

Lord's Supper Mechanics **(the order of breaking bread)**

Matthew 26:26-28

Question/Answer December, 2006

By: Steven J. Wallace

Introduction:

Some have wondered about the order in officiating at the Lord's Supper. Do we have to take the bread (hold it), then pray about it, then break it, then dispense it in that order? Does it have to be according to that specified model? These are concerns; I am sure, they spring up from sincere Christians only with the desire to do what is right. While we rightly press for order in many things (viz. baptism before salvation, etc.), we need to exercise caution in binding the subscribed outline above because of our personal understanding of the "breaking of the bread." We also need to safeguard against human tradition and think that such truth just because we have always seen it done that way.



There is a general pattern established in scripture for giving thanks for bread/food before we eat it as established by 1 Timothy 4:3-5. 🟡

Discussion:


I. Below are four contentions for you to consider

- A. CONTENTION 1 – the "taking," and "breaking" the bread are incidentals to eating the bread and not rigid ceremonial actions of worship. You *take* and *break* to eat.
- B. CONTENTION 2 – these expressions are euphemism for eating.
- C. CONTENTION 3 – the components stressed in rightly partaking of the Lord's Supper are
 1. in the action of remembering
 2. in the receiving of the elements of the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine as an *uncommon* meal
 3. in the right frame of mind while eating and drinking. (It is not the mechanically taking of the bread and not in the mechanically breaking of the bread that has sway over the soul's standing before God in this holy aspect of worship.)
- D. CONTENTION 4 – partaking of the Lord's Supper is determined to be properly or improperly done by the individuals themselves within the framework of the church service and not by the server's shortcomings.

II. CONTENTION 1 DEFENDED:

- A. If a person binds that one must give thanks and then *mechanically* break the bread to make the Lord's Supper scriptural as per Jesus' example, then would such a one not also have to bind that the officiator physically holds the bread prior to giving thanks, as per Jesus' example? I have never heard of such a contention, but why should it not be pressed?
- B. These postures of holding the bread and mechanically breaking it are not any more essential forms of proper worship than requiring that disciples meet in an upper room to partake of the Lord's Supper (see Lk. 22:12; Acts 20:8 ).
- C. Shall we also bind "many lamps" in the upper room? Shall we bind that it must be a "large" upper room? We understand that lamps are incidentals to having light for evening worship and we likewise understand that having a large room is fitting for many to gather. What shall we judge of a church who meets in one's home where there is no "upper room" with many "lamps?" Shall we make divisions that this is an "upper room church of Christ" and this is a "non-upper room church of Christ?" No, because the geographical place where men worship is not important. The ordained *purpose* is what is essential, not the *place* (see Jn. 4:21-24 .

III. CONTENTION 2 DEFENDED:

- A. Taking the bread and breaking the bread are mere euphemisms for eating it. If the breaking of bread necessarily implies that Jesus requires a formal mechanical breakage of bread, can we fulfilled our duty regarding the Lord's Supper by breaking it apart from eating it?
 1. Did the disciples run from house to house, grabbing bread and tearing up it into pieces or did they go from house to house to simply eat food with others (Acts 2:46)? It necessarily requires us to understand such as an incidental to eating **food**.
 2. Did the disciples come together on the first day of the week to grab bread and mechanically tear it to pieces or to eat it (Acts 20:7)?
 - a. Would they have fulfilled the command of breaking the bread of the Lord's Supper if they took it and broke it but never ate it? Obviously not.
 - b. Likewise, could they fulfill the command to take it and eat it without breaking it in their hands? Obviously they could.
- B. Applying this well defined understanding of the "breaking of bread" to 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. 
 1. We see that Jesus "broke it" in verse 24. What does this mean? Does it mean a formal mechanical breaking of bread? No, it merely relates that he shared in the meal with them and ate it prior to giving it to them. He broke bread in eating it.
 2. The same is true of the cup (v. 25). The newer versions become lazy in translating this passage. They (NKJV, NASV) convey the word "supper" for "sup" which is actually a verb in the original Greek. The KJV correctly translates it,

Comment [PC1]: Paul's example of eating seems to suggest the same truth that you take the bread and merely break it to eat it. He did not break bread for a formal show.

"And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat" (Acts 27:35)

It might also be appropriate to ask if you bind the mechanical taking and breaking of bread after prayer based on Lord's Supper passages, why not also bind the mechanical of breaking of bread after prayer during common meal occurrences (1 Cor. 11:1).

