Why Did We Change the Grape Juice to Wine in the Communion Cup?

A Biblical View of Wine and the Cultural Influences that Shaped the Church to Change Its Practice of Communion

by Marion Lovett

Preface

As the title of this article implies, we at Heritage Presbyterian Church have made a change in an element of communion. Perhaps a better question for the broader Evangelical Church would be, "Why did we ever change the wine in communion to grape juice to begin with?" This question addresses the heart of the matter more pointedly. It is important for the reader to know the biblical teaching on wine and the cultural context into which this article is written. This cultural context is the twentieth-century American Church influenced by the temperance movement of the mid-nineteenth century. I will attempt to show why I think this movement has perverted the rightful administration of the sacrament of communion by changing the element from what Christ used, desired, and intended for the sacrament. If one of the marks of a true church is the rightful administration of the sacraments, as the Reformers declared, then changing an element in communion has profound implications, especially if that change moves us away from the biblical observance of what Christ instituted. I hope the reader will be open to the following assertions and prayerfully consider the importance of the proper observance of communion in his own life.

Marion Lovett, Pastor

Heritage Church

Table of Contents

I.	Thesis	1
II.	The Use of Wine in the Bible	1
III.	The Christology of Wine	9
IV.	The Necessary Use of Wine in Communion	13
V.	The Historical Context and Influence	18
VI.	Refuting Some Common Objections	24
VII.	Conclusion	28

I. Thesis

My thesis for this article is rather simple and must be kept in mind. Christ instituted the Lord's Supper with bread and wine. The rightful administration of the sacrament should include these elements that Christ used, desired, and intended for its biblical observation. The Church should not have changed the element of wine to unfermented grape juice. To change the element from wine to grape juice was a sinful move, and to use grape juice instead of wine is a sinful practice. As part of restoring biblical worship to the Church of Christ, we must be willing to return to what was originally revealed by Christ and the apostles. When we do so, our own holiness will be promoted, not hindered.

II. The Use of Wine in the Bible

Before I speak directly about the element of wine in communion, it is necessary to take a step or two back to evaluate what the Bible reveals about the use of wine. If Christians are going to be committed to the Bible as their authority for faith and practice, then this is where they must start. Because of the cultural influences that shape much of the Church's current understanding and fears about this topic, I devoted a later chapter to address this issue. Right now, I ask the reader to prayerfully consider the straightforward and clear revelation of the Scripture as it pertains to my subject.

First, the Bible emphatically reveals that the abuse of wine is a sin. The abuse of wine is drunkenness. The Bible calls drunkenness a work of the flesh. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these;

Adultery . . . drunkenness . . .” (Galatians 5:19,21). One cannot be drunk and be filled with the Spirit. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; (Ephesians 5:18). While God created beautiful women, the proper love of them in marriage is not sin. but the abuse of God’s good creation is emphatically so. Likewise, wine itself is a good thing and not a sin. However, the Bible calls the abuse of it “the work of the flesh”, or sin. Likewise, the Bible is strong in its language about drunkards,

> *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).*

Notice that the Bible is not addressing the elements of abuse, but the heart of man which is unrighteous. So, while the Bible strictly prohibits the abuse of alcohol and warns strongly against the heart that would do so, it always makes a distinction between the good use of something good and the abuse of it. It is important for our own sanctification to make this important distinction between the use of something and the abuse of it.[1] A modern cultural example of this is the argument for gun control. Many take the side that all guns should be outlawed because guns kill people. It is a mistake to think that way. Guns do not kill. People with wicked hearts kill. A more absurd example, but one that brings the point home, would be to outlaw all matches and lighters. While fire can be a good and useful thing, it also kills people and destroys property.

The Bible reveals that wine is a good thing. This is contrary to how many people view wine, but the Scripture informs us otherwise. Psalm 104:14-15 says, "He [God] causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that maketh glad the heart of man..." God is good. He would not give man something that is bad. This passage teaches us that God blesses man with wine to cheer his heart!

Amazingly, in the parable of the trees in Judges 9:7-15, the Scripture reveals that wine cheers not only man but also God. "And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?" (Judges 9:13). This rhetorical question is expecting a negative answer. Wine is not a bad thing. In fact, the Bible reveals that it is good. Again, the abuse of a good thing is a sin, but the use of a good thing is good.

Having established an important point regarding the heart of man and the abuse of good things, I now turn to what the Bible says are good and proper uses of wine. The Bible never reveals that the use of alcohol is sin. In fact, it declares quite the contrary. The Bible reveals four proper and good uses of wine.

