

IS IT STILL THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IF GRAPE JUICE IS USED IN THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Thesis I: It can be clearly established with certainty that wine made from grapes was used in the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, and is therefore included in the "this do" command of our Lord in His institution.

While Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:18 refer to "fruit of the vine" this is not a reference to what we call "grape juice." "Fruit of the vine" literally refers to the grape itself, rather than its juice. Grapes inherently contain a leavening agent and left to themselves will ferment naturally. One must assume that intoxicating wine was being used to celebrate the Lord's Supper in the church of Corinth for believers were combining the love feast with the Lord's Supper and some were partaking of the Lord's Supper in a drunken state as a result (cf. 1 Cor. 11:21 where the Greek verb *methueo* is used i.e. intoxicated). Although wine was clearly abused by the Corinthian believers in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, Paul does not condemn the Corinthian Christians for using wine, nor does he prohibit the use of wine in the Lord's Supper. Paul's correction is directed toward their sinful abuse of wine not their lawful use of it. If wine was not lawfully to be used in the Lord's Supper, here was the ideal time for Paul to demonstrate where the use of wine would lead those who broke God's law by using it in the Lord's Supper. The silence concerning any prohibition of wine in the Lord's Supper at this point is emphatic.

The early church Fathers, as well as the Jewish rabbis, have understood "the fruit of the vine" to mean wine in the proper sense. Our Lord, in instituting the Supper after the Passover, availed himself of the expression invariably employed by his countrymen in speaking of the wine of the Passover. Furthermore, the drink offering that was poured out before the Lord at the Passover and on other occasions was wine not grape juice (Num. 28:24; cf. Num. 28:14 where the drink offering is specifically identified as wine, Hebrew word: *yayin*). It would certainly follow that the Lord used wine at the Passover celebration (and at the institution of the Lord's Supper) with His disciples in Matthew 26:29.

There was a Greek word available to the writers of the New Testament which might have been used to refer to grape juice ("*trux*") if they had wanted their readers to understand that the common beverage used by Christ, the disciples, Timothy, the presbyters and deacons, and the Corinthian believers was unfermented grape juice (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature* , by Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, p.564). The Holy Spirit of God chose not to use the word "*trux*" (grape juice) even one time in the New Testament. There is therefore no reference in the New Testament to unfermented grape juice, but all references are to fermented wine. To be sure, the Lord's Supper was instituted in the context of a Hebrew Passover which used wine made from grapes. Jesus instructs the disciples to "make ready for the Passover," which included wine.

Thesis II: While the Scriptures condemn drunkenness (the abuse of alcohol), alcohol itself is not condemned by God.

One can certainly demonstrate that alcohol itself is not immoral. Scripture only condemns drunkenness or the abuse of alcohol, but not responsible and legal use of alcohol. One need only cite Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine at the Cana wedding for proof, in addition to Psalm 104:15; Deuteronomy 14:26; Amos 9:13; Joel 3:18; Isaiah 5:11; I Timothy 5:23. Later temperance or prohibition movements in society do not reflect an accurate teaching of Scripture in that regard, but derive from protestant revivalism or pietism. In fact, Mr. Welch invented grape juice in order to avoid wine at Communion, because he believed to consume wine was sinful. Also to be noted was the fact that Welch did not believe that the Holy Communion is the body and blood of Christ, but only a symbol at best. According to the research of early church scholars, "Abstinence from the use of wine has, occasionally, been declared obligatory by heretics. It was one of the tenets of the heresy of Gnosticism in the second century. Tatian, the founder of the sect known as the Encratites, forbade the use of wine, and his adherents refused to make use of it" even in the Sacrament of the Altar; in its place they used water.

Thesis III: It is not our personal faith which makes the Lord's Supper what it is but the command and institution of Christ. Therefore to change what Christ instituted in this sacrament is spiritually dangerous and puts the sacrament into doubt. Included in the command "this do" is the use of the physical elements of bread and wine made from grapes along with the rest of the institution of Christ Jesus.

The Lord's Supper is not merely a symbol or a reminder but a means of grace.

The Lord attached His Word and promise to a particular way of observing this sacrament. What is used in the sacraments is a doctrinal matter, not simply a matter of convenience. Since the Lord's Supper is not merely symbolic, what we use in the Lord's Supper is not merely a case of using something that resembles wine or even resembles blood. It is a matter of faithfully carrying out the institution of the Lord Jesus. While acknowledging that there may be some circumstances in which an individual may have a physical difficulty with alcohol, there are better and worse ways to pastorally work with this situation. If we are to deal with these situations pastorally, then we must deal with them in such a way as to respond compassionately to the physical health situation of the individual communicant, but also be theologically faithful to a biblical and confessional understanding of the Lord's Supper. The Word comes to the element Christ designated, and it becomes the sacrament.

To be sure it would be wrong in an ordinary instance to refuse a ready communicant the cup of Christ's holy blood, but when someone cannot receive it in a very rare circumstance, then it would be better to commune in one kind rather than change the sacrament. It is not our faith that makes the earthly elements the body and blood of Christ, but that is according to Christ's command. Our faith simply receives (passively) the benefits of this gift and gives thanks. For those who in special circumstances there are three options: (1) to receive wine diluted with water; (2) intinction (slightly dip the host in the wine); or (3) to refrain from the Lord's Supper and be comforted by the preached Gospel, Holy Baptism, and Holy Absolution in Christ. For many because of illness, mental incapacity, or age, there comes a time at which many are not able to commune, but what they have received and continue to receive in the other means of grace sustains them.