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THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks... said, "Take eat...do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner he also took the cup...saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. —1 Cor. 11:23-26, NKJV.

I had never attended a service at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. I did so on March 26, 2013, their annual Memorial of the Lord's Supper. I had heard that the elements of bread and wine are passed at this service, but *not one* partakes! They are taught *not* to! I wanted to see this first hand.

The place of meeting was comfortable, neat, and well arranged. The people of the congregation were friendly enough, well dressed for the occasion, and most carried the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. The speaker referred to the scriptural passages which tell how Jesus instituted the Supper, even citing his words "eat this bread and drink this cup." But as plates containing pieces of unleavened bread were passed to the congregation, NOT ONE PERSON ATE ANY OF THE BREAD. When goblets of wine were passed, NOT ONE PERSON DRANK FROM THE CUP. *Why?*

According to the belief system of Jehovah's Witnesses, partaking of the Lord's supper was only for the 144,000 ("The Heavenly Class"). According to *The Watchtower* magazine (February 15, 2003) the number 144,000 was complete by the 1930's. However, if some of these were unfaithful, it is explained, resulting vacancies might be filled by others. *These* could partake of the Lord's Supper, but this would be extremely rare. All the others ("The Earthly Class")—those who make up the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, which are in many countries of the world—are taught *not* to partake.

But if only the 144,000 were to "eat this bread and drink this cup," one finds himself asking: Why pass the Communion elements to people for whom it was never intended?

Since when does "eat this bread" mean DON'T EAT THIS BREAD? Since when does "drink this cup" mean DON'T DRINK

THIS CUP? Granted, sincere people may not understand some verses exactly the same. But what can we say of a teaching that is the OPPOSITE of what the Scriptures plainly say? In my view, it is a total disregard for Scripture. But such is the teaching handed down from the Brooklyn leadership—and compliance is required.

At the time of the Reformation the widespread custom within the Roman Catholic Church was that the *priest* drank the wine, the *people* were only allowed to eat the wafer. The Reformers argued for "Communion in Both Kinds"; that is, the people should be allowed to partake of *both* the bread and the fruit of the vine. One wonders what the Reformers would have thought of a group that observes the Lord's Supper, passing both bread and wine, but no one is allowed to partake of *either*!

Over the centuries, a variety of terms have been used regarding the Communion service: Communion, the Lord's Supper, Christian Passover, Memorial Supper, Eucharist, and Sacrament, all being valid terms when rightly understood:

Communion (1 Cor. 10:16).

The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20).

Christian Passover (instituted by Christ at Passover).

Memorial Supper ("this do in remembrance of me").

Eucharist (Greek: meaning "give thanks"—Matt. 26:27).

Sacrament (related to the word *sacred*).

It may be of some interest to mention that the capital of the State of California, *Sacramento*, derives its name from the Spanish term for the Eucharist, the Holy Sacrament. The name of a city in Texas, *Corpus Christi*, is a Latin term meaning "Body of Christ," but linked specifically to the Eucharist.

Partaking of Communion in some churches involves elaborate rituals and ceremonies. Others point out that the early Christians received Communion in simplicity. Some build festive occasions around the Communion, as when a young boy or girl receives "First Communion."

Because Jesus used *one* cup, some believe only one cup should be used for Communion ("one-cuppers"). Others prefer individual cups, pointing out there were only a few at the Last Supper, while today there may be hundreds to be served. There is also the concern about the spread of disease.

I know of one lady who drove a long distance in order to attend a one-cup church; I know other people who might drive a long distance *not* to attend a one-cup church!

Though not a major issue, some, citing Luke 22:15-20, think Jesus passed the cup around *twice*.

At the Last Supper, the disciples were apparently in a *reclining* position around the table (John 13:25). Does this mean people must do that today?

Should people “go forward” and kneel to receive Communion? Must someone else—a priest—place the wafer on their tongues? Or can they touch it *themselves*, while being served where they are seated?

Is it proper to use women to serve Communion—or must this be done *only* by men? A man told me once that women should not serve—that “only *men*” were at the Last Supper. But by that reasoning, one could argue (falsely) that women should not even *take* Communion.

Would it be proper for a person to prepare Communion and serve *himself*, at home, possibly while watching a church service on television?