A. Wine is Used For Good Health

The first use of wine in the Bible is for medicinal purposes. Note how the apostle Paul advises Timothy, the young pastor of the church in Ephesus, to drink a little wine for his infirmities. "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." (1 Timothy 5:23). Wine has medicinal properties that today's physicians are just beginning to realize. The American Heart Association reports that

"analyses showed that compared with non-drinkers, people who drank 'moderate' amounts of alcohol every day – defined as two beers or wines or one mixed drink – had a 49 percent lower risk of a heart attack."[2]

In 1991, CBS's 60 Minutes reported on what is now widely known as the "French Paradox." In spite of a diet of rich foods—including more butter, cheeses, eggs and sauces, an estimated 15 percent of their daily calories obtained from saturated fats and less exercise—the rate of heart disease for French people is only 40 percent of that of Americans. Why the paradox? Leading researcher and physician, R. Curtis Ellison, M.D., Chief of Preventive Medicine and Epidemiology at Boston University School of Medicine, attributed this paradox (the incompatibility of a diet rich in fatty foods with a decreased risk of heart disease) to the tendency of the French to drink red wine regularly with their meals.

Dr. Vincent Figueredo, a San Francisco General Hospital cardiologist and author of University of California, San Francisco, health study said in an Associated Press release, "Moderate consumption [of wine] after a heart attack cut the cell death in half and almost doubled the recovery of muscle function of the heart."[3]

A 1999 medical research report published by The Journal of American Medical Association noted that "drinking up to two alcoholic drinks per day reduced the risk of stroke by half."[4]

Because of the cultural influences which have shaped our thought, American government policy has warned against, and even once prohibited, alcohol consumption. While the medical world has known for some time about the damage alcohol abuse causes the body, new medical

research is slowly beginning to reshape a reluctant nation. For instance, in a 1996 article published by The American Heart Association, medical research confirmed the French Paradox.

> *Any advice about the consumption of alcohol must take into account not only the complex relation between alcohol and cardiovascular disease but also the well-known association of heavy consumption of alcohol with a large number of health risks. One approach would be to recommend no consumption of alcohol. However, a large number of recent observational studies have consistently demonstrated a reduction in coronary heart disease (CHD) with moderate consumption of alcohol. Any prohibition of alcohol would then deny such persons a potentially sizable health benefit.*[5]

Medical research has demonstrated the biblical principle of "abuse versus proper use". Apparently, when Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for good health, he had good reasons for doing so!

B. Wine is Used to Identify God's Blessings Upon His People

Wine is often used in the Bible to identify God's covenantal blessings upon His people. In Genesis 14:18-20, when Abraham received a blessing from God through Melchizedek, who has a direct reference to Christ (cf. Hebrews 7:1ff), he brought out bread and wine and blessed Abraham.

When Isaac blessed Jacob, it was part of God's covenantal blessing and redemptive plan. Isaac's blessing begins, "Therefore God give thee of the dew of

heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine . . .” (Genesis 27:28). Furthermore, when Moses expressed the covenant blessings that God would pour out on His people who were faithful in keeping His covenant, He used wine as a portion of the blessing expressed.

> *“Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee.” (Deuteronomy 7:12-13; see also 11:13-14)*

Moreover, for those that love God and are faithful to covenant obedience, the Scripture says in Proverbs 3:9-10, “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”

The joyful blessings prophesied concerning the Messianic age are representative of God’s covenantal blessings and how wine is used to epitomize God’s blessings upon His people. Amos 9:13-14 says,

> *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste*

cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them."

Just as God blesses His faithful people with all good things, He likewise curses those who break covenant with Him. The removal of wine from His people is one of the emblems He uses to express the curse that comes upon His people who are unfaithful. Deuteronomy 28 is one such passage that expresses God's curse consequent upon Israel's disobedience. God took all the good things away including their wine. "Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them." (Deuteronomy 28:39).

Since wine is a good thing, God uses it to symbolize His goodness and blessing on His people living in covenant faithfulness with Him. Likewise, He also withholds it to curse those who disobey Him.

C. Wine is Used in Godly Celebration

A portion of Deuteronomy 14 instructs the Israelites regarding the third year tithe. Every three years, the Israelites were commanded to take the tithe of their produce and bring it to Jerusalem to celebrate before the Lord (v.28). The following are the instructions that the Lord gave.

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place

be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household (Deuteronomy 14:22-26).

Simply reading these words is enough to offend some folks. But the fact remains that one of the uses of the tithe for the Israelites was to spend it on food , drink, and celebration before the presence of the Lord. This occasion was not some unrestrained frat-boy keg party. On the contrary, it was a festive time of celebration before the Lord with His people. God desires that we know how to properly enjoy Him in festive celebration; so much so, that He warranted the use of the tithe expressly for that purpose!

When Jesus changed the water into wine in John 2:1-12, it is estimated that the amount transformed was about 120 gallons. Some commentators believe this festive wedding feast illustrates the marriage supper of the Lamb where Christ will celebrate with His Bride in heaven after His return (Revelation 19:7f). What is notable for our discussion about Christ's first miracle is that He changed 120 gallons of water to wine so the festivities could continue.

