

SECTION 6: ARGUMENTS CONSIDERED

ARGUMENT #1: Metonymy

"Cup" is used by metonymy and does not mean a drinking vessel, but rather the fruit of the vine.⁴

REPLY:

- 1) The word "cup" is not always used by metonymy in the Lord's supper passages. (See APPENDIX A: ANALYSIS OF KEY WORDS in these notes.)
- 2) Even when the word "cup" is being used by metonymy, a literal cup (drinking vessel) is still in view. Notice the following definitions of metonymy:

metonymy – "A figure of speech by which one name or noun is used instead of another, to which it stands in a certain relation."
(Bullinger, 538)

metonymy – "A figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or which it is associated." (Webster, 718)

metonymy – "A figure of speech in which an object is presented to the mind not by naming it, but by naming something else that readily suggests it." (Williams, 220)

⁴ This is the reasoning of W. Curtis Porter in The Porter-Waters Debate, Lambert Book House, 1975 edition, pp. 71-72. This is almost a universal argument used by virtually everyone embracing a plurality of drinking vessels. Gene Frost in *"Elements of the Lord's Supper," Gospel Anchor*, January 1983, p. 25 went so far as to say, "'The cup,' as used with the Lord's supper never refers to the literal vessel, but always to the fruit of the vine. The 'cup' of the Lord is the fruit of the vine. 'Cup' is used figuratively in what is called metonymy" (emphasis his).

From the above definitions it is clear that there are three distinct elements involved in metonymy:

- a) The thing named
- b) The thing suggested
- c) A relationship between the two objects

Metonymy is used in some verses using the word "cup":

1 Corinthians 11:26

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Applying the above definitions of metonymy here are the necessary conclusions:

- a) The thing named → a literal cup (a drinking vessel)⁵
- b) The thing suggested → literal fruit of the vine (the contents of the cup)
- c) A relationship between the two objects → the fruit of the vine is contained within a literal cup

Even in metonymy a literal cup is involved.

3) The above definitions clearly indicate five facts about metonymy:⁶

- a) The object named is not the thing suggested.
- b) There is a real object, not an imaginary one, named.
- c) Both the thing named and the thing suggested must exist.
- d) In the Metonymy of the "container for the contained," the container named must contain the thing suggested.
- e) One can only suggest the contents of as many cups as he names.

Because of these facts, here are the conclusions that must be drawn relative to the communion cup:⁷

⁵ Even Donahue admits that a literal container is being named in this passage to suggest its literal contents. See Donahue's response to written question #5 (a) in SECTION 7: WRITTEN QUESTIONS of these notes.

⁶ These facts were first pointed out by Ervin Waters in the Porter-Waters Debate, p. 79-80.

⁷ Waters, op cit, p. 80.

- a) Paul named "this cup," or "this cup of the Lord," to suggest its contents, the fruit of the vine.
 - b) Since the *object named* is not the *thing suggested*, "this cup" is *not* the fruit of the vine.
 - c) There is a *real cup named*.
 - d) Both the cup, which is named, and the contents, which are suggested, must exist.
 - e) The cup, which is named, *must contain the thing which is suggested*, the fruit of the vine.
 - f) Since one cup was named, the *contents of only one* are suggested.
- 4) In metonymy the drinking vessel is just as literal as the fruit of the vine which it suggests.
- a) If the fruit of the vine is literal, then the drinking vessel named to suggest it must be literal.
 - b) If the fruit of the vine is not literal, neither is the drinking vessel.
- 5) Fruit of the vine can be called a "cup" only when it's in a literal cup. It is improper and illogical to call grape juice a "cup" (singular) if:
- it is still in the cluster⁸
 - it is in a bottle
 - it is in a plurality of cups

The following sentences illustrate this point:

- a) Paul could have written, "*As often as you eat this bread and drink these cups, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*" (This is not what the Bible says, but what it should have said if a plurality of drinking vessels were used.)
- b) Instead, Paul actually wrote, "*As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*" (This necessarily implies the use of only one literal drinking vessel called a "cup.")

⁸ Donahue incorrectly believes that fruit of the vine may be called a cup anytime, including when it is still in a cluster on the vine. See his answer to question #4, in SECTION 7: WRITTEN QUESTIONS of these notes.

- 6) When metonymy is used, it adds to the meaning of "cup" rather than subtracts.