Over the years I have taken Communion in a variety of settings and locations, including *Jerusalem*. But probably the most unique location in which *anyone* has taken Communion happened on July 20, 1969—*on the Moon!* Were this not so well documented, one might write it off as rumor.

Forty-four years ago two human beings, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, changed history by walking on the surface of the Moon—the first to ever do so. Prior to their space journey, Aldrin asked the pastor of the Presbyterian Church he attended to pray over a Communion wafer and a small vial of Communion wine to take with him. He describes what happened within a few minutes after landing on the lunar surface, 250,000 miles from home:

“I opened the little plastic package which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice. In the one-sixth gravity of the Moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.’ I ate the tiny wafer and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the Moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the Communion elements.”

The Presbyterian Church near Houston that Aldrin attended has in its possession the Communion cup used on the Moon and commemorates the event each year with a special service.

It may be of some interest to note that the maiden name of Buzz Aldrin’s mother was Marion *Moon*.

Over the centuries since Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper there have been a variety of beliefs as to *how often* it should be taken: annually, monthly, quarterly, weekly, or not on any fixed schedule. While it is true the Passover was an annual event, the

biblical wording, “*as often* as you eat this bread, and drink this cup” (1 Cor. 11:26), implies it occurred more often than once a year. The Greek word here translated “often” appears again, though in a different context, in Revelation 11:6 where it is translated “as often as they will.”

The teaching that the Lord’s Supper should only be taken one night a year—corresponding with the *same* night Jesus took it—has repeatedly led to disputes about how to determine the exact time. In Jesus’ day, the timing of Passover was based on lunar observation. Once the New Moon was seen, 14 days would be counted to Passover. By the methods used at that time, the Passover could have varied not only a day or two, but as much as an entire month! The use of a present-day Jewish calendar, based on *calculation*, will not solve the problem.

So would it be more accurate to use observation today—counting 14 days from the New Moon? Would this be figured from when the New Moon is seen in the USA—or in Israel? I know of a Messianic group in Texas that hesitates to set or announce the Passover date (by our calendar) in advance—until they phone a man in Jerusalem to make sure he has seen the New Moon!

If Communion is only valid because of a phase of the Moon—possibly as observed from the Mount of Olives, as some suppose—what about an Astronaut like Buzz Aldrin who was actually *on the Moon*?

Some groups—especially among those that observe the Lord’s Supper annually—believe *foot washing* should be part of the service, based on John 13:2-14. This has led to disputes as to which is to be done *first*—the Lord’s Supper or the foot washing. The issue hinges on the phrase: “And supper being ended [finished].” Does this mean supper had been prepared, was now finished, so they could go ahead and eat? Or does it mean they had finished eating supper?

Years ago a man told me the church he grew up in actually split over this point. In all probability more harm was done by that split than the sequence of events, one way or the other. In situations like this, people with a dogmatic zeal to be biblically correct, may actually become *unbiblical* by failing to follow the guidelines of Romans 14.

Back in the ‘60s, a friend of mine visited a church one night here in southern California. When he noticed people carrying basins and towels, he realized they were going to have a foot washing service. He was alright with this. But when the time came for the foot washing, he was in for a surprise. After the men and women were divided into separate groups, shoes were removed, feet were washed, and then dried—all normal enough. What surprised him was this: *they did not use any water!* Apparently a former leader came up with the idea that using water is “ritualistic,” and the tradition was handed on down. Yet the same group was very strong on baptism *in water!* Can anyone explain the logic of this? I cannot.

When Jesus instituted the Communion ceremony, it followed the eating of a meal. Some consider this a pattern to be followed. Quite a few years ago I spoke at a meeting which began with a very nicely prepared supper, accompanied with Jewish music.

Women dressed in Jewish costumes served the roasted lamb, matzah, boiled eggs, bitter herbs, and wine. Exodus 12:26,27 was read. Yet, with all the effort that went into this service, I did not find it superior or more spiritual than any other. It seemed to me that the emphasis on types and shadows *regarding* Christ, tended to distract from the *reality* of Christ himself.

Others believe a meal should *not* precede Communion, but that participants should be fasting. No doubt this has encouraged *early* morning Mass!

Beliefs about the Lord's Supper have even influenced the arrangement of *furniture* in church buildings. For churches that build their services around the *Eucharist* (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, etc.), the Communion Table is given the central position. In those churches that emphasize *preaching* (Baptist, Assembly of God, Nazarene, etc.), the Pulpit is central.