The third good use of wine in Scripture is for godly celebration before the Lord. The Christian, however, should always have the guiding principle of 1 Corinthians 10:31 governing all his behavior, "Whether

therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." No matter what a Christian eats or drinks, whether it be water or wine, he is commanded to so to God's glory.

D. Wine is Used in Biblical Worship

The last biblical use of wine in the Scripture is sacramental. When God gave Moses instructions for the daily offerings that were to be observed in Israel, He commanded wine and strong drink to be brought to Him as an offering (cf. Exodus 29:38-40). One must remember the text of Judges 9 mentioned earlier; wine cheers God, too!

During the Feast of Firstfruits, God prescribes the use of wine in the offering given (Leviticus 23:13). Likewise, wine is commanded in the prescription of the grain and drink offering (cf. also Numbers 15:5,7,10; 28:7).

When the sacraments were changed under the New Covenant, wine, not grape juice, was prescribed as the element in the communion cup. An important point to reiterate is that God commands only what is good to be brought to Him – and the best at that! Therefore, we must not call evil what God says is good.

While the Bible certainly warns against the abuses of wine and alcohol, it also reveals that wine is a good thing and the rightful use of it is also a good thing.

III. The Christology of Wine

It is not surprising then when the Bible uses wine to identify with the blessings of Jesus Christ. All of the good uses of wine find their meaning in Jesus Himself.

The Bible itself connects wine to Christ, both literally and theologically.

1 Chronicles 12:38-40 reveals the coronation of king David where God's people met together in festive celebration and feasted on good food and wine for three days.

All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king. And there they were with David three days, eating and drinking: for their brethren had prepared for them. Moreover, they that were nigh them, even unto Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, brought bread on asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen, and meat, meal, cakes of figs, and bunches of raisins, and wine, and oil, and oxen, and sheep abundantly: for there was joy in Israel.

Wine is also used to describe the great eschatological feast we will have with Jesus at His Coming. As we consider this coronation of Israel's great king, we are pointed to another great King – Jesus. God's people, as Christ's Bride, will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19) where joy, celebration and feasting will be in abundance.

Isaiah 55:1 invites God's people to an abundant life in the gospel. This verse identifies the blessings of wine with the gospel itself. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." The gospel is free, provided by God's grace, and is full of abundant blessings of which wine is representative.

All of the covenant blessings throughout Scripture that use wine to represent its goodness find their fulfillment

in Christ. Proverbs 8 speaks of Christ in terms of wisdom. In Proverbs 9:2-5 we hear Wisdom calling out to us to come to her[6] (Christ) and eat of her bread and drink of her wine. Christ Himself calls us to the same.

The wonderful love union between husband and wife is a picture of Christ and the Church (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33). The Song of Solomon is a book written that typifies (symbolically represents) the Lord with His Bride, the Church, and demonstrates this beautiful marriage bond. In chapter five of Song of Solomon, the Scripture says, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." (Song of Solomon 5:1). This union between Christ and the Church is a joyous union that calls for festive celebration with the use of wine. Scripture uses wine for gospel blessings and to commemorate joy.

When Jesus changed the water into wine at the festive wedding in Cana, the Scripture says that in so doing, Christ "…manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11). The best wine in the world manifested the glory of Christ, so that his disciples believed on Him.

Psalm 104:14-15 says that God gives wine to gladden the hearts of men. This is exactly what the blood of Christ and the presence of Christ do – they gladden our hearts. The Bible tells us in Matthew 11:19, "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children." Several things are notable from this text. First of all, if Jesus had only been drinking

unfermented grape juice, as some claim, then the railing accusation against Him would bear no weight. Jesus came drinking fermented wine, and His accusers found fault with it. Because he drank wine and ate, they falsely accused Him of being a drunkard and a glutton. Jesus was neither of these, but neither was He a teetotaler or a hermit. Secondly, there was just as much a problem with the sin of drunkenness in Jesus' day as in our own. Yet, Jesus did not take an abstinent position. Thirdly, it important to realize that Jesus drank alcohol! Some would like to make abstinence a measure or application, of holiness. This is faulty reasoning because we will never be as holy as Jesus. Jesus never saw the use of alcohol related to one's holiness. The abuse of it, yes; the use of it, no. We must not set up standards of righteousness that Jesus Himself never ordained or even followed. To do so is a certain road to legalism which does not promote true holiness, but destroys it.

What better analogies and illustrations could the Lord have used for His own blood than wine? Wine has the color of blood. By the virtue of the alcohol in it, wine has power in it. The blood of Jesus which cleanses His people from our sins has power in it (Romans 1:16). Wine gladdens the hearts of man. For this reason, wine is used for feasting and joyous occasions. His blood gladdens the hearts of His people and is the occasion for our feasting and celebration. Such an occasion is observed at every communion.

So, this brings us up to my question – Why did we change the grape juice to wine in communion?

