. The Greek lexicographers all say *This cup containing wine, an emblem of blood, is rendered by the shedding of My blood an emblem of the New Testament*. So, we believe that the New Testament was ratified by the blood of Christ and there is a picture of that in the communion. To deny that picture is one thing, to destroy that picture is another thing, and to substitute something that totally destroys the picture is another thing.

I ask you this: what is a tray of individual cups an emblem of? How does it in any way represent the new covenant or the blood of Jesus Christ either one? It's not like we want to be different or that we want to create an argument; it's just that we believe what Jesus said is important. What the apostle Paul reported to the Corinthian brethren is important. If it's NOT important, why did Paul correct the way they were eating the Lord's Supper? They were way off base in Corinth in the way they observed the Lord's Supper, and I have to be honest with you, friends, I think people are way off base today. I really do. I think they've left the New Testament pattern for something that is a substitute.

Kevin: And as you say, it destroys the picture. The very idea of "individual communion" is really a contradiction and an oxymoron. *Communion is a joint participation*, and it's a wonderful and beautiful picture when a congregation of God's people come together and share the loaf of unleavened bread and share the cup of blessing, as Paul referred to it in **I Corinthians 10**.

Ronny: That really is a powerful point. The communion was never intended to be something we can get over with as quickly as possible. It was not intended to be expedited in a way that won't take too long to observe it. It serves a purpose: it is a reminder of what Jesus did for us when He shed His blood on the cross. And it is a reminder of the new covenant scriptures under which we live today and to which we are accountable today. That's a lesson everybody needs to get every Lord's Day.

The bread which WE break...Nobody breaks it for you—YOU break the bread. YOU participate by taking a piece of that bread. Is it not the communion of the body of Christ? You know, the people to whom Paul was writing were familiar with that, I believe. What they were NOT familiar with was the oneness that should've existed in the congregation and in the church. He used that one bread that everybody partakes of as an example to show them that they ought to be ONE in Christ. They weren't arguing about whether or not there was just one loaf; they knew that and practiced that every Lord's Day. What they were divided over was the oneness that they had in Christ. Yet today, instead of that, we are divided over whether the one bread means anything or not, and whether or not we can have a dozen loaves or one for everybody. One reason we cannot is that it violates the pattern. It violates the picture that Paul wanted to teach.

Kevin: You have debated this subject across the country for years and years, going back to the 1960's, I suppose. There are arguments that you've heard come up again and again. One would be, *The Bible speaks of Jesus taking the cup, but when the word cup is used, it's what we call a metonymy, where He is referring to the fruit of the vine and not to the container.* How do you answer that?

Ronny: Metonymy is a rather simple figure of speech that we all use from time to time when we name one thing to suggest another. But, you see, the thing that we name is there. You name something that exists and you suggest something else. When you say *drink the cup*, you're actually saying *drink what's in the cup*. You don't drink the container itself or consume the container itself. Rather you consume what's IN it.

All Greek lexicographers and dictionaries to my knowledge agree that when the Bible says, *He (Jesus) took the cup*, that it is referring to a literal cup. The word *cup* is from the Greek word *poterion* and it is a single cup. He took that cup, and in that cup was fruit of the vine. He said *Drink this cup*, using this figure which essentially means *drink what this cup contains*. What it contains never becomes the cup. The fruit of the vine never becomes the cup, rather is in the cup. We drink the cup by drinking what it contains, which is the fruit of the vine. So, to argue that the cup is the fruit of the vine not only violates what the scripture says, but also destroys the concept of metonymy.

Kevin: It's really amazing how what we accept and acknowledge in everyday language as so simple and so apparent suddenly seems to become so muddy when we move it into a religious context.

Ronny: Take for example the phrase *raising a baby on a bottle*. Do you raise a baby on an empty bottle? Do you say the bottle is the milk? We know better than that! We know that to *raise a baby on a bottle* means that if the baby takes the bottle or drinks the bottle, what is the baby doing? The baby is drinking the milk that's in the bottle. The milk never becomes the bottle. Jesus took a cup. It contained the fruit of the vine. He gave it to the disciples and said *Drink ye all of it or Drink ye all from it*. The Bible says that is what they did.

