

A Summary Of Arguments For And Against Individual Communion Cups

By J D Logan

(The following introduction is from the booklet “*Building According to the Pattern*”, published about 1925 in “*The Pacific Christian*” by Brothers T C Hawley and Earnest C Love, Ed.)

“*Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle; for, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.*” (Heb. 8:5).

“*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” (Rom. 10:17).

The religion of Jesus Christ is a revelation from God, and not an evolution from man. It is a system of salvation by faith: that is, by believing what God has said. The authoritative revelation of God is given and completed in the Bible. No one, since John completed Revelation, has been able to speak for God with authority, as did the apostles; so that the Bible is now the perfect standard and pattern for all men to go by, if they wish to make, successfully, the journey from earth to heaven.”

To which I will add the words of Peter, “*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.*” (2 Pet. 1:3).

Since the debate on the use of individual cups has been ongoing for over 100 years, many arguments for and against have been suggested. Some of the following date back over 100 years and some I have heard in my own lifetime. I sincerely hope that the truth can be furthered by exposing the words of Jesus, for, as Peter said, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*” (John 6:68).

AGAINST A PLURALITY

1. They are entirely unknown to the New Testament, not being even hinted at by Christ or the apostles.
2. They are a modern addition, scripturally speaking, having been introduced barely over one hundred years ago.
3. The church of Christ borrowed them from the denominational world; the same source from which came the missionary society, instrumental music, infant baptism, etc. We should return everything that we borrow!
4. The use of them violates the letter of the law of Christ, for only one cup is mentioned in the New Testament.
5. The use of them violates the spirit of the law of Christ by making an act “individual” which Christ intended to be a “communion”.
6. The use of them is a compromise of our plea for scriptural unity based upon the famous saying: “Where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent, we are silent”. We cannot honestly make that claim, while using individual cups.
7. The use of them violates the example of Christ in establishing the communion service. “...*he took a cup*”.
8. The use of them violates the plain command of Christ, who said: “*Drink ye all of it*”.
9. The use of them breaks the harmony and good fellowship between congregations, for those that oppose the cups cannot worship with them, anymore than they can with instrumental music.

10. The use of them violates the last message from heaven which forbids “adding to” God’s laws or appointments.
11. The use of them makes the worship “vain” worship, for it substitutes for the doctrine of the New Testament, “...*the commandments of men.*” (Mark 7:7)
12. The use of them destroys that symbol of unity as expressed in 1 Cor. 10:16-17, emphasizing oneness of “...the body” and the emblems.
13. The use of them should immediately be discontinued, for Christ said, “*Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*”. (Matt. 15:13).

IN FAVOUR OF A PLURALITY

1. It is not “nice” to drink after someone else. We don’t do that in our homes.
Reply...In families where there is any real love one might drink after another and think nothing of it. It is frequently done. There is nothing gained by being so “nice”. Some folks are too “nice” for this world.
2. Brother So-and-So is dirty; he uses tobacco and dips his mustache in the cup; and he does not always clean his nose, etc.
Reply...This is no argument for individual cups. Someone should tell brother So-and-So to clean up. When Samuel’s sons became sinful, the people asked for a king. What they should have done is clean up the judges. They wrecked the nation by changing God’s appointments instead of going after those that were guilty. Let us avoid their mistake.
3. The State law forbids the common cup.
Reply...Yes, there are laws in some states against the “common cup”, but there has been no effort to enforce them in religious affairs and probably never will be. But should there be an effort made to interfere with the worship, let Christians stand where Peter stood and say, “*We ought to obey God rather than men*”, and bravely take the consequences.
4. There is great danger of catching some contagious disease from the communion cup.
Reply...Yes, some doctors and scientists will tell us that. However, studies have shown that there is far more danger from unwashed hands than from drinking from a common cup. If the communion cup was a dangerous thing, then the church of Christ would have been dead long ago. For a hundred years up until about the turn of the twentieth century, the members of this great body in this nation have assembled and partaken from the common communion cup. They are as healthy and vigorous as any body of religious people I know. If half the stories were true, as some would have us to believe, regarding catching disease from drinking from a common cup, we would have all been dead before the bugologists” found out what the matter was. Let us fear God rather than germs!

