

The Bread & Cup: regularly gathering to remember the Lord (Luke 22:17–20; etc.)

We celebrate the Bread & Cup in remembrance of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do so in a worthy manner, being sure that our actions conform to our confession. And we also wish to do so in a physical manner that conforms to the intent of God in Scripture

I. Preliminary guidelines for interpretation and application

1. We base our practices upon two types of biblical information: prescriptive information, that is, commands, and descriptive information, that is, the accounts of how the commands are lived out. We look for commands concerning the Bread & Cup and at the practice of the early church to discern how they understood those commands.
2. We also distinguish between essence (the basic nature of something), function (what something does or is intended to do), and form (the shape or outward expression of something). Form and function grow out of and should agree with essence. We seek to discern what form of practicing the Bread & Cup fits the intended function and agrees with the essential nature of the celebration of the Bread & Cup.

II. The command and teaching of Jesus Christ

1. *The historic occasion* (Luke 22:19–20; cf. Matt 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; John 13)
 - a. The Bread and Cup were first shared by Jesus probably at the conclusion of the Last Supper, which the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) present as a Passover meal. Luke alone mentions two cups, the first cup probably being the cup of blessing with which a meal began.
 - b. The Synoptics report three commands of Jesus: for the disciples to take the first cup and divide it among themselves (Luke 22:17), for the Eleven to take the bread and eat it, and to drink the cup (Matt 26:26–27), and for the Eleven to “do this in remembrance of me”.
 - c. The command for remembrance implies a continued practice, but without the examples of the early church and the instructions in 1 Corinthians 11, it would not be clear if a continued practice in the church was intended. Many details of the evening have been used to establish practices, but none are explicitly commanded.
2. *The post resurrection affirmation* (1 Corinthians 11:2, 17–34)
 - a. The apostle Paul passed on to the Corinthians instructions which he himself had received directly from the Lord which included a command to remember the Lord and proclaim His death in the practice of the Bread & Cup.
 - b. Surrounding details define the practice in the early church, but are not explicitly commanded: the Bread and Cup when they were gathered (vv. 17, 18, 20, 33, 34) in the context of a meal.

III. The practice of the early church

1. *Acts 2:41–47* — This passage indicates that in the early church baptized believers (v.41) held the Bread & Cup as highly important (“devoted themselves”) and so practiced it daily as they met to eat together in their homes (cf. Jude 12; 1 Corinthians 11:20).
2. *Acts 20:7–12* — It had become a practice in this church to gather on Sunday (1st day of the week) to share a meal (v.7, “break bread”) and celebrate the Bread & Cup (v. 11, “having broken the bread”).
3. *1 Corinthians 10:17* — The believers in Corinth gathered (“we who are many”, “we all”) and symbolized in the bread their unity (“there is one bread”, “the one bread”).
4. *1 Corinthians 11:17–34* — The believers gathered (see above) to eat a meal (vv. 21–22) in a central location (v. 22) at which they shared the Bread & Cup, by which they proclaimed truth (that they were not living out).

We conclude that God’s Word calls us 1) to obey by celebrating the Bread & Cup, 2) to focus on Jesus and His death in the Bread & Cup, 3) to celebrate it as a community of gathered believers—one body, 4) to strive for unity and fellowship, 5) to not restrict ourselves to location or time, 6) and to avoid holding merely to form without practicing what the Bread & Cup teaches.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Why is there wisdom in following the practice of the early church, but not requiring dogmatically all which they did (but was not commanded)? What further examples exist?
- Some churches take the Bread & Cup to those who are house-bound. How does this align with the principles drawn from the practice of the early church? What is good about it? What is deficient?
- When we may once again assemble physically as a church, we will not at first be able to continue on Sundays as usual with our previous method of celebrating the Bread & Cup. In what manner might we best celebrate it, keeping to biblical principles but attempting to follow current hygiene restrictions? (Please share any good ideas with church leadership.)