“After the same manner [note, same manner as the bread, sjw] also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”

3. When you compare this to Matthew's account (26:27) you seem to get the understanding that Jesus didn't just take the cup and then dispense it, but that he actually took the cup, *drank from it* even as he formerly ate the bread in breaking it and then dispensed it to the disciples.
 - a. Shall the officiator do likewise? We think that such is not burdened as a rule but given as an incidental.
 - b. “In like manner also the cup after the supping, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do ye, as often as ye may drink it—to the remembrance of me;’” (YLT)
 - c. The word used here is also found in only three other verses
 - 1) Revelation 3:20 it is translated “dine,” (NKJV) and “sup” (KJV).
 - 2) Luke 17:8 it is translated “sup” (KJV)
 - 3) Luke 22:20, “In like manner, also, the cup after the supping, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, that for you is being poured forth’” (YLT)

Comment [PC2]: “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.” Note, one container advocates seek to make the container a holy item of worship too. They therefore burden the assemblies to use only one as is implied from Jesus saying “Drink from it.” This error has all kinds of ramifications if taken seriously. Some would find themselves needing to drink the container and contents alike as per 1 Cor. 11:25.

Catholics seem to think, it seems, that it is the officiator who needs to literally give their sacrament to each individual. They may have created this based on building an erroneous concept of Jesus personally giving it to each one. Even if our Lord did, it doesn't mean that the officiator of the Lord's Supper needs to.

IV. CONTENTION 3 DEFENDED:

- A. It is the attitude of eating and drinking that is critical in the Lord's Supper, not the mechanically breaking of the bread. In all of the accounts you see the elements of the fruit of the vine and unleavened bread stressed. In all of the accounts you see the purpose of the Lord's Supper stressed in remembering Him (Lk. 22:19). ■
- B. Here are some simple questions to prove this contention true.
 1. In doing “what,” do we proclaim the Lord's death? “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).
 2. In doing “what,” in an unworthy manner, makes us guilty of the body and blood of Christ? “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27). Submitted below is the text to consider in God's Word to the Nations Version.

“17 I have no praise for you as I instruct you in the following matter: When you gather, it results in more harm than good. 18 In the first place, I hear that when you gather as a church you split up into opposing groups. I believe some of what I hear. 19 Factions have to exist in order to make it clear who the genuine believers among you are. 20 When you gather in the same place, you can't possibly be eating the Lord's Supper. 21 Each of you eats his own supper without waiting for each other. So one person goes hungry and another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes in which to eat and drink? Do you despise God's church and embarrass people who don't have anything to eat? What can I say to you? Should I praise you? I won't praise you for this. 23 After all, I passed on to you what I had received from the Lord. On the night he was betrayed, the

Lord Jesus took bread ²⁴ and spoke a prayer of thanksgiving. He broke the bread and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me." ²⁵ When supper was over, he did the same with the cup. He said, "This cup is the new promise {Or "testament," or "covenant."} made with my blood. Every time you drink from it, do it to remember me." ²⁶ Every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you tell about the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷ Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks from the Lord's cup in an improper way will be held responsible for the Lord's body and blood. ²⁸ With this in mind, individuals must determine whether what they are doing is proper when they eat the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ Anyone who eats and drinks is eating and drinking a judgment against himself when he doesn't recognize the Lord's body. ³⁰ This is the reason why many of you are weak and sick and quite a number of you have died. (GWV)

V. CONTENTION 4 DEFENDED:

- A. Partaking of the Lord's Supper in the right way is determined by the individual who eats, not the officiator who breaks.
- B. Questions to answer:
 1. Of whom should we be examining while partaking of the Lord's Supper? Are we to examine the officiator or ourselves? Please cite the reference where we are to be examining the officiator. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28).
 2. Who shall be excused if their mind is not in the proper place while eating and drinking? Can we use the officiator's shortcomings as an excuse for not properly partaking of the Lord's Supper? "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:29)

Conclusion:

1. Let us resolve to not seek distractions when partaking of the Lord's Supper.
2. Let us resolve not to create distractions when partaking of the Lord's Supper.
3. Let us resolve to put the emphasis where it should be, on the body of the Lord, on the blood of the Lord, on the meaning of the bread and the fruit of the vine.