

What Does the Bible Teach About The “One Cup, No Bible Class” Movement?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- A. Some churches which embraced “non-institutional” tenets became isolationists in the earlier part of the twentieth century. A major focus at that time was the modern “Sunday school” with its individualized classes.
1. Today, over 1,100 congregations in the U.S. are non-class churches.
 2. These churches are divided over whether individual containers may be used to serve the fruit of the vine in the Lord’s Supper.
 3. In 565 non-class congregations, individual containers are used.
 4. In 561 churches, one cup is used.
 5. Each group claims 4% of the total number of congregations in the U.S.
 6. However, non-class groups are found in 34 states and contain 1.8% of professed members of churches of Christ.
 - a. Non-class groups are prominent in Texas (197), Oklahoma (66), and Arkansas (55), Missouri (50).
 7. One cup congregations are found in 34 states, and constitute only 1.4% of the total membership.
 - a. Leading states are Texas (103), California (59), Oklahoma (50), and Missouri (50).
 - b. One cup groups claim the highest percentage of the churches in Pennsylvania (12%). However, there are very few non-institutional churches of Christ in Pennsylvania.
- B. It should also be noted that non-class brethren disagree among themselves over the use of a located preacher. Many of the non-class churches maintain a policy of having no fellowship with those non-class churches which use a located preacher or which fellowship class brethren.
1. The practice of “chain fellowship” binds these churches in a tighter fellowship group. And although the majority of the one cup folks use unfermented grape juice and believe each participant should break the loaf, others either break the loaf before distribution or insist on wine.
 2. While “mutual edification” as a belief and practice characterizes the one cup churches and most of the Non-class churches, a few congregations have adopted multiple cups for the Lord’s Supper and Bible classes, but have held to mutual ministry.
 3. Mutual edification (or mutual ministry) suggests that the engagement of a person as the exclusive “preacher” for the congregation be disallowed in favor of giving all male members an opportunity to “edify” the church in public assembly.
 - a. Concentrated in Missouri, and total 141 churches accounting for only 1% of churches of Christ.
 4. Churches which espouse premillennial ideas number only 81. Premillennial churches received their impetus in the 1920s and are found primarily in Kentucky (46) and in Louisiana (21), making up half of all such brethren.

5. A few congregations subscribe to the A.D. 70 theory (4), or baptize in the name of Jesus only (3). They do not represent a major division.

II. THE ONE CUP ISSUE

A. Don L. King, publisher of Old Paths Advocate in 1997, stated emphatically that one is going to hell if one participates in the use of a plurality of cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper. He wrote: "We are concerned with things we hear about the subject of fellowship. Why do we worship with one-cup? Answer: because we read it plainly in Matt. 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 20; 1Cor. 10:16, 11:25-28. Is it wrong, sinful to use more than one? Answer: yes, because more than one-cup violates the example given in these verses, it violates the command for us to do as Jesus did. Listen brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one-cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one-cup. Surely, we believe that! If people are not going to be lost for using more than one, then let's give up the fight and heal the division caused by those who have insisted on using more than one. Individual cups are a sinful violation of the Bible pattern. What about Bible classes? Is it right to divide the public assembly into classes for the purpose of teaching and allow women to teach? The pattern is always an undivided assembly with one man at a time doing the teaching."

B. Throughout the history of the Restoration movement, most churches followed the denominational pattern of using a limited number of cups.

1. Bethany church of Christ and Alexander Campbell was a one cup congregation, but they used two cups, one for each side. The men sat on the right and the women sat on the left side of the room. The women refused to drink from the cup after the men, because the men chewed tobacco during worship.

C. The use of individual communion cups was introduced in a Congregational Church in Putnam Co., Ohio in 1893 by Dr. J. G. Thomas, who was both a physician and minister. The next year he obtained a patent on his invention.

1. In March 1913, the Apostolic Way edited by Dr. G. A. Trott denounced the "cups" fashion. Men such as H. C. Harper, J. W. McGarvey, and David Lipscomb were very vocal against individual cups.

