

Challenges Christians Face

Grape Juice or Wine?

1 Corinthians 11:20-26

Rev. Freddy Fritz

July 8, 2012

Grape Juice or Wine?

Scripture

Six weeks ago I concluded *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I called *Challenges Christians Face*.

Today, I would like to pick up on one issue regarding the use of grape juice or wine in communion.

Paul addressed the issue of communion in chapter 11. He rebuked the Corinthians because the Lord's Supper had degenerated into a self-centered disregard for others. The rich Christians did not wait for the poor Christians to arrive so that they could all eat together. They went ahead and ate and drank to the point of becoming drunk. When the poor Christians arrived there was nothing left for them to eat, and they went hungry. So, Paul rebuked the Christians in Corinth for their dreadful behavior at the Lord's Supper, and then told them how the Lord's Supper should be celebrated.

Let us read about it in 1 Corinthians 11:20-26:

²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

Introduction

In recent years an increasing number of churches—including PCA churches—have started serving wine instead of grape juice for communion. This practice raises the question: should grape juice or wine be served for communion?

Lesson

My thesis today simple: wine should be served for communion.

I. The Use of Wine in Scripture

First, let's look at the use of wine in Scripture.

The Bible teaches that wine is a good gift to man from God. Speaking to God, the Psalmist says in Psalm 104:14-15, “You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and *wine to gladden the heart of man*, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.”

God himself commands that wine be brought to him as an offering. For example, Exodus 29:38-40 says, “Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. And with the first lamb a tenth measure of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin¹ of beaten oil, *and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering*” (cf. Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 15:5, 7, 10; 28:7). God always commands that the best be offered to him as a sacrifice. Nothing unclean or unholy may ever be sacrificed to God. Yet God commands that he be offered wine as a sacrifice. It is impossible, therefore, that wine is inherently evil, unclean, or unholy.

¹ A *hin* is a liquid measure equal to one-sixth of a bath or about one gallon. See Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 979.

Challenges Christians Face

There are a many other verses in the Bible that state that wine is a blessing from God (such as Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 7:12-13; 11:13-14; 14:22-26; Judges 9:13; and Amos 9:13-14). Wine is one of God's gracious blessings to his faithful covenant people.

Jesus drank wine. Speaking to the crowds concerning John the Baptist, Jesus said in Luke 7:33-34, "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man [i.e., Jesus] has come eating *and drinking*, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" In this passage, Jesus draws a parallel between himself and John the Baptist. John was condemned for not eating bread and not drinking wine. Jesus was condemned for the exact opposite: eating bread and drinking wine. In fact, Jesus was even accused of being a drunkard because he drank wine.

The very first miracle that Jesus performed was turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, recorded in John 2:1-11. The wine ran out, and Mary, Jesus' mother, went to him and told him about it. Jesus turned about 120 gallons of water into wine. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, he called the bridegroom and said to him in John 2:10, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the *good wine* until now." Clearly, everything that Jesus does is good—even producing good wine.

Revelation 19:9 notes the words of the angel to John, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." In fact, John records the description of all the elect throughout all the ages who have gathered in heaven for the magnificent marriage supper of the Lamb. However, he does not give us details about that supper. But Isaiah does! Isaiah 25:6-9 says, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, *a feast of well-aged wine*, of rich food full of marrow, *of aged wine well refined*. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of

his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.’”

Did you notice what awaits us at the marriage supper of the Lamb? It is “a feast of rich food, *a feast of well-aged wine*, of rich food full of marrow, *of aged wine well refined*” (Isaiah 25:6).

Throughout all of Scripture wine is described as a good gift and gracious blessing from God.

II. The Abuse of Wine in Scripture

However, let’s observe the abuse of wine in Scripture.

The abuse of wine in Scripture is always condemned. For example, Proverbs 23:20-21 says, “Be not among *drunkards* or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the *drunkard* and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.”

And Galatians 5:19-21 says, “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, *drunkenness*, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

There are many Scriptures that condemn the abuse of wine (such as Job 12:25; Psalm 107:27; Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-33; Isaiah 5:11, 22; 28:7-8; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 3:2-3, 8; Titus 2:3; 1 Peter 4:3).

The message of Scripture is that wine is a good gift from God. It is to be used in moderation.

However, like all of God’s good gifts, wine can be abused. For example, the good gift of food is abused by gluttons. The good gift of sex is abused by fornicators, adulterers, and homosexuals. The good gift of language is abused by liars and gossips. In the same way, the good gift of wine is abused by drunkards.

It is the abuse—not the use—of wine that is condemned by

Scripture. The abuse of God's good gifts is not solved by the ungrateful rejection of these gifts. Rather, the abuse of God's good gifts is solved only by the proper use of them.

