

# *It Is Written*

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## *Peripheral Matters*

By Bobby L. Graham

In dealing with geometric figures like a circle, words like "core," "center," and "periphery" are sometimes used. The core or center of a circle is fully understood by all, while its periphery might not be as well understood. "Periphery" refers to the outer part of the circle, that area lying close to the outer edge.

In recent years I have increasingly been reading about "core" matters and "peripheral" matters in relation to the will of the Lord as set forth in the Bible. The idea held by many is that there are some matters of New Testament teaching that are at the very center of God's will, and that all must accept these matters; it is also contended by them that matters besides these "core" matters lie beyond the center and are not essential to salvation. "We don't sweat the small stuff" was used by one proponent of this idea. One familiar with the old teaching of a distinction between "gospel" and "doctrine" will recognize the similarity between these two concepts. The same weaknesses plague both of them as well.

The chief weakness of this teaching is that it disregards the authority/dominion of Christ. To dethrone Christ is the ultimate insult to the Son of God, for he is God's gift to the church as head over all things, as well as exercising authority over all dominions (Eph. 1:20-23). When Jesus sent his disciples to evangelize the world, he instructed them to teach and baptize people and then teach them to observe all things commanded by him. What plainer statement of the all-encompassing rule of Jesus Christ could one find? Whatever Christ has taught, either personally or representatively through the apostles, becomes his will for all people. Unless he distinguished "core" matters from "peripheral" matters, there is no such distinction. Where is such a distinction made by him? Some might refer to his teaching about weightier matters in Matthew 23, but there he made it clear that those matters not as weighty as others must still be done. Weighty matters are thus classified because they under gird those things not as weighty; no reference is there made to some as essential and others as non-essential.

A second fault (weakness) concerning this teaching is that it puts man into God's place. If there is such a concept as "adding insult to injury" in the spiritual realm, it would be to replace Deity with humanity after Deity is removed from the position of dominion in one's thinking and life. After all, who but human beings decide which matters are essential (core) and which are peripheral? Whenever a person makes a decision that something is not necessary to pleasing God, he takes a fatal step toward spiritual suicide, one reminiscent of ancient Israel: "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). This is the very spirit of error foretold by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:4: "Who opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

The religion of Jesus Christ is not a cafeteria religion in which people can select what they wish to believe and practice, but a complete yielding to Jesus as the Christ after one has renounced (denied) himself to follow Christ (Matt. 16:24). No human being has the power to legislate for the Lord or disregard divine legislation. What all should seek to do is to think God's thoughts after him, for this is the essence of faith and faithfulness.

# How Many Containers in the Lord's Supper Cup?

By Terry Wane Benton

Some divisions have plagued churches over the meaning and use of the word "cup" when Jesus spoke of taking "this cup" as He instituted the Lord's Supper from the old Passover meal. Was Jesus telling His disciples to use only one container among them, and that even when they suddenly grew into 3000 and more disciples in Jerusalem on Pentecost, they were to all make sure that they all shared drinking the fruit of the vine from a single container? Was Jesus talking about the container or the content of the fruit of the vine?

## One Content or One Container?

First, Paul mentioned "this cup" and "drink it" (I Corinthians 11:25). Was he saying to drink the content or drink the container? We never drink a container. I don't believe it can be done. When we drink "it", we are drinking the fruit of the vine. That fruit of the vine may be divided into several containers, but it is still one cup.

Secondly, Paul said, "Drink this cup" (I Corinthians 11:26). He wrote this in Ephesus to the Corinthian church. Were they to get the container Paul was using in Ephesus and bring it to Corinth so they could drink from it? He said drink this cup, not that cup you have in Corinth. Obviously, the church at Ephesus and the church at Corinth were drinking from the SAME cup (the fruit of the vine), but not from the same container.

Third, Matthew records that Jesus "took the cup...and gave it to them" (Matthew 26:27). Was the cup a reference to the container or the content (fruit of the vine)? From Luke's account, "He took the cup...and said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves'" (Luke 22:17). Were they to divide a container? Break a container into pieces and give each disciple a piece? No! They had their own containers from the Passover feast, and Jesus told them to divide the fruit of the vine among themselves by pouring it into their various containers. So, "cup" is used by metonymy to mean the content, namely, the fruit of the vine.

Insisting on a single container is not what Jesus was doing. Insisting on the common drink of the fruit of the vine, as the cup is clearly what Jesus was calling for, is what Jesus was calling for, and that is how Paul could be drinking the same cup in Ephesus as the Corinthians were drinking in Corinth.

## Several Cups versus One Cup

When we consider what several cups would look like in the context of the Lord's Supper, it would look more like this. Several different cups would be: water, cola, milk, coffee, tea, grape juice, apple juice, tomato juice, etc. That would be several different cups. If we divide these among ourselves, we do not partake of the same cup. However, in the context of the Lord's Supper, we do use one cup, namely, only the fruit of the vine. We can divide this among ourselves, and it is always one cup. We can have brethren in Ephesus and Corinth and even across centuries to different locations, still dividing among all that one cup, and it remains one cup, no matter how many containers are used to divide it out. It is a poorly thought-out argument to insist that Jesus made the container a third essential element of the Lord's Supper. The container is only an expediency in holding the fruit of the vine. There is no symbolism in the container, and there is no evidence that the disciples divided the container among themselves. They had their own individual containers and divided out the contents of the fruit of the vine into their individual containers.

If "the cup" means the container:

- We must divide that one container among ourselves. Our one-cup brethren never do that.
- We must insist that people take a chunk of wood out of "the Table" in order to "partake of the Lord's table" (I Corinthians 10:21).

If not, why not? Why would "the cup" be literal, but partaking of the table would not be literal? In all my years of dealing with this issue, I have never gotten a straight answer from the brethren who insist on using one container in the Lord's Supper. The fruit of the vine is the one cup that is shared by brethren all over the world, and there was never any significance attached to the containers used by the various disciples. We do not allow someone to insist on one container, just one common content, the fruit of the vine.