IV. The Necessary Use of Wine in Communion

As I meditated over the meaning of the sacraments that Christ gave His Church in the New Covenant, I began to appreciate more fully the true meaning and purpose of them. The Shorter Catechism defines a sacrament as an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers (Shorter Catechism, Q92). In other words, a sacrament is an ordinance that includes symbols, and by the proper use of these symbols, Christ and His saving work is applied to believers. The sacraments are a means of grace. Or, said another way, a means whereby God saves His people. In modern church language, the usage of the terms "to save" or "salvation" are too often restricted to merely mean the moment a sinner repents and trusts Christ (i.e. his justification). However, the Bible uses these terms much more broadly to indicate the salvation of one's whole life. It includes a believer's sanctification as well as his justification. Therefore, a proper understanding of the sacraments is essential to our own sanctification and progress in the gospel, and hence our perseverance in the faith.

The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are not optional, nor should they be infrequently or occasionally observed. The sacraments should never be seen as a mere memorial, but as a means of our salvation. However, the Christian should be careful not to allow his pendulum to swing too far the other direction into the Roman Catholic camp which would teach that grace is poured into the souls via the sacrament itself, apart from the work of the Spirit and faith in the recipient. The Shorter Catechism again

helps clarify the correct meaning. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his spirit in them that by faith receive them. (Shorter Catechism, Q91). On the one hand, folks from the evangelical Church who view the sacraments as a mere memorial, will not observe them properly because faith would not be required by the recipients to simply "remember" or call to mind what is represented. For them, the sacraments are not a means to their sanctification and spiritual growth. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church, which views the sacraments as a means of salvation, does not observe them properly either because they believe that the benefits of sacraments are conferred upon passive recipients without the necessity of their faith. Their term for this is the Latin phrase, opus operatum (or ex opera operato) meaning that the sacrament confers grace by virtue of the sacramental act itself. In other words, grace is conveyed in the sacramental work apart from faith. It is interesting that both the memorialists and the Catholics err on the same point regarding the recipient – neither requires faith in the act of receiving the sacrament.

It is necessary to address this issue of the importance and correct teaching of the sacraments. Without a high view of the sacraments and an understanding of their operation, one is likely to discount the whole argument for the element served in the cup. The sacraments include three important things. First, they include symbols or outward sensible signs. Secondly, they include an inward spiritual grace. Apart from this grace, the outward symbol is but an empty form. Thirdly, they include a union between the sign and the

grace it signifies. This is called a sacramental union. Reformed Theology holds that the union is spiritual, so that where the sacrament is received by faith, the grace signified by the sign is assuredly communicated to the recipient.

When the Lord instituted baptism, He did so with water. Water is the essential element in a biblical baptism. It symbolizes washing and cleansing from sin. The Scripture says, " . . . arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). The sign must be correct in order to accurately signify the grace that is communicated. Therefore, it is not biblical to baptize with any substance other than water.

The same principle is held forth in the Lord's Supper. Christ instituted the Lord's Supper with bread and wine. Therefore, the symbols must be biblical in order to accurately signify the grace which is communicated. When Christ observed the Lord's Supper in the upper room with His disciples at Passover time, he used real fermented wine, not grape juice.

Masses of misled people and erroneous handling of the Scripture has recently led to a serious fallacy in which it is claimed that the wine Jesus used was non-alcoholic. When Jesus instituted this New Covenant sacrament, he said,

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. (Matthew 26:27-29).

Dunlop Moore's comments shed light on the alcoholic

nature of the wine Jesus used when he defines the phrase "fruit of the vine."

… the Jews from time immemorial have used this phrase to designate the wine partaken of on sacred occasions, as at the Passover and on the evening of the Sabbath. The Mishna (De. Bened, cap.6, par I) expressly states, that, in pronouncing blessings, "the fruit of the vine" is the consecrated expression for yayin [Greek word for wine] . . . The Christian 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 Passover, availed himself of the expression invariably employed by his countrymen in speaking of the wine of the Passover. On other occasions, when employing the language of common life, he calls wine by its ordinary name.[7]

Moreover, the time of the Passover was in the spring. It was held during the first month of the Jewish calendar which is in the March/April timeframe today. The grape harvest was in August or September. This would put Passover just about six months away from the grape harvest season. One must remember that pasteurization of grape juice, to keep it from turning into wine, was not invented until 1869. As soon as grapes are crushed, they begin fermenting. It is as though grapes want to turn to wine. God made grapes so that they naturally contain the necessary ingredients, sugar, and yeast, to turn into wine. Grapes will reach almost full alcoholic content in only five to ten days. In the first century, the Hebrews did not have a way to store grape juice or inhibit it from fermenting until Passover. Fermentation was the natural method of preserving the juice from the grapes. The cup that Jesus instituted at Passover undoubtedly contained real alcoholic wine.

We have no reason to think that Jesus wanted merely grape juice in the cup. After all, He changed 120 gallons of water into wine, and that occasion was also around Passover time. We know from the testimony of the master of the feast that this was not only real wine, but the best wine (John 2:9-10).