Besides this, if there should be a tubercular victim in the congregation, the entire congregation is already exposed by the simple act of inhalation. These germs are not transmitted by drinking from a common cup.

Also, when the separate cups are introduced, the diseased one still handles the bread, and is sure to leave germs on it, so the next one will get them. Also, when these cups are used once, they are washed and put away till next service. Unless they are sterilized very thoroughly, the germs that were on them are not killed, but scattered all over the other cups.

Also, remember, tubercular germs are said to remain alive and dangerous for six months under favorable conditions. What is to hinder someone from getting one of those live germs next Sunday?

Conclusion...There is very little danger in drinking from the common communion cup, if any, and individual cups do not remove all the supposed danger.

5. Our leading preachers endorse them.

Reply...The same may be said of the Missionary Society, instrumental music, individual bread-break-breaking, and every other innovation that has marred the peace of the brotherhood and cluttered up the road to heaven. Some men have simply gone wrong, that's all!

6. Our leading churches all have introduced them.

Reply...the same as Number 5. It was the "sophisticated" congregations in the larger cities who first began to use them. This was often done by competing with the denominations. It took several years of dissention for this to be accomplished. Many of these churches today have introduced all sorts of unscriptural practices. I have read of young people taking guitars into bible classes. Some "progressive" congregations are using women to preside over the communion service. When you begin to depart from the scriptural pattern, there is no way to successfully resist further digressions!

7. We use two (sometimes three) cups, why not two hundred?

Reply...Absolutely right! Why not two hundred? No congregation uses two, or more, cups by the authority of Christ. Who started this practice, I don't know. But, one thing for certain, it did not begin with Christ or the apostles. This cannot be used as an argument for individual cups, until the authority for the two has been established.

8. The word "cup" is figurative.

Reply...Sometimes, this is true, but not always. When Jesus "*took a cup*", he took a literal cup; of this there can be no doubt. This, however, does not authorize the use of individual cups. "*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come.*" (1 Cor. 11:26). Suppose we admit this is a figure of speech, a metonym, then what? In this case the container is put for the thing contained. What is the container? "*a cup*". What is the thing contained? "*the fruit of the vine*".

Christ prayed, "*Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me.*" (Luke 22:42) Here we are told that the cup is purely figurative, there being no literal cup present. That is true. Jesus was obviously referring to the method of execution prevalent at that time; that of forcing a convicted man to drink a cup of hemlock, a deadly poison. This is no help for the advocates of individual cups.

9. It is only the contents that count; the vessel is immaterial.

Reply...The Jews had developed an argument similar to this. "*Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.*" (Matt. 23:16-22).

To paraphrase Jesus' answer we have: "*Ye blind: for which is greater, the contents, or the cup that sanctifieth the contents?*"

10. Jesus said, "*Take this, (cup) and divide it among yourselves.*"

Reply...This offers no comfort to those who use individual cups, for this was not the "*cup of the Lord*", but rather a cup of the Passover. However, as to the "*cup of the Lord*", we know how they divided it among themselves: "*...they all drank of it.*" (Mark 14:23).

11. No one can drink the literal cup...that is, no one can actually swallow a part of a literal cup.

Reply..."*We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat, who serve the tabernacle.*" (Heb. 13:10). Here, some are said to eat of an altar. If one can eat of an altar by eating the things offered upon it, one can drink a cup by drinking what is in it. "*...ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils.*" (1 Cor. 10:21) Here some are said to partake of a table. Everyone knows that in partaking of what is on the table, the full requirements of this language is met.

12. We have our communion with God, anyway, so it makes no difference how many cups we use.

Reply...This argument makes the assembly together to break bread entirely unnecessary. If other members of the congregation do not figure in the communion, why have a meeting? Certainly one can commune with God at home or out in the forest. This error is caused by a misunderstanding of the word “communion”. Of this word, Vine says, “‘koinonia’, a having in common (koinos), partnership, fellowship, denotes ...sharing in the realization of the effects of the blood (i.e. the death) of Christ and the body of Christ, as set forth by the emblems in the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 16:16.” (Vine, Pg 115) You cannot have communion by yourself!

