

Equipping The Saints

“...For the equipping of the saints for the work of service...” ~ Ephesians 4:12

May 15, 2016

1.46

Some Thoughts on the “One Cup” Issue (By Andrew Dow)

Last Sunday morning’s lesson, “*Why Do We Take the Lord’s Supper,*” briefly touched on what is sometimes called the “One Cup” issue—that is, the disagreement between those who believe that the fruit of the vine can be dispensed in multiple cups and those who conclude that it must be taken from only one cup. The “One Cup” issue has been the topic of more than a few debates. For instance, W. Curtis Porter and J. Ervin Waters debated the issue in 1946 and again in 1950. Furthermore, Elmer Moore engaged in written debates with Ronny Wade (1987) and Douglas T. Hawkins (1998) which both appeared in the *Guardian of Truth*. Suffice it to say, this has been an ongoing controversy which has passionate and sincere people on both sides.

After the lesson last Sunday morning, a brother in Christ lovingly approached me and explained to me that he thought I had oversimplified the “one cup” issue. This article is an effort on my part to more fully explain and answer the “one cup” position. I hope that this article will properly portray their arguments and demonstrate an accurate handling of the Word of God.

Command, Example, & Necessary Inference?

In the majority of articles and debates I’ve tracked down, those who affirm that we must use only one cup predominately argue this way: *we must use one cup because the New Testament commands, exemplifies, and implies the use of one cup.*

This is the argument I dealt with in the lesson last Sunday morning. It's true that Jesus' command included the singular word, "cup." However, we can't ignore the clearly figurative language He used. This is the only way we can make sense of statements like, **"This cup which is poured out for you"** (Luke 22:20), and **"drink the cup"** (1 Corinthians 11:26). He's clearly using the word "cup" figuratively to describe what is in the cup.

They also contend that Jesus set a binding example when He used one cup. However, why is the one cup binding while the location (Luke 22:12) and time (Luke 22:14) are not? Additionally, looking carefully at the example Jesus left indicates that one cup was not used at all. The cup (i.e., contents) is divided in Luke 22:17, but it is not drunk until Luke 22:20 (after eating the bread).

Finally, they conclude that the use of one cup is implied by Christ and His disciples in the texts already mentioned above. However, what might we infer from Acts 2:41-42 where three thousand individuals are saved and subsequently share the memorial meal (**"breaking of bread"**)? Did they all use one cup? This seems incredibly unlikely. However, I suppose this is as speculative a proposition as claiming that Jesus' use of a singular word necessarily implies that we must use one cup.

What Does the Cup Represent?

Another argument put forward by those who advocate the use of only one cup is taken from Jesus' statement in Luke 22:20, **"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood"** (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:25). The argument is this: *while the bread and fruit of the vine are significant due to their connection with the flesh and blood of Jesus, the one cup is equally significant due to its connection with the new covenant.* As best as I can determine, this argument seems to have gained momentum more recently. In his 1950 debate with Porter, Waters only alluded to this point without giving it much weight. However, the

Hawkins-Moore debate in 1998 was entirely about this specific argument. Regardless, this argument is worth considering.

First, we must not take Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25 out of the contexts in which they reside. The word “cup” is just a word until it is placed in context; only when considered in context can we determine what it means. We already pointed out that Jesus was using the word “cup” to speak figuratively of its contents (i.e., the fruit of the vine). Otherwise the cup being poured (Luke 22:20) and drunk (1 Corinthians 11:26) does not make sense. Therefore, when Jesus uses the word “cup” in this context, He is speaking of the cup’s contents. Now look again at Luke 22:20—**“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”** Jesus is explaining that the contents of the cup (i.e., the fruit of the vine) is what represents the new covenant.

However, “one cup” proponents argue that there are three distinct things being represented: (1) the bread represents His body, (2) the fruit of the vine represents His blood, and (3) the cup represents the new covenant. We should be careful, though, not to make distinctions where Jesus did not make them. Jesus said **“This cup which is poured out... is the new covenant in My blood”** (Luke 22:20). Matthew recorded it this way, **“He had taken a cup... saying, ‘Drink from it... for this is My blood of the covenant’** (Matthew 26:27-28). The cup (i.e., contents) represents the covenant and the cup (i.e., contents) represents the blood. The blood and the covenant are intertwined and inseparable. Consider what the Hebrew author wrote, **“For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it... Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and**

scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you’” (9:16-20).

Furthermore, I would point out to you that in no single account does Jesus speak of three representative elements of the Lord’s Supper (i.e., Bread, Fruit of vine, and Cup). In all four records Jesus describes the bread (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24) and the cup (Matt. 26:27-28; Mark 14:23-24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). There is never a third element or representation.

Conclusion

The motive of this article is not to prove one group is right and another group is wrong, but simply to try to discern what Scripture says about this topic. I am persuaded from my study of Scripture that the number of cups used to distribute the Lord’s Supper is unimportant (whether it be one cup or three thousand). What our concern ought to be is remembering and proclaiming Christ’s life giving sacrifice for our sins!

Notes:

AM Lesson:

*Where Can I
Make A Difference*

PM Lesson:

*2 Thessalonians:
More Hope*

“Go therefore and make disciples...” (Matthew 28:19-20)