III. The Use of Wine in Communion

Third, let's look at the use of wine in communion.

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:27-29; Mark 14:23-25; Luke 22:15-20), and also in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal, and the specific cup for the Lord's Supper was the third of four cups of wine that was drunk during the meal. Wine was used during the Passover meal, and in each of the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus identifies the contents of the cup as "the fruit of the vine." One Bible scholar tells us that the expression, "the fruit of the vine" was a liturgical formula used in Jesus' time at the blessing of the cup of wine.² The word "wine" is not used in the institution of the Lord's Supper, but that was not necessary because "the fruit of the vine" was synonymous with wine. In other words, when the historical and grammatical context is taken into account, there are simply no grounds to conclude that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with anything other than the same wine that was used during the Passover meal.

For the next 1,800 years the Church used wine during communion. During these 1,800 years, there was never any suggestion that a drink other than wine should be used for communion.

For example, in the early church we find clear testimony to the use of wine by such men as Justin Martyr (*The First Apology*, 65) and Clement of Alexandria (*The Instructor*, 2.2). In the eighth century, the Synod of Constantinople bore witness to the continued use of wine in communion.³

At the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, there

² Joachim Jeremias, translated by Norman Perrin, *Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 183.

³ See John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, 3d ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 55.

were disagreements over virtually every other issue related to the sacraments of baptism and communion, but there was no disagreement over the use of wine. The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinistic Churches all taught that bread and wine were the proper elements to be used in the Lord's Supper.

The great confessions and catechisms of the sixteenth century all taught the use of wine for communion. For example, our own *Westminster Confession of Faith* 29:3 states that Jesus has appointed ministers "to pray, and bless the elements of bread *and wine*."⁴ The *Westminster Larger Catechism* repeatedly declares that the elements of the Lord's Supper are bread *and wine* (Q. 168-169, 177).

Every Reformed theologian from the time of Calvin forward taught that bread *and wine* were the proper elements to be used in the Lord's Supper.⁵

Furthermore, our own *Book of Church Order* clearly states that the proper elements are bread and wine in 58-5: "The table, on which the elements are placed, being decently covered, and furnished with bread *and wine*, and the communicants orderly and gravely sitting around it (or in their seats before it), the elders in a convenient place together, the minister should then set the elements apart by prayer and thanksgiving."

Even some great theologians and confessions of the historic Baptist church have taught that bread *and wine* are the proper elements for communion. For example, the *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* states, "The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to pray, and bless the elements of bread *and wine*" (30:3). The Southern Baptist *Abstract of Principles* of 1859 states, "The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of Jesus Christ to be administered with the elements of bread *and wine* . . ." (art. 16).⁶

Up until the middle of the nineteenth century, the use of wine in communion was simply a nonissue for Christians. In fact, it is

⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

⁵ See Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 302.

⁶ See John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, 3d ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 348.

still a nonissue for Christians in the rest of the world.

IV. The Rejection of Wine in Communion

Fourth, notice the rejection of wine in communion.

If all churches throughout the world used wine in communion for more than 1,800 years without controversy or disagreement, what caused the change that is so prevalent in American evangelical churches today?

The answer quite simple is the nineteenth-century temperance movement. This movement, which arose in reaction to the widespread abuse of alcohol, ultimately came to the conclusion that the solution to abuse is not right use but nonuse of alcohol. Proponents of the temperance movement eventually concluded that alcohol was evil.

The ultimate goal of the temperance movement was the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of all alcoholic beverages. The American Temperance Society was organized in 1826, and by the 1850s thirteen states had outlawed the sale of alcohol. Significantly, many of the leaders and members of the movement were Christians. Eventually, the idea that alcohol is inherently evil had an impact on the practice of the Lord's Supper in American churches.

Frankly, their effort resulted in reinterpreting Scripture on this issue. They reasoned as follows: Alcohol is evil. Thus, the use of alcohol is sinful. We know that Jesus never sinned, and so Jesus could not have drunk alcohol, changed water into alcoholic wine, or used wine in the Lord's Supper. He must have used a different beverage. Since Jesus talked about "the fruit of the vine" in the institution of the Lord's Supper, he must have been referring to non-alcoholic grape juice. Gradually, churches adopted the temperance translation, and substituted grape juice for wine in communion.

In his book titled, *Given for You*, from which I have borrowed heavily, Keith A. Mathison says that the temperance movement failed culturally because it shared one of the flawed presuppositions of liberal Christianity. It placed the responsibility for sin

in an external object rather than in the human heart. Getting rid of alcohol did not and could not get rid of sin in the heart of man.