Advocates for individual drinking vessels mistakenly suppose that metonymy subtracts from the meaning of "cup." They assume that no drinking vessel is involved at all and only the liquid is envisioned. This is a false conclusion. Notice the following quotation from E. W. Bullinger:

"Applied to words, a figure denotes some form which a word or sentence takes, different from its ordinary and natural form. This is always for the purpose of giving additional force, more life, intensified feeling, and greater emphasis. Whereas today "Figuratively language" is ignorantly spoken of as though it made less the meaning, and deprived the words of their power and force. A passage of God's Word is quoted; and it is met with the cry, "Oh, that is figurative" – implying that its meaning is weakened, or that it has quite a different meaning, or that it has no meaning at all. But the very opposite is the case. For an unusual form (figura) is never used except to add force to the truth conveyed, emphasis to the statement of it, and depth to the meaning of it. When we apply this science then to God's words and to Divine truths, we at once that no branch of Bible study can be more important, or offer greater promise of substantial reward."⁹

Bullinger is correct. Many people say of the "cup": "Oh, that is figurative," meaning that the word "cup" is weakened or means no literal cup at all. As Bullinger correctly points out, the exact opposite is true. When used by the figure metonymy, the word "cup" takes on additional meaning. Rather than meaning simply a drinking vessel alone, metonymy envisions a drinking vessel plus its contents.

- 7) When "cup" is used by metonymy, lexicons list such usage under "literal" usage because a literal container is being named to suggest a literal liquid. Notice the following two examples:

Thayer, p. 533

Literal – "a cup, a drinking vessel" Mt 26:27; Mk 14:23; Lk 22:17,20; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25,28 ... metonymy – of the container for the contained, the contents of the cup, what is offered to be drunk Lk 22:20b; 1 Cor 10:21; 11:25sq.,27

Figurative – "One's lot or experience, whether joyous or adverse, divine appointments, whether favorable or unfavorable, are likened to a cup which God presents one to drink Mt 20:22,23; Mk 10:38,39; Rev 14:10; 16:19; 18:6"

⁹ Bullinger, op cit, p. v-vi.

Arndt & Gingrich, p. 702

Literal – "cup, drink-vessel" Often in the language of the Lord's supper λαβὼν ποτήριον. Mt 26:27; Mk 14:23; cf. Lk 22:17, [20a]; 1 Cor 11:25a ... The cup stands, by metonymy, for what it contains ... [Lk 22:20b]; 1 Cor 11:25b, 26 ... vs. 28 ... 1 Cor 10:16 ... 11:27

Figurative – Of undergoing a violent death Mt 20:22; 26:39, 42; Mk 10:38; 14:36

So, even when metonymy is used, it does nothing to remove the fact that a literal drinking vessel was used by Jesus and shared among the disciples.

ARGUMENT #2: Metonymy (again)

"Cup" is always used by metonymy in the Lord's supper passages¹⁰

REPLY:

1) This is simply not true. Each occurrence of any word must be analyzed separately from other occurrences. For example:

Romans 9:6

6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.

The first occurrence of the word "Israel" refers to saved Christians. The second occurrence refers to unsaved Jews.

Likewise, each occurrence of the word "cup" must be examined separately from other occurrences. The word "cup" is used in at least three different ways:

- Literally – as in Mt 26:27.
- In a metonymy – as in 1 Cor 11:26.
- In a metaphor – as in 1 Cor 11:25 and Lk 22:20.

Bullinger discusses how to determine when a word is figurative or literal. See "ARGUMENT #4: "Anti" brethren are inconsistent" in these notes

2) See APPENDIX A: ANALYSIS OF KEY WORDS of these notes, where each usage of the word "cup" is discussed.

¹⁰ This argument was used by both Pat Donahue during the Battey – Donahue Debate, Jonesboro, GA, June 25, 1994.

ARGUMENT #3: No drinking vessel intended

Since "cup" is used by metonymy no literal drinking vessel was intended¹¹

REPLY:

"Cup" is not always used by metonymy in Lord's supper passages. It is used in at least three ways:

- a) Literally – as in Mt 26:27.
- b) In a metonymy – as in 1 Cor 11:26.
- c) In a metaphor – as in 1 Cor 11:25 and Lk 22:20.

In all three cases, a literal cup is envisioned.

In the case of Mt 26:27, a literal cup is mentioned by Matthew in his narration of what Jesus did. In this case no figure is being used. Matthew, in narration, is simply writing what literally took place. Any spiritual meaning to any elements of the communion will be made by Jesus later. Before any figurative, or spiritual meaning may be attached to something, the literal elements and literal events must first be described. Thus, "cup" is used literally by Matthew in 26:27.

In the case of 1 Cor 11:26, a literal cup is mentioned to suggest its literal contents. Christians "Drink this cup" only when what they drink is in a cup – a literal drinking vessel. It is improper to say, "Drink this cup," if no literal drinking vessel is present.

In the cases of 1 Cor 11:25 and Lk 22:20, a literal cup is being compared to the New Covenant. Rather than using a simile and saying, "The cup is like the New Covenant," Jesus used the stronger figure of metaphor and said, "This cup is the New Covenant." When a metaphor is used both object used in the comparison must be used in their absolute literal sense. See Bullinger's discussion of this very point under "ARGUMENT #27: Spiritual significance."

¹¹ A commonly used argument. See also, ARGUMENT #28: Emphasis is on fruit of the vine, not the container.

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Debate Notes on Individual Communion Cup
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