

# Protecting the Lord's Supper: Why I Like that Little Cup & Wafer

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If a Christian from the 1<sup>st</sup> century could travel forward in time to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and visit a typical worship service among churches of Christ, I doubt he would find any radical departures from the simple 1<sup>st</sup> century Christian worship to which he is accustomed.

Of course, he would quickly notice we typically meet in a church-owned building instead of a member's house, he would hear new melodies and lyrics during our songs, and he would notice a different language, obviously. Perhaps the biggest difference would be the absence of spiritual gifts - such as the gifts of prophecy or tongues or the utterances of knowledge and wisdom - which were so necessary in the 1<sup>st</sup> century before Christians had the completed revelation of Christ's New Testament.

But I do not think he would see anything wrong with how we worship, **including how we do the Lord's Supper.**

## What We Know

Just as was true in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Christians today are not free to take the Lord's Supper *willy nilly*. Scripture regulates how we take communion:

**1. We are to partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.** The *frequency* and *day* we are to observe the Lord's Supper are not directly stated in preserved Scripture in the form of a command. However, it is clear from the practice of the apostle Paul that God approves of eating the Lord's Supper on Sunday. Acts 20:7 speaks of Christians in Troas assembling on Sunday for the purpose of breaking bread, and 1 Corinthians 11:20 shows that the Lord's Supper is one of the primary reasons for assembling on Sunday. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 shows us they assembled *every* Sunday.

**2. Unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine are to be eaten during the Lord's Supper.** We partake of the same elements that the Lord instituted: "bread" and "fruit of the vine." We know this from the accounts of Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. All other additions, substitutions, or innovations are corruptions of his memorial supper.

**3. Only citizens of the kingdom (Luke 22:30) can legitimately take the Lord's Supper.** While it is virtually unheard of for churches of Christ to practice "closed communion" (no one is going to walk up and slap the grape juice out of the hand of an unwitting visitor), we recognize that the Lord's Supper is intended only for those who have come into communion with His body and blood by being baptized into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3-7; 1 Cor. 10:16). Thus, children are ineligible to share in the memorial.

**4. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to memorialize Christ.** We should remember the suffering and anguish that our Lord went through in dying on the cross (1 Cor. 11:24-25). If we engage in the Lord's Supper in an irreverent manner, or if we do not separate in our minds the significance of this memorial, it will be damnation to us (1 Cor. 11:27, 29).

## Critical of the Way We do it?

I occasionally hear Christians (who should know better) criticizing the way churches of Christ (and, incidentally, much of evangelical Christendom) take the Lord's Supper. "It should be a robust family-type supper. Everyone - including children - should take part." "It should be an actual meal, with whole loafs of bread and other food." "Tiny cups and wafers

are recent inventions and are unlike what Christians used in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.”

This kind of reasoning demonstrates a **dangerous misunderstanding** of the Lord’s Supper. **No human alive today knows the exact quantity of bread or juice that was typical in the 1<sup>st</sup> century observance of this memorial.** Additionally, **no human today has the authority to regulate the portions of the food for the universal church.** To teach we must “super-size” the portions on the Lord’s Table is divisiveness.

The **timing during worship** and the **portion of food** during the Lord’s Supper is a **matter of judgment** and it seems to me that churches that rush through it are making a mistake. But I argue that it **there is a benefit to keeping the portions relatively small** in light of the fact that the purpose of the Lord’s Supper is not to satisfy hunger, but to memorialize the Lord.

### ***The Lord’s Supper is not Intended to Satisfy Hunger***

**The Lord’s Supper was never a common meal.** Both Luke and Paul confirm this by recording the Lord’s Supper “after they had eaten” (Luke 22:20) and “after supper” (1 Cor. 11:25).

**The only time the Bible talks about a meal in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper, it gives the command to separate the two (1 Cor. 11:21).** The fact that some early Christians in Corinth had profaned the Lord’s Supper with a meal doesn’t authorize us to do so. Only bread and fruit of the vine are used to describe the memorial; where does God authorize us to incorporate other elements from a common meal?

**I like the fact that it is our tradition to use a small cup and tiny wafer during the Lord’s Supper because it helps clear any confusion that this might be a literal “meal” in the common sense of the word.**

### ***The Lord’s Supper did not Provide Much Food for the Disciples***

Furthermore, a large serving of bread and drink is not necessary in order to remember the Lord. Bear in mind that Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, broke twelve pieces from the small Jewish loaf, today called matzo, and gave them to the apostles, after which He told them to divide the cup among themselves (Matt. 26:26-27). The same word for “bread” is used to describe the young boy’s lunch consisting of five loaves (John 6:9). **Each of the twelve apostles would not have had very much to eat and drink.** **The spiritual blessings from the Lord’s Supper are derived from the focus of the**

**Christian who is spiritually sharing the body and blood of Jesus, not on the physical quantity or quality of the elements.** If it was about quantity, then fill my plate up! But the remembrance of Jesus is more important than the amount of the substance.

## Let's Make the Lord's Supper Better

It is **misdirected zeal** to suggest we need to bring the entire church around a literal table and incorporate the Lord's memorial meal into a common meal. **If your elders have elected to use a small cup and wafer, they are justified in doing so.**

I would argue, however, there is room for many churches to improve how they do the Lord's Supper. May I suggest:

- **Don't rush through it.** I can't help but feel a "let's get this over with" attitude among some when visiting different congregation. Give people time to read one of the crucifixion accounts. Give people time to pray another private prayer. Give people time to meditate on the meaning of the bread and the fruit of the vine.
- **Separate it from the offering.** As a matter of expediency, since the men leading the Lord's Supper are already in front of the audience, it is typical for churches to move on to passing the collection plate immediately after the Lord's Supper. I feel this is in poor judgment. Sing a song in between. Give people time to transition from memorializing the Lord to preparing their offering to Him.
- **Find a dedicated speaker for the table.** Don't just grab the first unsuspecting guy in the lobby 5 minutes before worship and ask him to direct the Lord's Supper. Ask a Christian several weeks in advance to prepare a 5-10 minute talk. That is what he focuses on. Don't ask him to pass the plates; let the other men do that.

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