

## This Cup is the New Covenant



Jesus' words, 'This is my body ... this is my blood', can be understood in a figurative sense, namely, 'The bread represents my body; the cup represents my blood.'

That does not mean that both the literal and figurative meanings are correct, or that we are free to pick and choose whichever interpretation we prefer. However it would be unwise to exclude either the literal or figurative meaning at the outset. We have to keep both possibilities in mind, and then examine the immediate and broader context for evidence to support each possibility.

We can begin by comparing the words of Christ as recorded by the evangelists and the apostle Paul. We note that the four gospels often record the same event and the same speech in different ways. The different perspectives help us get a more complete picture.

If we look at Jesus' words about the cup, both Matthew and Mark quote Jesus as saying, 'This is my blood'. 'For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28). 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many' (Mark 14:24).

It is difficult to categorically exclude either a literal or figurative interpretation from these verses alone, even though no-one really takes them in a strict literal sense. Catholics do not believe that the wine in the cup is the blood of Jesus. Catholic theology says that the wine is not really wine anymore, even though it still appears and tastes like wine, but that it has changed 'in substance' into the blood of Jesus. That is not what we usually mean by literal. It is an over-simplification to say that Catholicism takes Jesus' words literally.

Moreover, the literal interpretation becomes impossible and absurd in the accounts of Luke and Paul. 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20). 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Both Luke and Paul say that 'this cup is the new covenant.' If we had to take Jesus' words literally, we must say that the cup is the covenant, but of course, neither Catholics nor Evangelicals would say so. Catholics and Evangelicals agree that Jesus is using a figure of speech; he simply means that the cup represents the covenant. We drink the wine to remember the covenant in which God promised to forgive his people on account of Jesus' sacrifice. There should not be any disagreement about this blessed truth.

If we want to be consistent in our interpretation, we must also take Matthew's and Mark's accounts in the same sense as in Luke and Paul. The Holy Spirit who inspired the sacred text used a language that simply cannot be misunderstood. The figurative meaning is the ONLY reasonable option we can take in Luke and Paul, and these verses also become the key to rightly understand the parallel passages in Matthew and Mark. The literal interpretation sets one scripture against another. Therefore, 'This is my blood' simply means, 'This cup represents the blood of the covenant.'