2. David Lipscomb: "Communion is a joint participation of two or more in one work or service. The communion of the Lord's Supper is the joint participation of the members in the loaf and in the cup. This shows a communion of the many on one cup and one bread. To divide the cup and bread into many parts and for each to partake of his own bread and cup destroys the idea of communion and separates them into many instead of a communion into one. It is very certain the bread and cup were not divided into many parts in the days of Jesus and the apostles, and the feeling grows up from a disposition to follow other rules than the example of the Master."

3. A much less known issue similar to the one cup doctrine is the one loaf doctrine. Advocates insist that congregations may use only one loaf that must remain unbroken until blessed at the Lord's Supper. It is then broken and shared by all of the disciples present. The scriptures used are: Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1Cor. 10:16-17, 11:23. The arguments are similar to the one cup reasoning, but become impractical to an extreme (how big was the loaf when the 3000 on Pentecost partook?). This argument is typically limited to individuals; few congregations have made an issue of this doctrine.

III. WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

A. John 17:17-21, 13:34-35

1. In view of their position requiring one cup in the Lord's Supper and no divided Bible classes, they have bound where God has not.
2. By making a matter of judgment into a matter of doctrine, they have become sectarian, and therefore, an ultra-conservative denomination.

B. Use of metonymy in the scriptures:

1. METONYMY is a combination of two Greek words: "META" - Change, and "ONOMA" - name; Hence a change of name; the employment of one name or word for another. (Hermeneutics by D. R. Dungan)

2. Examples:

- a. They have "Moses and the Prophets" which means the books or writings of Moses and the prophets - Luke 16:29.
- b. "The earth was corrupt" means the people living in the earth were corrupt - Gen. 6:11.
- c. "God so loved the world" - John 3.16,17. He loved the people in the world.
- d. Noah "prepared an ark to the saving of his house" - Heb. 11:7. "HOUSE" is the metonymy which stands for his family and not a physical structure.
- e. "House of God" for the family of God - 1Tim. 3.15.
- f. The Samaritan woman asked Jesus, "Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" - John 4:12. Does that mean that all put their lips to the well?

3. Metonymy is a figure of speech in which one thing stands for another.

- a. Hired hand means a hired person, not just a hand.
- b. 500 head of cattle are 500 whole cows, not just the heads.
- c. The cup means the contents of the cup, not the container itself.

C. The meaning of the Cup

1. Jesus was not speaking about the physical container or vessel but the contents and what it represented.
 - a. "This (cup) is my blood of the New Testament" - Matt. 26:26-29.
 - b. "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the Vine until..."
 - c. "This (cup) is my blood of the New Testament" - Mark 14:22-25.
 - d. "I will drink no more of the fruit of the Vine until..."
 - e. "This cup is the New Testament in my blood" - Luke 22:17-20.
 - f. "The cup which we drink, is it not the Communion of the blood of Christ?" - 1Cor. 10:16
 - g. "This cup is the New Testament in my blood" - 1Cor. 11:25.
2. "Take this (cup) and divide it among yourselves" - Luke 22:17-18
 - a. Did Christ mean to divide the container or the contents?
3. Christ did not take a plate for the bread, but the one cup folks do. Will they be lost if they use a plate, because it is not specifically authorized?
4. Where was the Lord's Supper instituted?
 - a. In an "upper room" - Mark 14:14-16, 22-25.
 - b. Why don't they bind an upper room?
5. How many elements in the supper?