13. The “cup question” is an untaught question.

Reply...We respectfully state that the cup is mentioned specifically every time the vessel is mentioned at all. Jesus took a cup when he set up the institution. Later, when Paul was delivering to the church what he had “*received of the Lord*”, he specifies the cup. This is not untaught. The “*cup of the Lord*” is more clearly set forth in the scriptures than the day upon which it should be drunk. Yet the argument in favor of the “*first day of the week*” as the day of Christian assembly is abundantly sufficient. Neither are untaught questions!

14. To say the church should have but one cup is “making a law where God has made none”.

Reply...This would be true if the Lord, himself, had not set up the institution, using one cup, and commanded, “*This do in remembrance of me*”. (Luke 22:19). Are we legislating for God when we urge all persons coming into the church to go down into the water and be buried with the Lord in baptism? No! Why? Because the Bible teaches that itself. The law was made by Christ, himself! By insisting that brethren should use as many, and no more, cups than are mentioned in the scriptures, one is not making laws for God.

15. The Jerusalem church was so large that all of them could not possibly have drunk from one cup.

Reply...This is the same argument made by the infusionists that sprinkling or pouring must be right, because three thousand people could not have been immersed in one day. But we answer by showing that it was not necessary for one man to do all the baptizing. There is no reason for believing that all the brethren in Jerusalem ever tried to break bread in one assembly.

Also, we might ask, If, as you suggest, all in the Jerusalem church met in one assembly, did they use individual communion sets with over three thousand containers? We must remember that these were not invented until nearly two thousand years later!

No loaf can be possibly made that would accommodate over three thousand people, yet Paul says, “*...we are all partakers of that one bread*.” (1 Cor. 10:17). There is certainly as much authority here for a plurality of loaves as there is for a plurality of cups. And if a congregation can find authority for individual cups in the scriptures, then surely, by the same token, it can also find authority for individual loaves (wafers). Then why should we oppose Roman Catholicism on this matter, as we do?

The Jews were accustomed to observing the Passover regularly. The family and the lamb were the units of worship. But families and lambs do not always correspond so, as a result, sometimes the families had to double up. (see Exo. 12:4). But the rule was “*...a lamb for an house*.” (Vs 3) No Jew would ever think of saying, “My family is too large, I will kill two lambs.” One lamb; one house.

To Christians the congregation and the cup are the units of worship, If there is to be an alteration because of size, it should be that of the congregation, not the number of cups. I have been in congregations of between one hundred fifty and two hundred members and were accommodated easily with a large chalice (cup). If the congregation grows larger, let another

congregation be established, and thus spread the work into another location.

16. To oppose individual cups causes division.

Reply...This cannot be denied, if the use of them continues, or if some insist on introducing them into congregations. No one is justified in being a party to division merely to satisfy a whim. Division cannot be justified over mere expedients. But the Lord's Supper is no whim, and the cup is no mere expedient. Partaking of the cup is a most solemn duty. It cannot be a matter of indifference.

One hundred fifty (approx.) years ago the church of Christ was divided by the introduction of instrumental music. Today, we honor the faithful old brethren who withstood this innovation and as a result, saved the church. Today, we continue to face a similar crisis over the individual cup use. But there is only one course left to the people of God; maintain the true form of worship of the Saviour at any cost. If division must come, and come it has, and will, many will be lost because of digression, but a remnant will be saved. But if all submit to the error, the Lord will come and remove the candlestick out of its place and all will be lost. The Lord, however, will not blame the division upon those who remain faithful to his word and appointments. We need have no fear of this.

(There are many other arguments used to justify the use of individual cups than these, but this more or less represents those of the past one hundred years. We call on our brethren who participate in this digression from the truth to abandon this and return to the true worship according to the scriptures.)

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