There are exceptions, of course—and variables. Back in the '60s I spoke at a large Bay-area church that did not fit any particular mold. The Communion Table was central, a lectern (for announcements and song leading) was on one side of the platform, a large pulpit on the other (for preaching). The sanctuary itself featured a high Cathedral style ceiling. The baptistery was situated beneath the symbol of a dove suspended from the ceiling. As the service began, robed altar boys entered, marched in procession, and lit candles. The pastor wore a traditional black clergy garment with collar. His wife, nicely dressed, played a tambourine as she led the lively, Pentecostal-type song service! Other parts of the service were Liturgical. The pastor told me, "There is something here for everyone!"

History records differences that resulted in the split that came centuries ago between the Roman Catholic Church ("The Western Church") and the Greek Orthodox Church ("The Eastern Church"). The one Church made the sign of the cross from left to right, the other from right to left! The one allowed three-dimensional statues, the other only flat-surface icons. And regarding the bread for the Eucharist: the Roman Catholic Church used *unleavened* bread, the Greek Orthodox Church used *leavened* bread. Each side had certain arguments for this difference, but I will not go into that here.

Some churches use little round Communion wafers, some square ones, and some break the bread into irregular shapes. Some pass a loaf of bread around and each person pulls a piece off. A Mexican pastor felt his people would feel more comfortable if he used tortillas.

Believing the "bread" once prayed over, to one degree or another, becomes *sacred*, some have questioned how to properly dispose of unused portions. I was in a service once in which the pastor broke the bread into exactly the number of people present—presumably so nothing would be left over.

Debate has often centered on whether alcoholic wine or grape juice should be used for the Communion service.

A church in northern California for which I had the opportunity to speak on a number of occasions, believed in taking the Lord's supper at Passover time. Each year, the pastor, a fine

man who was now up in years, would go to a liquor store and buy a bottle of kosher Manischewitz wine. (No doubt he felt strange doing this; any other time of the year the strongest thing he drank was Pepsi!) The people in this group considered this a very special service each year. Some would drive for a considerable distance to be there. I had been invited to be their quest speaker for the occasion.

That afternoon, a man who had previously been part of the church and had moved away, came back into town. He now believed their previous position was wrong, that grape juice should be used. Because he carried quite a bit of influence, some felt he was right; others wanted things to remain as they had been for a long time. With some resulting confusion, it was decided to place *two* large goblets on the Communion table: one contained wine, the other grape juice.

I remember an elderly man who came forward, looked at the two goblets, and asked a question. He may have had hearing problems, because he spoke quite loudly: "Which is the REAL wine?" My first thought was he wanted the grape juice. But not so. He picked up the "real" wine and drank about half the glass!

What about it—was *wine* served at the Last Supper? Evidently it was. Grapes were harvested in the summer or early fall, so at Passover time—in *Spring*—fresh grape juice would not have been available then. From ancient times, as confirmed by the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jews on the night of the Passover used cups of wine, fermented wine. There is no indication Jesus broke with this custom.

The Corinthian Christians, lacking proper teaching about how to conduct a Communion service, were making a feast out of it. That wine was used is obvious, for some were even getting "drunk"! (1 Cor. 11:21). The Greek word used here means "to drink to intoxication, i.e. get drunk" (*Strong's Concordance*, #3184).

Today, on the other hand, by refrigeration and in other ways, juices can be preserved in a non-alcoholic form. With all the alcohol abuse that exists, with the horrid drinking and driving epidemic, it is certainly understandable why many churches prefer to use grape juice!

Among the Latter Day Saints, commonly called Mormons, things took a different twist. Originally they used fermented wine. Later, believing alcohol should not be purchased from their enemies, they began to produce their own wine, eventually owning and operating vineyards in Utah and California. But then Joseph Smith received a revelation known as the *Word of Wisdom* which stated, in part, that alcohol consumption is harmful. Because Christ mentioned water as a symbol of eternal life, it was decided to substitute *water* in the Communion service. This has been their official practice for the past 100 years.