The point of this paper is this: Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with wine and bread, and no one has the right or authority to change the element in the cup from what Jesus intended and desired for His people to use to commemorate His body and blood. To change the element from wine to grape juice is an audacious act – no matter what the motives are. This change is an act of disobedience and unbelief, and it neglects all the Scriptural revelation on wine and all the import of what it represents.

Like wine (the sign), Jesus' blood is what gladdens the hearts of men (the reality). It is wine and not grape juice, like the blood of Jesus, that has power in it. It is wine that has been used for centuries for celebration and joyous occasions, and this is what pictures the gospel in Jesus' blood.

Herman Hoeksema summarizes this point well.

> *It is true that in the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus did not use the symbol of water, but that of wine. For this we can find two reasons. In the first place, wine is the color of blood, and the wine at the communion table is the sign of the blood of Jesus Christ. And, secondly, wine is a symbol of communion, of prosperity and joy, according to Scripture [Gen. 14:18; 27:27, 28; 49:10-12; Deut. 7:13; 33:28; Psalm 104:14, 15]. Wine is the symbol of heavenly joy, and therefore it was very fitting at the wedding of Cana that the*

heavenly bridegroom should change the water into wine. And thus we can understand that at the Lord's Supper it is not water but wine that is used as the proper sign of the blood of the Lamb, by which not only our sin is changed into righteousness, but also our earthly life is translated into the joy of God's heavenly tabernacle.[8]

We would do well to heed the account of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 to understand the seriousness of changing something sacramental that God had specifically prescribed.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. (Leviticus 10:1-2)

The fault of these priests was their disobedience in not following what the Lord prescribed. The Lord had commanded one thing to be burned, but they changed the element to burn something else, and God severely judged them for it.

To better understand the context of this relatively recent, unbiblical change from wine to grape juice, let us consider the cultural and historical background that has shaped our modern-day perspective on alcohol in communion.

V. The Historical Context and Influence

First, the change to grape juice in the communion cup

is a fairly recent phenomenon. For over 1800 years, the issue of wine in communion has never been debated – in any branch of the Church. While the Church debated just about every other point of communion, the one thing that was never debated was the element to be used. While the Roman Catholics held to transubstantiation, and the Lutherans to consubstantiation, the Zwinglians to a memorialist view, and the Reformed to the spiritual presence of Christ, the one thing they all had in common was the use of bread and wine. The substitution of grape juice for wine had its origins not in the Bible, but in influences of American culture with the demands of the temperance movement in the mid-nineteenth century

The temperance movement was, at first, an American phenomenon, primarily occurring between 1826 and 1860, designed to curb the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The American Temperance Society was formed in Boston in 1826, and seven of the sixteen founders were clergyman. They promoted a total abstinence position. Their intention was good. They desired to curb the abuse of alcohol and the drunkenness around them. However, their methodologies were wrong and would soon prove not to have the effect they desired. This temperance movement sparked campaigns to prohibit the sale of alcohol, but, in 1857, this was declared unconstitutional. This is a classic example of taking an abuse of something good and forming a wrong application in handling the problem. While the temperance movement included a large number of clergymen, they were not solving the problem biblically. In fact, Jesus never went about reforming society's drunkenness with prohibition, and well-meaning men need to be careful to take note of Jesus' view of alcohol.

There are numerous problems associated with the philosophy of the temperance movement. For instance, the Bible was subjected to much perversion in order to promote the cause of abstinence. It is appalling to discover that, during Prohibition, temperance activists hired a scholar to rewrite the Bible by removing all references to alcoholic beverages.[9]

Many other fallacious applications began springing up from this false premise that alcohol is evil. For example, because the temperance movement taught that alcohol was a poison, proponents insisted that schoolbooks never mention the contradictory fact that alcohol was commonly prescribed by physicians for medicinal and health purposes.[10] The fundamental flaw in this line of thinking is forbidding something that God has not forbidden. In other words, when someone calls something evil that God does not say is evil, yea, has even called it good, that person is wrong and must have his mind renewed with the Word of God. Undeniably, our sentiments about alcohol today have been influenced by this relatively recent phenomenon based upon an unbiblical and faulty premise. It may help the reader to have a balanced perspective to be reminded that the Pilgrims loaded more beer than water onto the Mayflower before they cast off for the New World.[11]

In today's Church, we have a lot of pharisaism. Jesus exposed the Pharisees heart when He showed them how they frequently ignored God's clear laws, while making up others that were not according to Scripture. Modern-day Pharisees like to call something evil which Scripture has not so declared, while making other things lawful that Scripture has clearly prohibited. For instance, some of the strongest proponents of an abstinent position, calling alcohol sin, are those who deny the that the Fourth Commandment (i.e.

Remembering the Sabbath day, to keep it holy) is applicable for Christians today. While denying God's laws, they piously follow men's traditions. Jesus addressed this very issue in admonishing the Pharisees.

