

God Has Spoken

Tract Series

10 Observations On The “One Cup” Doctrine

by A. L. Parr

When Christians partake of the Lord’s supper, how many vessels, or containers (cups, glasses, etc.), should be used in serving the “fruit of the vine?” Perhaps the most frequent practice in serving the fruit of the vine is to distribute it in individual containers for each worshiper. Some, however, believe that this is a sinful practice – that just one container should be used, and all worshipers should drink from the one container.

The basic cause of the controversy is a misunderstanding on the part of some as to the identity of “the cup.” The word “cup” is often used in scripture in relation to the Lord’s supper as a figure of speech, a figure known as metonymy, in which the container is named to designate that which is contained within it. This figure is used frequently in scripture, as, for instance, in the use of “the world” for “the people that are in the world” (I John 3:13; 5:19), and “house” for “the people in a house” (Acts 16:31,34; I Timothy 3:4,5).

The ideas that “the cup” is the drinking vessel, and that just one drinking vessel should be used in the Lord’s supper, are NOT ideas that can be found in the word of God. In actuality, “the cup” is “the fruit of the vine,” or grape juice, not the vessel or container that holds it. Ten observations on the pertinent scriptures show this to be true.

OBSERVATION #1

(Matthew 26:26-29)

What would Jesus drink in the kingdom, according to verse 29? He would drink “the fruit of the (grape) vine.” The fruit of the grape vine is the grape. Obviously, though, a grape is solid, not liquid, and one does not “drink” a solid. So it is the juice of the grape that he drinks. The juice is also a product, or fruit,

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds
(Hebrews 1:1-2).

of the vine. But the verse says that he would drink “of the fruit.” He would consume some of it.

But the same language is used in v. 27: “drink ... of it.” If to drink “of the fruit” is to consume some of the fruit, then to drink “of it” is to consume some of it. Of what? Of the cup. The cup is what they were to drink. They were to consume some of it. Now, one cannot drink a solid “cup” any more than he can drink a solid grape. Obviously, the command is to drink the contents of the drinking vessel.

OBSERVATION #2

(Matthew 26:26-29)

What Jesus is discussing in verse 27 he also is discussing in verses 28 and 29; the subject clearly has not changed. When Jesus commanded the apostles to “drink ye all of” the cup, what were they to do?

According to Jesus’ own explanation in verse 28, they were supposed to drink of his “blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Still talking about the same thing in verse 29, he called it “this fruit of the vine.” In this explanation, Jesus clearly told the apostles and us what he means by the word “cup.” We see, then, that the word “cup” in verse 26 refers to the contents of the drinking vessel, not to the vessel itself.

OBSERVATION #3

(Luke 22:17-18)

When Jesus “took the cup,” what did he take? To suggest that the word “cup” here refers to a container or vessel to hold a drinkable liquid creates a very strange situation. In this same verse Luke, who tells us that Jesus “took the cup,” also tells us that Jesus said, “divide it among yourselves.” “It” obviously refers to “the cup.” If “the cup” is a container, the only way to have obeyed that command would have been for the apostles to break the container into 12 pieces and give each apostle one piece. Why would Jesus make such a silly requirement? Do the advocates of the “one cup (container)” doctrine today follow such a practice? If not, they don’t truly believe what they teach.

The truth is that not one time did Jesus refer to the container; he spoke always of “the cup,” which was the fruit of the vine which was in the container.

OBSERVATION #4

(I Corinthians 10:16)

When Paul mentions the cup and the bread of communion, what does he mean by the word “cup?” Grammatically, it corresponds to “bread.” Of all the things involved in the Lord’s supper (communion), what best corresponds to the bread? Is it the container for the grape juice, or is it the grape juice in the container? Of course it is the grape juice. The container for the grape juice would correspond to the container for the bread, not to the bread itself.

OBSERVATION #5

(I Corinthians 10:16)

Again, when Paul mentions the cup and the bread of communion, what does he mean by the word “cup”? Whatever it is, it is something that “we bless.”

What is the more important thing – the thing of spiritual significance – which we bless? Is it the container or that which is inside the container? Will anyone dare say that the vessel is of greater importance and spiritual significance than the fruit of the vine it contains? By what reasoning or authority?