Kevin: What if there was an 's' at the end of the word 'cup?'

Ronny: That's an interesting question.

Kevin: But there's not.

Ronny: But what if the Bible said, "He took the cups"? What if someone was to say, *I want you to prove to me that it's alright to have a tray of individual cups*. Wouldn't you go to that scripture? Wouldn't you say, *well, the Bible says right here He took the cups*. But, you see, it never said that. Even though the Bible says *He took the cup*, people will argue in some unreasonable fashions why that doesn't mean what it says.

Kevin: Let's look at Luke's account.

Luke 22:17 "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves:"

This is one of the main scriptures that I hear people quote to try to justify dividing the fruit of the vine into individual cups.

Ronny: That's true. But it is so easily answered and understood if one will just think about it. We know that Jesus took a cup and we know that He gave that cup containing fruit of the vine to His disciples saying, *Drink ye all of it or All of you drink from it*. The question is this: How did they divide it? The answer is: by drinking from it. They divided the contents of that cup by drinking from that cup. When He told them, *Take this and divide it among yourselves*, it was passed from one person to another, each person drank from it, and that's how they divided it.

Kevin: The very Greek word that means *of* in the phrase *Drink ye all of it* is the word *ek* and it means *out of*. It is a commandment. Again, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said, *This do in remembrance of Me*. Another common reply is *How in the world did thousands of people in Jerusalem share a cup on the Day of Pentecost? We read of the church multiplying by thousands at a time, particularly in Jerusalem. How could they possibly have used one loaf and one cup as they communed?*

Ronny: That's been an argument that people have used. The amazing thing about that argument is that it is designed to prove that what Jesus said didn't mean what He said. It's designed to prove that what Jesus and the disciples did is something that we can't do today. I would answer that by pointing out that even though there were thousands of people present on the Day of Pentecost, there is no evidence whatsoever that they all assembled in one congregation and observed the Lord's Supper. We know that there were people there from every nation under heaven and they went back home. They left the city. We also know that, according to ancient history, the ancient church generally met from house to house rather than in one large building. One of the major reasons for that was because of the animosity that existed between the Jewish people and those who had obeyed the gospel. They were all Jews at that time, and many of those Jews were considered "turncoats" simply because they had accepted Christ even though the Jewish people had put Him to death. So, what has to be proven first is that the three thousand on Pentecost all met in one assembly or congregation. There is no way to do that. Obviously, the argument falls right there.

We do know that churches did assemble every Lord's Day. And we know that there were various congregations throughout that area. The church multiplied and the number of Christians multiplied, the Bible says, so actually here is what has to happen: To prove that everybody on the Day of Pentecost had to drink out of one cup, you've got to find everybody on the Day of Pentecost in one assembly of the church. If you can find that, then you might have an argument. But you can't find it. Here is what you CAN find: each congregation of the Lord's people gathered to observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. You can find exactly HOW Jesus instituted the supper and how the apostle Paul delivered it to the people of the Corinthian congregation. He reiterated exactly what Christ said. That would've been an ideal time for Paul to have changed something. But he didn't. We have to accept what Jesus said, what Jesus did, and what Paul said.

Kevin: That brings up the idea that communion is a congregational practice. Some people will say that you would have to have one cup for all of the world, but the whole world is not commanded to come together and commune. Rather, congregations come together to commune. That is the example we have in **Acts 20:7**.

Jesus gave a pattern that we can and should follow today, and it's not a matter of being difficult, obstinate or just trying to be different. It's a matter of simply maintaining the practice that Jesus established two thousand years ago. We contend that that ought to be done, and we hope that our viewers will give some serious Bible study to this very important Bible topic. It is worthy of your time and consideration.

I Corinthians 11:2 “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.”

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