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Mark 7:8-9)

The change of wine in the communion cup to grape juice came about as a result of two dynamics that were working in the Church in America. First of all, as already noted, there was the wrong view that alcohol is itself sinful. This was the precursor of audaciously changing the wine in communion to grape juice in violation of the clear institution of Christ. The rippling effects of the temperance movement began to be felt in the Church. Consequently, in 1869, Dr. Thomas Bramwell Welch, a physician and dentist by profession, successfully pasteurized Concord grape juice to produce an "unfermented sacramental wine" for fellow parishioners at his church in Vineland, N.J., where he was the communion steward. His achievement marked the beginning of the processed fruit juice industry and the beginning of this drastic change in communion for the first time in history.

The second dynamic which resulted in the change of the element was a low view of the sacrament of communion. The doctrinal strength of the Church was waning, and the sacraments were seen mostly as memorial "ordinances." When the Church has a low view of the sacraments, then it is easy to be flippant with changing things around. Today, the Church, particularly in America, is still plagued with a low view of the

sacraments. Naturally, all sorts of novelties are beginning to emerge. Recently, I heard of a local church in my area teaching children about baptism using video clips from Disney's movie, The Lion King. In one of my church supply catalogs, a new way of serving communion was packaged in a product that already has the juice in a sealed plastic cup and a wafer enclosed on the top. The advertisement read, "Communion now as easy as 1-2-3." This mentality reveals the modern Church's debased view of Christ's sacraments.

A broader perspective of this issue is in order. What has been the position of the church historically regarding the use of bread and wine in communion? Martin Luther certainly felt strongly about the use of wine. Luther was so adamant about using wine in the Lord's Supper that he said in his Table Talk that "if a person can't tolerate wine, omit it [the Sacrament] altogether in order that no innovation may be made or introduced." The Anglican Church taught the use of wine in its Confession (Thirty-Nine Articles, Article 28). Even the Anabaptists required the use of wine in communion (Dordrecht Confession of 1632, Article 10). All of the great reformed confessions of the 16th Century call for the administering of wine in communion (Belgic Confession; The Heidelberg Catechism; 2nd Helvetic Confession). The Westminster Confession of Faith prescribes the use of wine (29, 6). The modern Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) manual of Church order designates the partaking of bread and wine. The London Baptist Confession of 1689 calls for the use of wine (30:5). Even the Southern Baptist Abstract of Principles of 1859 decrees that bread and wine is to be used in the Lord's Supper. The Baptist Faith and Message written in 1925, long after the temperance movement, and long after Welch developed

pasteurization for grape juice in 1868, called for bread and wine. The Church always believed the element in the communion cup was real fermented wine and never anything less. Renown Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote a verse in a communion hymn that our church occasionally sings, "What food luxurious loads the board, When at His table sits the Lord! The wine how rich, the bread how sweet, When Jesus deigns the guests to meet!"[12]

When the proponents of abstinence and those who wished to change the element from wine to juice came along in the 19th century, some well-versed men of the Church strongly opposed the move. Theologians, such as Presbyterian A.A. Hodge and Baptist John Dragg were some of the first to be confronted with the question and were adamant in their refusal to change the elements of the Lord's Supper to pacify the legalistic spirit of the age.

A.A. Hodge in 1890 comments,

> *The contents of the cup were wine. This is known to have been 'the juice of the grape,' not in its original state as freshly expressed, but as prepared in the form of wine for permanent use among the Jews. 'Wine,' according to the absolutely unanimous, unexceptional testimony of every scholar and missionary, is in its essence 'fermented grape juice.' Nothing else is wine. The use of 'wine' is precisely what is commanded by Christ in his example and his authoritative institution of this holy ordinance. Whoever puts away true and real wine, or fermented grape juice, on moral grounds, from the Lord's Supper sets himself up as more moral than the Son of God who reigns over his conscience, and than the*

> *Savior of souls who redeemed him. There has been absolutely universal consent on this subject in the Christian Church until modern times, when the practice has been opposed, not upon change of evidence, but solely on prudential considerations.*[13]

So, the question that demands an answer is not, "Why did we change the grape juice to wine in the communion cup?" but rather, "Why did the modern American evangelical Church ever change it from wine in the first place?"

It was wrong to change it, and since I had grown up in the culture of the Church that practiced abstinence, taught that alcohol was sin, and used grape juice in communion, I simply went along with tradition without questioning the practice. Not until I began studying the meaning of the sacraments did I see the serious flaw and the need to reform the practice according to what Christ intended.

VI. Refuting Some Common Objections

While I will not cover all the objections to using wine in communion, I will refute some of the most common objections. I will say, however, that after hearing the biblical position on wine and the sacraments that I have just covered, our church fellowship has yet to lose a family over this issue. The folks at Heritage have received this teaching with much humility and with a teachable spirit which can only be attributed to the grace of God and His desire for us to do right in His sight.