Furthermore, the temperance movement failed morally because it allowed itself to set up a higher standard of righteousness than the word of God. By prohibiting what God had allowed, the movement fell into legalism (which is having a legal standard that is different than God's law).

Finally, Mathison notes that the temperance movement's only lasting "success" is found in churches that used its flawed reinterpretation of Scripture to replace wine with grape juice in communion.⁷

V. The Refutation of Some Common Objections

Finally, let's look at the refutation of some common objections.

I would like to examine briefly some of the more common objections to the use of wine in communion.

The first objection is that wine in the Bible was not alcoholic. The common word for *wine* in the Bible (*yayin* in the Old Testament and *oinos* in the New Testament) referred to "a fermented beverage from grapes."⁸ Other words (*asis* and sometimes *tirosh* in the Old Testament and *gleukos* and *trux* in the New Testament) could refer to unfermented grape juice. So, if God intended people to drink unfermented grape juice rather than fermented wine, he could easily have used the appropriate words to command his people to drink and use grape juice. But, he did not. He used the common word for wine.

Furthermore, people clearly got drunk by drinking wine. That is Paul's concern, for example, with the Corinthians. He said in 1 Corinthians 11:21, "For in eating, each one goes ahead with his

⁷ See Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 305.

⁸ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *God Gave Wine: What the Bible Says about Alcohol* (Lincoln, CA: Oakdown, 2001), 34.

own meal. One goes hungry, *another gets drunk.*”

If the wine in the Bible was not alcoholic, then there would not be so many warnings about drunkenness in the Bible.

The second objection is that while some wine in the Bible may be alcoholic, Jesus would have used grape juice rather than wine for communion. Part of the problem with this objection is that it assumes that wine itself is evil. However, the Bible never calls wine evil, although it does call drunkenness a sin.

The Scripture indicates that Jesus used wine for communion when he used the expression “the fruit of the vine.” As previously mentioned, that was the liturgical expression for the use of wine.

When Paul rebuked the Corinthians for getting drunk on the communion wine, he did not say that they should use grape juice rather than wine. Instead, he called them to use wine correctly in communion.

The third objection is that Jesus used new wine, and new wine is grape juice that has not yet fermented. This sounds plausible at first, but it has no biblical merit. New wine in the Bible was also alcoholic. The disciples at Pentecost were accused of being drunk with new wine (*gleukos* in Acts 2:13). That accusation would be unreasonable if new wine were not alcoholic. New wine is wine that has not yet fully aged. Although it has not yet reached its full potential, it is still alcoholic.

The fourth objection is that the wine in Jesus’ day was watered down. Even if that were true, it would still be wine!

There is only one passage in all of Scripture that talks about wine being watered down. In Isaiah God confronts his covenant people with their disobedience. And one of the ways they disobey God is by diluting their best wine with water (Isaiah 1:22).

The fifth objection is that we should use grape juice rather than wine because of alcoholism. But alcoholism was just as much a problem in Jesus’ day as it is in our own. And yet Jesus still used wine in communion.

Further, the problem with alcoholism is not with the wine but rather with our sinful hearts. It is the same argument regarding gun

control. Some say that we should get rid of guns because guns kill people. However, guns do not kill people. People kill people by using guns. You see, guns are amoral. But, our hearts are sinful. The problem is not with the object but with our sinful hearts.

Moreover, it might be helpful to remember that the amount of alcohol in a communion cup is about the same amount of alcohol in a similar amount of cough syrup. Most people have no problem drinking alcohol in cough syrup, but some object to the same amount of alcohol in a cup of communion wine.

And the final objection is that love should compel us to use grape juice rather than wine in communion. The difficulty with this objection is that Jesus used wine and commanded wine to be used in communion. He did not give us a choice in the matter.

This is the “weaker brother” argument. The point is that the weaker brother has a defective understanding of biblical truth. Our goal must be to correct his defective understanding. While doing so we may personally forego drinking alcohol. However, when it comes to communion we should not let defective thinking govern church practice. We should use the elements that Jesus prescribed.

Conclusion

Much more could be said on this matter.

I am not advocating that anyone start drinking wine. Further, if you do drink wine, you must not get drunk while drinking.

However, I do believe that we should use wine in communion. Obviously, we will not do so today! I encourage you to talk to me if you have any questions or concerns. I will ask the Session to read, study, and pray about using wine for communion. I will recommend that if we do start using wine that we also offer grape juice for our younger communicants and for those who would still prefer grape juice.

May the Lord help us to grow in obedience in this area of our worship of him. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Challenges Christians Face

PRAYER:

O Lord our God, I thank you for your word. Help us always to conform our practice to the teaching of your word.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and love as God has called us to love!