Without doubt, that which is blessed in this verse is the fruit of the vine. It is blessed because it represents the blood of Christ which is shed for the remissions of sins. The vessel represents nothing of spiritual significance and is not worthy of any blessing. “The cup” is the contents of the container, and not the container itself.

OBSERVATION #6

(I Corinthians 10:21)

What did Paul mean when he wrote, “drink the cup?” Does Paul ignore common sense and try to convince us that we can and should swallow a solid vessel? Of course not! He obviously, then, uses the word “cup” to refer to what is inside the vessel – he employs the figure of speech known as metonymy, which we have previously discussed.

OBSERVATION #7

(I Corinthians 11:23-29)

When we read, “when he had supped” (v. 25), we understand that Jesus had just eaten the Passover supper. After that supper he gathered some of the same elements they had been eating. The language used is natural for a common meal.

Nothing more is to be made of it but what Jesus clearly says with regard to symbolism. Whatever he did they had been doing as they ate supper.

Was there one vessel at that supper table for the 13 men (Jesus and the twelve apostles)? Why would such a circumstance occur? Where is the evidence that it did? Do advocates of the “one cup (container)” doctrine today use just one cup at a regular supper meal where many people may be present? If not, why not? What Jesus did for communion he also had done for supper.

OBSERVATION #8

(I Corinthians 11:23-29)

How can a drink container be used “in remembrance of me” (v. 25)? To do so it would have to be the very same container used by Jesus in that upper room – or at the very least an exact replica of it. Who knows which vessel was used on that occasion, or what it looked like? Do all those who advocate the use of “one cup (container)” today use identical drinking vessels? If so (and they do not), do they claim them to be exact replicas of that container used by Jesus in Jerusalem? They would not dare so claim because they know that they have no proof or authority for such a claim.

The container, then, cannot be used “in remembrance of me.” Something else must be meant.

It is what is inside the container: the fruit of the vine which represents the blood Jesus shed on the cross for the remission of sins. If Jesus had ordained a drink container to be used in that upper room, and had required all the apostles to drink from that one container, then it would be mandatory for all worshipers in the world today to use that very same cup every time they remembered Jesus in taking the Lord’s supper. Since “the cup” is the fruit of the vine, and not its container, saints can partake of this “one cup” in every part of the world simultaneously.

OBSERVATION #9

(I Corinthians 11:23-29)

It is not difficult to understand how the bread in verse 27 corresponds to the body of the Lord, but how can it possibly be that a drink container can correspond to the blood of the Lord? It cannot. Something else must be meant. That something else is what is inside the container.

Not one time does the New Testament make reference to a container for either the bread or the fruit of the vine. The Lord’s supper does not consist in material containers, but in the spiritual significance of those edible elements which are consumed by the worshiper: the bread and the fruit of the vine.

OBSERVATION #10

(I Corinthians 11:23-29)

If “that cup” refers to the drinking vessel in verse 28, to what does “that bread” refer in the same verse? If to “drink of that cup” means to drink from (or out of) a drinking vessel, then what is to “eat of that bread?” Is there something inside the loaf that is to be eaten, or are we to eat the bread itself? We know that we are to eat the bread itself. Then are we to drink “that cup” itself? Yes, but “that cup” is not a drinking vessel or container; it is what that drinking vessel contains.

CONCLUSION

Without doubt there is just **ONE CUP**. But very, very obviously that cup is the fruit of the vine, not a vessel for holding the fruit of the vine.

Again, there is **ONE CUP**. That cup is the fruit of the (grape) vine. It is not milk, or water. It is not the juice of any other fruit or vegetable. There are not many cups in the church, so that we might on one occasion or in one place use one cup (i.e. water), and at another time or place use another cup (i.e. grape juice). There is just one cup because there is just one Christ and Savior. He, being only one person, had only one blood, and he shed it only one time for the remission of our sins. There is just one cup because there is just one substance that Jesus designated to represent his blood.

What, then, of the question about the number of containers? Two observations are pertinent. **First** God has legislated nothing about containers. Therefore, we cannot (Acts 15:8-10). **Second**, there is no basis for an assumption that Jesus and the apostles shared just one container among them either for their regular supper on the Passover, or for the memorial they inaugurated. There is no scriptural reason, then, to limit the number of drink containers to one in the Lord’s supper (either its first observance or next Sunday’s), much less to bind such limitations on other worshipers.

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