

CONTAINERS AND CONTENTS



Coca Cola is likely the most well known product in the world. I have seen people drinking it in obscure places in faraway lands. Over the years, its containers and labels have changed, but its contents remain the same. People are looking for the 'real thing' inside. Sometimes at first, people buy a product because of catchy ads, labels or containers, but they will ultimately make a repeat purchase if the contents are satisfying.

Christianity is the most well known faith in the world. I have seen people enjoying its spiritual refreshment in obscure places in far away lands. One of my most precious memories was in 1993. I was based all that summer in the large city of Novosibirsk in central Russia in Siberia as an evangelist and Bible teacher to hungry new believers. God led us to go out to isolated areas to bless the people, for I grew up in a rural area and have a certain empathy for those who may be overlooked by missionaries that just go to the big cities.

One night I took a bus with my translator about 1/2 hour out of the city. Then we walked about 20 minutes down a railroad track until we came to a small cluster of houses. We entered one house and there was a small group of Christian believers who welcomed us. My heart was greatly touched when they said to me; 'We have been praying that God would send someone to teach us the Bible. You are an answer to our prayers!'

I was just the **container**. They were really after the **contents**. God's Word and Holy Spirit were in me - that is what they were thirsty for. The purpose of God's Spirit and Word is to exalt the risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is always a danger that people can focus too much on the container and not the contents.

Peter and John went to the temple to pray and met a lame man on the way. The cripple man asked them for money. Peter then said to him:

Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. - Acts 3:6

Peter helped him up and the man was instantly healed and began walking and leaping and praising God! Miracles tend to draw a crowd, and the onlookers gathered around Peter and John with seeming adulation. Peter saw this and told them that it was not their own power or godliness that healed the man. He gave this explanation...

God has glorified his servant Jesus..... by faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. it is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that he has given this complete healing to this man, as you can all see. - Acts 1:13,16 NIV

The crowd was looking at the container named Peter. He pointed them to Jesus, the

'real source' of the faith and healing power display.

In the church at Corinth, people began to follow various Christian containers such as Paul, Apollos and Peter, and others followed Christ. - 1 Corinthians 1:11-12. All of us have our favorite Bible preachers and teachers, but we must not get hooked exclusively on one person or group (except for Jesus). The river of God's life and glory has many streams that enter it and that emphasize various truths that are needed in the body of Christ. The early church began on solid ground, but eventually certain truths were changed or neglected. Near the end of the Dark Ages, God began to restore key kingdom truths back to the church and has been doing so ever since. (we will cover that sometime in the future)

People get out of balance when they focus only on certain truths or certain teachers and forget that the Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom is the key message - Acts 28:31 God has blessed me to be exposed to many different streams of Christianity from which I have gained many good insights. However, when I mention certain groups or teachers, it does not mean that I endorse everything they teach or their lifestyle. Paul reminds us: **'Test all things, hold on to the good.'** - 1 Thessalonians 5:21

A warning light should go off in us when we see a Christian leader that becomes like a celebrity and draws too much attention, glory and even money to their self. A few years ago it caught my attention when the pastor of perhaps the largest church in America, changed the name of his TV program from the church name to his first name. Some of my young Christian friends asked me what I thought of his ministry. I told them: "I don't so much have a problem with what he preaches, it is what he doesn't preach." **Too many preachers today would rather be popular than prophetic.**

God wants us to prosper in all areas of our life, but some leaders live in gross self-indulgence. One TV preacher lives in a 30,000 sq. ft. home and boasts about it. Some have airplanes that cost up to \$60 million. Some urge great sacrifice from their followers, but do not live it. I cringe when I see them mix prayer requests, miracles and pleas for money in the same messages. At least a couple of those daily TV preachers bring on what I call 'Economic Hit Men' once a week or more to hit people up for money using the motivation of greed. I spotted one 'greedy hit man' a few years ago dressed up in a real slick suit who regularly came on various TV programs. I was not surprised when I heard later that he went to jail for tax fraud. He had also accumulated several luxury cars etc. Men of God need reminders of three areas of life that can cause them to stumble: Fame, Finances, Females, or to put it in another way: Glory, Gold, Girls.

Money has been a stumbling block throughout church history from one extreme to the other, from vows of poverty to extreme self-indulgence. In the middle ages the Catholic church sold indulgences to the people in exchange for getting their loved ones out of purgatory. Jesus faced similar issues in his day, and warned the religious leaders.

You cannot serve God and mammon (money). The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, you are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but **God knows your hearts.** **What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.**
- Luke 16:13-15 NIV

I do not accept praise from men, how can you believe if you accept praise

from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from God.
- **John 5:41.44 NIV**

The Pharisee's container looked good to the world, but Jesus knew the contents inside were **'full of greed and self-indulgence'** - Matthew 23:25. Judas Iscariot was over taken with this greed too when he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Thankfully, the other disciples of Jesus and the early church as a whole were sold out to Jesus and His kingdom. They forsook the kingdom of self for the cause of Christ - Acts 2:44-45. They were willing to let Jesus fill them with His light and glory.

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness, made his **light shine** in our hearts to give us the **light** of the knowledge of the **glory of God** in the face of Christ.' But we have this **treasure** in **jars of clay** to show that this **all-surpassing power is from God** and not from us. - 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 NIV

Jars of clay were a very common in that day and were fragile objects. The disciples of Jesus were just common ordinary men and women with nothing to commend them in the natural realms. God had chosen to put his presence, power and wisdom into them. This is what caught the attention of the religious leaders when they saw Peter and John.

When they saw the **courage** of Peter and John and realized that they were **unschooled, ordinary men**, they were astonished and they took note that **they had been with Jesus**. - Acts 4:13

God's power and glory are often in greatest display when we feel weak, powerless and are in death filled situations. God wants the world to see the contents and look beyond the container. Christians are meant to display God's goodness and glory.
- Isaiah 61:3, 2 Corinthians 4:8-12, 1 Peter 4:12-14.

We don't think as much today about 'jars of clay', but we often use paper cups. A modern version today might read: 'God has chosen to put his treasure in in paper cups.'

They Pharisees had worldly treasures, but Peter had the real treasure. They could have boasted to Peter....'We have silver and gold!' However, Peter could have retorted to them, "You may have silver and gold, but you cannot say to the lame, Rise up and Walk!'. Peter had the real treasure....the Name of Jesus and all it stands for....Authority to heal, to bless, to bring glory to God. As believers in Jesus, that treasure is also ours. It is part of our great inheritance through Jesus in the kingdom of God and is one of the Keys of the Kingdom. Humbly receive it and release it to a waiting world.

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