- a. Those who advocate one cup say there are three elements:
 - 1) The bread represents the Body
 - 2) The fruit of the Vine represents the Blood
 - 3) The Cup (container) represents the New Testament.
 - b. They have failed to rightly divide the word.
 - 6. Paul said, "For as often as ye eat this bread (first element) and drink this cup (second element)..." - 1Cor. 11:26.
 - a. There is no physical way one can drink a container.
 - b. Paul says further, "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" - 1Cor. 10:27.
 - c. Paul does not say one would be guilty of the body and container of the Lord, which would be a third element.
 - 7. Matt. 26:27 - Jesus "took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: 'Drink from it, all of you.'" Did Jesus mean they should drink the container or contents?
 - a. In verse 28, He says, "For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Was His blood the container or contents?
 - b. In verse 29 He says, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." Was the fruit of the vine the container or contents?
 - c. Jesus told His disciples, "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name ... he shall not lose his reward" - Mark 9:41. If someone gave one of them two cups of water, would he lose his reward?
 - 8. Clearly the references are to the contents and not the container.
- D. Questions which were asked by a brother in a debate with a one cup person:
 - 1. While passing the fruit of the vine to the assembly, if the cup should be accidentally dropped and broken and its contents spilled, how would you scripturally serve the remainder of the assembly?
 - 2. If the cup represents the New Testament and there was only one cup, how many New Testaments should be in the assembly? Can there be more than one New Testament in the assembly?
 - 3. If only one cup is to be used, how are Christians around the world to partake when only one cup is used? If one says one cup in each church, he has the church using ten thousand cups around the world.
 - 4. 1Cor. 10:16-17 mentions "one bread." Must all Christians around the world partake of the same loaf of unleavened bread?
 - 5. Luke 4:17 speaks of the Bible as "the book" (singular). Do you object to the fact that there is more than one copy of the Bible?

IV. IS BIBLE CLASS BIBLICAL?

- A. Often, Christians do not fully understand the Bible teaching about Bible class
 - 1. Some local churches treat them as an afterthought; some eliminate classes altogether, while others turn them into recreation periods
 - 2. Some members treat Bible study as an option, some think it is a sin to miss a class, and still others see them as a waste of time.

3. There is a digressive group that believes local churches may not hold Bible classes, there are some brethren who think that any group larger than a family but smaller than the local church may not hold Bible classes, or that Bible classes may not be held in any other setting than the local church or one's home.
- B. As always, I care very little for what others think; I care greatly for what is written in scripture.

V. THERE HAVE BEEN BIBLE CLASSES FROM THE BEGINNING

- A. Patriarchal Age - Gen. 9:8-9, 18:19.
- B. Early Mosaic Period - 2Chron. 15:3, 17:8-9.
- C. Late Mosaic Period - Neh. 8:7-8.
- D. Close of the Mosaic Period - Luke 19:47; John 7:14, 8:2, 4.
- E. The beginning of the Christian Dispensation - Acts 5:42, 18:24-26.

VI. CAN A LOCAL CHURCH CONDUCT BIBLE CLASSES?

- A. There are no verses that say, "Thou shalt hold Bible classes in local churches" However, the scriptures authorize and mandate the practice.
 1. The authorized office of teacher in the church.
 - a. Eph. 4:11-12; 1Cor. 12:28-29; Gal. 6:6
 - b. Local churches are required to have active teachers; this tacitly presupposes the existence of Bible classes.
 2. All Christians need to make the effort develop teaching ability.
 - a. 2Tim. 2:24; Heb. 5:12
 - b. Not all Christians will become teachers - James 3:1.
 3. Elders are responsible to feed the flock; part of that is determining how often and to what extent the local flock feeds - 1Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28.
- C. How classes are conducted is determined by autonomous congregations.
 1. By sending individuals out to teach one on one - Acts 5:42.
 2. By holding studies in people's homes - Acts 10:24-25, 33.
 3. In public settings - Acts 16:13-14.
 4. In facilities rented or owned by the local church - Rom. 16:5.
- D. Bible classes are a work of the church, but not the exclusive work of the church.
 1. The scriptures speak of individuals who taught apart from the direct oversight of a local congregation - Acts 8:26-40.
 2. The scriptures speak of families who gather for Bible study - Eph. 6:4.
 3. The scriptures speak of schools of prophets who studied the law of Moses and the prophets - 2Kings 6:1.
 4. The scriptures speak of groups of teachers and preachers traveling about teaching and preaching - Acts 21:8.

VII. WHO IS TO BE TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE CLASSES?

- A. Doesn't the Bible say that children are to be taught at home?
 1. Fathers are to teach children - Eph. 6:4.
 2. Mothers are to teach their children - Prov. 1:8; 2Tim 3:15, 1:5.
- B. Jesus and John taught the children of others - Mark 10:14-16; 1John 2:13-14.