Objection 1. Wine in the Bible was not alcoholic.

I have already refuted this objection in the article but will address a few more points. Drunkenness in the Bible is often linked to the abuse of wine, which could not be the case if the wine was not alcoholic. Noah cultivated a vineyard and became drunk from the wine (Genesis 9:20-21). The Scripture exhorts all Christians, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), clearly implying that wine has the "power" (i.e. alcohol) to make one drunk.

Objection 2. While some wine in the Bible may be alcoholic, Jesus would not have used alcoholic wine, but grape juice, for communion.

This objection assumes that wine in itself is evil. The Bible must be the standard of what is right and wrong, and the Bible never makes this claim that wine is evil.. In fact, the Bible indicates that wine is good. Only the abuse of what is good is wrong. This assumption ignores many of the Scriptural passages about wine. In fact, the Bible uses more positive references to wine than negative ones.

The early Church seemed to have no problem understanding that what Jesus drank was real wine. Paul rebuked some in the church at Corinth for getting drunk off of the communion wine (1 Corinthians 11:20-21). What Paul rebuked was not the use of wine in communion, but the abuse of communion itself. They were abusing both the bread and wine. It is clear from this passage that the element in the communion cup was alcoholic wine.

Objection 3. Jesus used new wine, and new wine is grape juice that has not yet fermented.

While this may at first sound plausible, 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 (Acts 2:13). That accusation would be nonsensical if new wine were not alcoholic. Remember that it only takes five to ten days from the time the grapes are crushed for the wine to reach its full (or almost full) alcoholic content. New wine is wine that has not fully aged. It is not wine that contains no alcohol.

Objection 4. While Jesus may have used real wine in His day, our current situation calls for temperance, and therefore the use of grape juice is warranted.

This argument is not scriptural at all. It is based on pragmatic reasoning which not only has no biblical basis (a dangerous position), but it truly has no practical justification. The argument may go something like, "Well, we have more alcoholics and problems with drunkenness today than in Jesus day, so we need to take some practical measures . . ." First of all, this is unfounded. The problem with drunkenness was very much a problem in Jesus' day. In fact, Jesus Himself was falsely accused of being a drunkard. The Scriptures warn against drunkenness (1 Corinthians 6:10). While Scripture has many warnings against the sin of drunkenness, it never promotes an abstinent position. It never even hints at it. To assume that this is a modern issue is a mistake in reasoning. Alcohol is not the problem; the sinful human heart is. An abstinent position is the same application, in principle, as saying we all ought to live in celibacy because of the immorality of our society.

In addition, practically speaking, both France and Italy have never viewed alcohol as taboo the way that America has. The average Frenchman and Italian drink between 120 and 180 bottles of wine each year.

That equates to about two and a half glasses a day. While the rate of alcohol consumption per capita is higher in those countries than America, the rate of alcoholism is lower. Studies have also shown that in "temperate" cultures, while the consumption of alcohol was lower, the rate of alcoholism and coronary heart disease was lower in the "non-temperate" cultures in spite of higher consumption.[14] We have fabricated our own problems because of a wrong view of alcohol. The objection that our current cultural situation calls for temperance does not stand.

Objection 5. The wine in Jesus' day was watered down.

This objection really addresses an emotional response more than a rational one. To prove my point, ask someone who uses this argument as a reason not to have alcohol in the communion cup if he is willing to take real wine and water it down and use it in communion. My guess is that he will still find some other reasons why we should use grape juice. No matter how watered down the wine gets, the fact is there is still wine in the cup, and people who often support the abstinence position are emotionally biased against having any wine in the cup no matter how watered down.

The basic premise of this objection is the quantity of alcohol, not the argument for grape juice or wine. This objection does not logically support the use of grape juice. In fact, this objection actually supports the use of wine, because it admits within its premise that what was in the cup was truly wine.

For someone to still consider this argument viable, consider that the amount of wine in the communion cup is approximately 1-1? teaspoons. This is far less alcohol than one will consume in cough syrup or many cold

medicines. People do not think twice about taking alcohol in medicines or even putting it in their favorite cookie recipes (e.g. vanilla extract). However, these same folks will have a conscientious objection when it comes to consuming alcohol for sacramental purposes prescribed by our Lord. This kind of thinking represents emotional biasing in what people believe is right rather than basing their convictions on the rational and logical teachings of Scripture. Our conscious must be trained by the Scriptures and not by what our well-meaning grandmother always told us.

Objection 6. I don't care what the Bible says, I just don't think wine is right to use.

I threw this one in there to illustrate the heart of the matter and the real reason people look for all sorts of excuses to do anything other than what the Bible clearly teaches. Our emotions should always follow a mind that is renewed by the Scriptures (Romans 12:1-2). The Church, and Christians alike, would be much better off if they would dedicate themselves to what the Bible reveals rather than living according to what we feel like doing or not doing. May we return to the Scriptures alone as the teacher of our conscience!

