

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Matthew 26:26-29.

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. By way of introduction, imagine we are at a potluck. Before we start eating, I go up to the food table, pick up a dish, and say to everyone, "Hey, everybody listen up! You all have to try this dish. It's awesome."
2. What did I mean by the word "dish"?
  - A. Was I referring to the container that held the food? Was I telling you that you needed to bake with the literal dish because I was enamored with the cookware?
  - B. Or, was I referring to food that was in the container? Was I telling you that you needed to eat the figurative dish, i.e. the casserole, because I was enamored with the recipe?
3. Both are grammatically possible.
4. If I was referring to the food that was held in the container, I was using a figure of speech called metonymy. Metonymy is "the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant, for example *suit* for *business executive*" (New American Oxford Dictionary). "Metonymy ... is a figure of speech used in rhetoric in which a thing or concept is not called by its own name, but by the name of something intimately associated with that thing or concept. For instance, 'London', as the capital of the United Kingdom, can be used as a metonym (an instance of metonymy) for the British government" (Wikipedia).
5. How would you decide what I meant?
6. Better yet, what has this got to do with religion?
7. I am scheduled to have two debates on what is commonly called the one-cup question.
8. Here are the propositions.
  - A. Proposition One: "To be faithful to God, a local church must use only one literal cup of fruit of the vine when it observes the Lord's Supper." Andrew Richardson, affirms. Tim Norman, denies.
  - B. Proposition Two: "A local church may be faithful to God and use multiple literal cups of fruit of the vine when it observes the Lord's Supper." Tim Norman, affirms. Andrew Richardson, denies.
9. Matthew 26:26 KJV, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. 27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29 But I say unto you, 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." See also Luke 22:14-20; Mark 14:22-25; 1 Corinthians 10:16-21; 11:23-29. I am using the KJV because Andrew Richardson uses it.
10. Here is the issue. What is "the cup" in Matthew 26:27? Is it the literal container or a figurative reference to its contents? It's akin to asking what the dish was in my opening illustration? Was it the cookware or the casserole?



**DISCUSSION:** I believe "the cup" is the fruit of the vine – a figurative reference to the contents of the container, not the container itself – and that the use of one or more literal cups is a matter of religious indifference.

1. **"The cup" is clearly a figure of speech.**
  - A. **Downstream and upstream of "this."** Mark 14:23 KJV, "And he took **the cup**, and when he had given thanks, he gave **it** to them: and they all drank of **it**. 24 And he said unto them, This is **my blood** of the new testament, which is shed for many. 25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of **the fruit of the vine**, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God."
  - B. **The divided cup.** Luke 22:17 KJV, "He took **the cup** ... and said ... divide it among yourselves."
  - C. **The poured out cup.** Luke 22:20 KJV, "**This cup** ... which is shed for you." NASB, "This cup which is poured out for you."
  - D. **The drunk cup.** 1 Corinthians 11:26 KJV, "As often as ye ... drink this cup."