VIII. CAN A SISTER TEACH BIBLE CLASSES?

- A. Yes - Titus 2:3-5
- B. However, there are limits on whom, where, and when a woman may teach.
 - 1. A woman may not exercise authority over men in a formal, spiritual setting - 1Cor. 11:3; 1Tim 2:11-15.
 - 2. However, she can participate in teaching a man in an informal setting - Acts 18:26.
 - 3. A woman can participate in a Bible class so long as she does not oversee it. Silence in church notwithstanding - 1Cor. 14:34-37.
 - 4. Even in the assembly, there are occasions where women must speak: singing (Eph. 5:19), confession before baptism.
 - 5. Women spoke in spiritual gatherings: Sapphira responded to Peter (Acts 5:8), Rhoda announced Peter's release (Acts 12:12-15).

IX. IS BIBLE CLASS A PART OF WORSHIP?

- A. The scriptures recognize that there is a difference between a Bible class and a worship assembly; it is based on the intent and purpose for the gathering.
 - 1. To be a part of worship, it must be done when the whole congregation is called together for the purpose of worship - 1Cor. 11:18, 20, 33.
 - 2. In a worship assembly, 1) all, 2) come together, 3) to worship.
 - 3. In a Bible study, we 1) separate, 2) into different classes, 3) for the purpose of Bible study.
- B. Not every assembly of brethren is worship - Acts 15:4, 6, 22.

X. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ASSEMBLED CHURCH AND A BIBLE CLASS

- A. Bible study is an important function of the church. It is needed before doing any work for the Lord, but Bible study classes do not have the marks of a properly, fully functioning church. Bible study groups produce students. Churches produce workmen. The differences are:
 - 1. Bible study does not require meeting with others.
 - a. Church assembly for worship requires meeting with others.
 - 2. Bible study can happen with strangers and unbelievers.
 - a. A church functions only with other believers gathering together regularly.
 - 3. Bible study does not need to have doctrinal agreement. They work toward it.
 - a. The church requires doctrinal agreement in order to be the pillar and ground of the truth.
 - 4. Bible classes may be formed to help others discover the Bible rightly divided.
 - a. A church must be formed on the apostolic pattern established on scripture already rightly divided.
 - 5. A Bible study class will fulfill its purpose when it is done studying.
 - a. A church cannot fulfill its purpose until it works out what it has studied. A church that only studies without doing the work is not functioning properly.
 - 6. Bible study classes have no responsibility to others in the group.

- a. The church exhorts members to edify, sanctify, and serve each other.
- 7. Bible study classes may study something questionable to see if it is true.
 - a. A church has a responsibility to avoid wrong teaching and encourage separation from the world.
- 8. Bible study classes do not require a specified order.
 - a. Churches have leadership that is responsible to keep order in the church.
- 9. Bible studies require no long term commitment. Studies are changed as students advance in age and learning.
 - a. To function as a church, there must be a commitment to its work.
- 10. A Bible study takes less work and there is no need for direct personal involvement.
 - a. Participation can be passive. A church has more functions and requires personal responsibility to function. Church ministry encourages active participation.

X. THE BIBLE EMPHASIZES BIBLE STUDY

- A. We put heavy emphasis on Bible class in this local congregation, because the word of God puts emphasis on it.
- B. In view of the fact that God's word requires it, the elders here are diligent to make sure they are quality classes, and the teachers do an exceptional job teaching them, why are some of you choosing to wait until after the classes to come on Sunday morning or treating Wednesday night lightly and negligently?
- C. 2Tim. 2:15 - You are required to study the word of God. If you are convinced that you are getting sufficient Bible study without the teaching you receive in Bible classes, then you know more than the Lord, for He wills that your Bible study be supplemented by the church.

Conclusion:

- A. When brethren practice one cup or no Bible class as an expediency for the local church without binding it on others, they are faithful congregations autonomously functioning within the bounds of authority in the use or non-use of expediences.
- B. When brethren bind what God has loosed and make it a test of fellowship, they have become sectarian and denominational. One cup, no Bible class, mutual edification congregations that bind these matters as tests of fellowship are denominational churches of Christ.