VII. Conclusion

The main point of this paper is to argue for the right administration of the sacrament of communion. The Bible reveals to us that the element in the cup is wine and not grape juice, and we should observe communion accordingly. The very reason I have labored to establish my point, is not due to the lack of clarity on this issue from the Bible, or even the practice of the Church for over 1900 years, but due to the emotionally charged disposition against all alcohol consumption

that many have learned, not by the Scriptures, but by other cultural influences due to the abuses.

The position that I am arguing in this paper is not that Christians should go out and begin drinking wine. If a man chooses to practice abstinence in his Christian walk, there is no problem with his application, with three qualifications. First of all, he cannot judge others who decide not to take an abstinent position. In doing so, he readily admits there is something inherently wrong with alcohol which the Scriptures do not teach. This is legalism and should be resisted. The Scripture, not our personal standard, is the rule and judge for our faith and practice. Secondly, a Christian can apply abstinence in his life so long as he has a right biblical view of alcohol and Christian liberty. This point is basically the same as the first, but with broader implications. Holiness is an issue of the heart. If one think he can further his own personal holiness with an abstinent position, or any other position that the Scripture does not teach, he is seriously misguided. Jesus drank wine, and this mindset thus makes his position holier than Jesus, which is an impossible standard to reach. This modern-day Pharisaism is destructive to the Christian faith and gospel living. The early Church declared that alcohol was an inherently good gift of God to be used and enjoyed. While individuals of that time might have chosen not to drink, to despise alcohol was deemed heresy.[15] If you abstain from alcoholic beverages and have a mindset that alcohol, in itself, is neither here nor there in Christian piety, then, may the Lord bless you in your pursuit of the kingdom. The Scripture says, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17). The over-emphasis on alcohol in our temperate society

actually distracts us from true kingdom pursuit of righteousness, peace, and joy.

Thirdly, and this is, in part, the point of my argument, that one who practices abstinence in his life cannot do so biblically if he abstains from real wine in communion. Abstinence can never go that far in application because to do so would disobey the clear teaching of Scripture pertaining to the sacrament and the way Christ intended for His people to partake of it with wine.

REFERENCES

[1] Kenneth Gentry, a conservative Presbyterian minister, who does not even drink alcohol, makes a good argument for the use versus abuse in his book, God Gave Wine. Lincoln, CA: Oakdown, 1999.

[2] Hennekens, C., American Heart Association News Release, Abstract No. 1990 (November 19, 1987).

[3] "Alcohol Helps the Heart," Greenville News (April 7, 1997).

[4] "Alcohol Can Help Prevent Stroke" http://www2.potsdam.edu/alcohol-info/InTheNews/MedicalReports/Other/1040130126.html. The abstract and full text of the research can be found at The Journal of American Medical Association website, JAMA 281:53ff. http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/281/1/53

[5] Thomas A. Pearson, MD, PhD. "Alcohol and Heart Disease," 1996. From the Nutrition Committee of The American Heart Association (http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/full/94/11/3023)

[6] The reason the feminine pronoun is used with wisdom is because the Hebrew language has only masculine and feminine nouns, unlike Greek and other languages which has a neuter. The Hebrew term "wisdom" is a feminine noun and therefore the pronouns that correspond to it must be in the feminine gender as well. That is why wisdom is referenced as "she." Wisdom is an appellative (title) used for Christ. While the title itself is a feminine noun, it does not necessitate that the one who bears that title be female.

[7] Moore, Dunlop. "Wine"

[8] Hoeksema, Herman. Reformed Dogmatics; p. 706-707.

[9] The American Mix, 2001, 1(1), 4.

[10] Hanson, David J. Preventing Alcohol Abuse: Alcohol, Culture, and Control. Westport, Ct: Praeger, 1995, Chapter Three.

[11] Royce, James E. Alcohol Problems: A Comprehensive Survey. New York: Free Press, 1981, 38.

[12] Spurgeon, Charles (1834-1892). "Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands," verse2. It is interesting to note that Spurgeon lived

contemporaneous with the Temperance Movement and was unaffected with it in his ministry. Spurgeon's ministry was in London, demonstrating the Temperance Movement was mostly an American phenomenon at that time, and therefore, seemed only to affect the churches in this nation.

[13] Hodge, A.A. Evangelical Theology; p. 347-348.

[14] Peele, Stanton. "Utilizing Culture and Behaviour in Epidemiological Models of Alcohol Consumption and Consequences for Western Nations," Alcohol & Alcoholism, 32, 51-64, 1997. http://www.peele.net/lib/temperan.html. See also S. Peele (1993), "The Conflict Between Public Health Goals and the Temperance Mentality," American Journal of Public Health, 83, 805-810. http://www.peele.net/lib/publhlth.html.

[15] Austin, Gregory A. Alcohol in Western Society from Antiquity to 1800: A Chronological History. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, 1985, pp. 44 and 47-48.