- E. **The cup of devils.** 1 Corinthians 10:21A KJV, “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils.” *The cup of devils is unquestionably a figurative reference to idolatry. The cup of the Lord is likewise a figurative reference to the fruit of the vine.*
- F. **Partakers of the table.** 1 Corinthians 10:21 KJV, “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils.” *Partaking of the Lord’s table is clearly a figurative reference to eating the unleavened bread of the Lord’s Supper. We don’t literally eat the table. Likewise, drinking the cup of the Lord is clearly a figurative reference to drinking the fruit of the vine of the Lord’s Supper. Again, we don’t literally drink the cup.*
2. **There is no place in scripture where “the cup” must be taken literally.**
- A. The word cup or *porterion* is used 31 times in the New Testament.
- 1) Other than the 12 uses under discussion, it is used literally 4 times (Matthew 10:42; Mark 7:4; 9:41; Revelation 17:4) and figuratively 15 times (Matthew 20:22, 23; 23:25, 26; 26:39; Mark 10:38, 39; 14:36; Luke 11:39; 22:42; John 18:11; 1 Corinthians 10:21 [“cup of demons”]; Revelation 14:10; 16:19; 18:6).
  - 2) Other than the 12 uses under consideration, almost 3 out of 4 times the word “cup” is used it is used figuratively, not literally.
- B. In Matthew 26:26-29 and all other places “the cup” is mentioned, we can substitute “the fruit of the vine” for “the cup” and visa versa and it makes perfect sense. This proves that there is no grammatical reason why “the cup” has to be a reference to a literal cup.
- C. Substitution is an especially good exercise because we don’t use the “the cup” the way they used “the cup.” Since we don’t, it’s hard for us to initially see that a literal reference is not required.
- D. People in the first century used “the cup” the way we use “the dish.” Here’s another helpful substitution exercise.
- 1) Mark 14:23 KJV, “And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.”
  - 2) Substitute “dish” for “cup,” and “ate” for “drank.”
  - 3) If you took some of the dish mentioned in the introduction, put in on your own plate, and then ate it, did you eat of the dish? Yes, even though you ate off your own plate and not from the literal dish itself. In like manner, given the way people in the New Testament used “the cup,” members of a local church can all drink of the cup even though they all drank from different containers.
- E. Admittedly Jesus had a literal cup. This, however, does not mean that His literal cup prompted the figurative reference. As we’ve already seen, it was an already well-established figure of speech, one that Jesus used very, very quickly thereafter. See Matthew 26:39, 42. In other words, there is no evidence that His literal cup even entered His mind when He referred to “the cup.”
3. **It is possible that multiple literal cups were used when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper.** Luke 22:14-20.
4. **We must attach religious significance to either the literal cup or the fruit of the vine, but not to both!**
- A. Some suggest that there are three items of memorial significance in the Lord’s Supper – the bread, the literal cup, and the fruit of the vine.
- 1) They say that the bread represents the Lord’s body, the literal cup the new testament, and the fruit of the vine the Lord’s blood.
  - 2) They attempt to support their conclusion by saying that the phrase, “This cup is the new testament in my blood” (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25) means something different than the phrase, “the cup ... is my blood of the new testament” (Matthew 26:27-28; Mark 14:23-24).
- B. Several responses.
- 1) If the new testament and the blood are both represented, then the cup – whatever it is – represents both of them. Saying that the literal cup represents the new testament and that the fruit of the vine the blood is completely arbitrary, a conclusion drawn from the mind of men, not the word of God.
  - 2) The bread is just as surely the new testament in his body as the cup is the new testament in his blood.

- 3) The scriptures lend no support whatsoever to the notion that the New Testament is represented by a third item of memorial significance.
  - a. 1 Corinthians 10:16 KJV, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"
  - b. 1 Corinthians 11:26 KJV, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."
  - c. 1 Corinthians 11:27 KJV, "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."
  - d. 1 Corinthians 11:28, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."
- C. Which represents the blood – the literal cup or the fruit of the vine?
  - 1) The answer is clear.
  - 2) The wrong choice is not a safe choice.
  - 3) The clear choice puts the container in the same category as the putting the bread on a table (1 Corinthians 10:21; Luke 22:21; John 13:28 – frankly isn't the table to the bread what the cup is to the fruit of the vine?), sitting around the same table (Luke 22:14; Mark 14:20), partaking on the second floor (Mark 14:15; Acts 20:7-8, 11); etc. If the literal cup doesn't represent anything, then there is no rational basis for making it any more religiously significant than these other items we all regard as incidental and non-essential.
5. **Literal is logistically impossible.** One way to discern the meaning of words and phrases is to look at how they were used by those who spoke them. If the literal cup is significant, then we must conclude that the 3,000 and later 5,000 member church in Jerusalem observed to Lord's Supper with a cup of astronomical size. I believe this logical necessity clearly speaks to what was actually religiously significant.
6. **There is one figurative cup, many literal cups.**
  - A. 1 Corinthians 10:16 KJV, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."
  - B. 1 Corinthians 16:8 KJV, "But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost."
  - C. The one bread is unleavened bread eaten in remembrance of Jesus' body. It is the one bread Christians all over the world eat on the Lord's day. Separated by continents, they nonetheless eat the one bread even though they eat from many different loaves. Likewise, the one cup is fruit of vine drunk in remembrance of Jesus' blood. It is the one cup Christians all over the world drink on the Lord's day. Separated by continents, they nonetheless drink the one cup even though they drink from many different containers.

## CONCLUSION:

There is overwhelming evidence that "the cup" is a figurative reference to its contents and no evidence that necessitates a literal use. I believe, therefore, we must interpret "the cup" figuratively lest we add to the word of God. I believe that if God had intended us to interpret "the cup" literally, He would have given evidence to show us that's what He intended us to do.

Other applications:

1. Test, defend. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; 1 Peter 3:15.
2. Appreciate the need to be very careful in deciding what matters are essential and which are incidental.
3. It's just as wrong to bind what God has not bound as to loose what God has not loosed.
4. Germs are irrelevant.
5. We must be consistent.