Roman Catholics teach "Transubstantiation," that during the ceremony of the Mass the elements are turned into the actual body and blood of Christ. Consequently, in the Middle Ages there were serious discussions as to what should be done if a person were to vomit, or if a mouse were by chance to eat Christ's body. At the Council of Constance, it was debated whether a man who spilled some of the blood of Christ on his

beard should have his beard burned—or if the beard *and* the man should be burned. Most today, and rightly so, would recognize such as very extreme views.

While performing the Transubstantiation ceremony, priests of the Roman Catholic Church have long used the Latin words, *Hoc est corpus meus* (“This is my body”). In view of the fact that no visible change takes place, about four centuries ago, some of the more skeptical folks coined the phrase “hocus-pocus”!

It is true that Jesus said, “This *is* my body...this *is* my blood” (Matt. 26:26-28). But when he said these words, *he*—as a flesh and blood person—was right there with the disciples. He did not change into a piece of bread and a cup of wine! It would appear, then, that the word “is” meant these elements were symbols—they *represented* his body and his blood to be shed for our sins—which is the Protestant viewpoint.

In recent months, a 26-foot tall statue of Marilyn Monroe (a pose based on one of her old movies) has been set up in Palm Springs, drawing a lot of attention from tourists. Were someone to say, “That *is* Marilyn Monroe,” all would understand that the word “is” was being used in a *representative* sense. So would it be when referring to a statue of Plato or Julius Caesar, as Adam Clarke points out. Similar word usage may be seen in biblical examples:

The seven good cows ARE [represent] seven years....and the seven thin and ugly cows...ARE [represent] seven years (Gen. 41:26,27).

The ten horns ARE [represent] ten kings (Dan. 7:24).

The field IS [represents] the world; the good seed ARE [represent] the children of the kingdom; the tares ARE [represent] the children of the wicked one; the enemy IS [represents] the devil; the harvest IS [represents] the end of the age; and the reapers ARE [represent] the angels (Matt. 13:38,39).

The rock that went with them WAS [represented] Christ (1 Cor. 10:4).

The seven stars ARE [represent] the angels of the seven Churches: and the seven candlesticks ARE [represent] the seven Churches (Rev. 1:20).

And so, also, with the wording in question:

“Jesus took bread, blessed it and...said, ‘Take, eat; this IS [represents] my body.’ Then he took the cup...saying... ‘This IS [represents] my blood.’” (Matt. 26:26-28).

Some churches have “Open Communion,” in contrast to those who practice “Closed Communion”—only the members of that particular church may partake. Those who hold this belief point out that taking Communion is a serious matter and only those properly instructed should partake. On the other hand, because the Scripture says, “Let a man examine *himself*” (1 Cor. 11:28), those who favor Open Communion believe each person must search his *own* heart—that this is not for *some-one else* to decide.

If one partakes of the Lord’s Supper in *Jerusalem*, as I have done, it is a unique experience and significant in that this was the location in which Jesus instituted the Supper. But one is

no closer to God there than anywhere else (John 4:21-23). Those who are unable to take a trip to Jerusalem need not feel left out!

If the Lord’s Supper is taken at the time of Passover, one might feel a certain link with Christ in the *timing* (even though only *approximate*, considering differences in time zones, the location of the International Date Line, changes in the calendar, etc.). But this is no reason, in my view, that taking the Lord’s Supper at other times is invalid.

Arlene’s brother, Willis, told me about a Communion service he and his wife attended years ago while they were on vacation in a mountain resort area. The meeting was made up largely of young people who had come to Christ, some from very sinful backgrounds. For the Communion elements, something like little Animal Cookies were used, and the drink may have been Kool-Aid. There was no elaborate ritual; the service was simple, sincere, heartfelt. Their love for the Lord was apparent. Many were weeping as they remembered Christ’s death. Though Willis had taken part in many Communion services over the years, this one stood out!

Please know I am not recommending the use of Animal Cookies or Kool-Aid—or anything else that might be contrary to Scripture. But when all is said and done, we know that God looks on the *heart* (1 Sam. 16:7). Within the framework of Christian liberty, the attitude of the *heart* is more important than *details* that divide and distract (1 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 5:1; Rom. 14:14-17).

One could take Communion in the finest Cathedral, complete with elaborate and impressive ceremonies, using what might be considered *the* correct bread and wine—if the *heart* is not touched by the Holy Spirit, if there is not the SPIRITUAL dimension—it would be no more than a ritualistic routine.



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