

## Questions About the Lord's Supper By Paul R. Blake

A fellow evangelist writes: "I have recently had some questions come up and have been trying to study and find the best way to explain it. In regards to our partaking of the Lord's Supper, when some sisters prepare the bread for the Lord's Supper, they have the bread cut up into little pieces as a matter of convenience. Do we have to literally "break the bread" when we partake? Also, some think that we have to use what they refer to as "pure grape juice." My understanding is, that as long as we are using the "fruit of the vine," it doesn't matter the kind or brand. I will thoroughly appreciate any insight you may be able to give."

These questions often trouble brethren because they are applying personal, human reasoning to matters that are not revealed and therefore not to be bound on others. Let me illustrate. Begin by reading Mark 7:1-13. The Pharisees had carried principles of moral purity further than the Lord intended. They reasoned that they would become impure by contact with persons in the market who may have come in contact with something unclean, and it just might have conferred to them. So when they get home, they go through the ritual washing for purity. Then they think to themselves, "Well, the impurity is now in the laver and cup I used to wash myself. I must wash the vessels in a ritual manner. Oh wait, I sat on that couch while washing myself. Some of the impurity might have transferred to it. I need to ritually wash the couch." They made up rules by reasoning where God had not spoken. It made sense to them. I am tempted to think it is a form of religious OCD. Actually, all they needed to do was wash their feet.

Consider the matter of the fruit of the vine. The brethren are requiring pure grape juice. Pure grape juice was seasonal in that time and place, and the Passover was not held during the grape harvest; therefore fresh, pure grape juice would not have been available. For the rest of the year, the ancients preserved grape juice by various methods. The chief method was to boil off the water until thick syrup remained. The high sugar content would keep it from spoiling. They would later reconstitute it using local water and occasionally various spices. Another way to preserve it was by fermenting it. The alcohol would keep it from spoiling in wineskins. However, at the Passover they were forbidden to have leaven or leaven products in the house. The third way was by bubbling sulfur fumes through it. It certainly would change the taste, but it would also kill any pathogens in it. The fruit of the vine used at the Last Supper was most certainly either reconstituted from the concentrated syrup or the sulfated grape juice. The brethren who think it needs to be pure grape juice come up with that idea from their own reasoning, not from any implication in the scriptures.

Also, they did not have concord grapes, which is what the majority of our juice grapes are in the US. Their grapes would be a variety that would grow well in hotter climates than the varieties grown in the US. So technically, we are not using the same kind of fruit of the vine that they used in Jerusalem.

With regard to the bread, this is again a matter of what one reasons from the text rather than what the text actually states. At the close of the Passover feast, Jesus took the bread made from white wheat flour using an American pie crust recipe out of a polished aluminum tray and broke it into four quarters and placed it in all four trays. They passed the trays and each disciple broke off a little piece for himself. No wait;

that's how we do it here in 21st century America. We have the tendency to superimpose our present expedient practice over their actual practice in Bible times. According to historians, the Jews prepared unleavened bread for Passover using the common people's grain, barley flour, and mixing it with salt, water, and occasionally a little olive oil. Wheat flour could only be afforded by the wealthier people and it would be whole wheat, not white flour. The loaf would be a large thin round sheet similar in size and thickness to a large tortilla, but drier and perhaps crisper. In all likelihood, it would be prepared on a stone heated in an oven or an outdoor fire. Breaking the bread simply involved Jesus breaking off his portion and then passing the remainder of the loaf to the person next to him to break off his own portion. No tray, no score lines on the loaf so it breaks evenly, etc. These are all things we do as an expediency, not as a Divinely revealed rule. If it is truly important for the brethren to get all the details right, then to be consistent they would have to eat the Supper in an upper room reclining at a table, not sitting in rows in an auditorium. The point is: it is not necessary to duplicate first century matters of expediency.

So since we are not using the same grain in our bread and the same grapes in our juice, are we actually taking the Lord's Supper? Of course we are. The scriptures say fruit of the vine; it says nothing about the variety of grape or the method of preparation or preservation. The scriptures say unleavened bread; it says nothing about the variety of grain, whole wheat, white wheat, barley, spelt, or rye. Nor does it say anything about how it was prepared, shaped, or tasted, as long as it is unleavened and one can break his portion from the loaf. One can find grapes and grain on every continent on this planet; therefore, one has the materials readily available to prepare and eat the Lord's Supper in a Divinely acceptable manner.

With regard to the sisters preparing individual portions, I am not comfortable with this simply because it dismisses a revealed element of the Lord's Supper, that is, each disciple took his portion from the loaf. Using individual loaves differs far too much from the New Testament example for it to be considered an expediency. The fact that some disciples are troubled by this indicates that instinctively they are aware of this discrepancy.

However, please don't get the idea that a congregation must only use one loaf. This again is human reasoning combining texts out of context to get this conclusion, i.e. washing cups and couches. One loaf will be expedient in a congregation of 100 if it is large enough, but if the congregation has 400, it would require a loaf the size of a manhole cover. What size loaf did Peter break after the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:42-47? For a church with 3000 new members, the loaf would need to be 10 cubits in diameter. At the same time, the multiple loaves expediency for large congregations does not justify individual loaves. The members of large congregations with multiple loaves are still fulfilling the element of the New Testament example of the Lord's Supper, that is, each disciple is taking his portion from a loaf that has been blessed.

It is important that we all learn to discern between what is revealed and what one reasons from what is revealed. There is a difference between what is expedient and what is Divinely required. And there is a difference between what we may confidently bind as authorized doctrine and comfortable traditions some want to bind as if Divinely required.