

IS GRAPE JUICE PERMISSIBLE FOR SACRAMENTAL PURPOSES?¹

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In answering this question we want to be guided by the Holy Scriptures alone. What the Scriptures teach us to use in the Lord's Supper, that we want to use and nothing else. We will not permit human reason to dictate in this matter; neither will we blindly follow the example of what certain others may use, for the practice of others in this matter must not decide the case for us.

The question must be: What did Christ use when He instituted the Lord's Supper? What is the Apostolic doctrine in this matter? We will abide by that, and know assuredly that then we are on safe ground. The command of Christ concerning the Sacrament: "Do this in remembrance of Me" [Luke 22:19], and "This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" [I Cor. 11:25], includes that we use that which He used when instituting it.²

There is a historical note in connection with the institution of the Lord's Supper that indicates what was in that cup which Christ used when He instituted the Sacrament. It is recorded in Matthew 26:17-19:

Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." ' " So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

It was the Passover which Jesus was celebrating with His disciples when He instituted the Sacrament. The Passover was celebrated in Jesus' day in a somewhat different manner from that in which it was originally celebrated (Ex. 12). In Christ's day, wine was used at the Passover. And it was wine, not grape juice, which was in the cup used by Christ. This we learn from the *Mishna*. The *Mishna* contains the legal decisions of the ancient rabbis, their explanations and applications of the law (mostly the ceremonial and civil law) to special cases, and their regulations regarding the ceremonial observances. The contents of the *Mishna* are of an earlier date than the final reduction of these oral traditions to the permanency of writing, which took place toward the close of the second century of our era. What does the *Mishna* say with regard to this matter? *Targum Pesachim*, chap. 10, we read:

Also a poor man ate not save in a recumbent position. – And they do not open for him less than four cups of wine, even though he live on alms. At the first cup he gives thanks to God for the day and for the wine. – If any one wishes to drink between the first two cups, he may do so (according to Maimonidis, because the

¹ [This Conference Essay was printed in *The Clergy Bulletin*, Published by Authority of the General Pastoral Conference of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church XV, no. 4 (Dec. 1955): 33-36. The essay borrows freely from the fine article by A. Wismar, "What Is to Be Used in the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, Grape Juice or Wine?" *Theological Quarterly*, Published by the Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States XVII, no. 3 (July 1913): 163-175.]

² [All Bible passages will be cited using the *New King James Version*.]

wine does not readily inebriate when drunk while a person is eating); but between the third and fourth cup (nothing being eaten between them) he may not drink.³

Another quotation from the same source reads: "The third cup is the cup of blessing after food. Pure wine is poured in, and a mixture with water is made in the cup. The fourth is that over which they sing the Hallel, and he adds the benediction of the song: 'Let all Thy works praise Thee, O Lord,' and 'Blessed be He who has created the fruit of the vine'" (*Pesach.*, 117). Again: "In every one of those cups must be a quarter measure of wine, be it pure or diluted, be it old or new."⁴

These quotations show us that wine was used at the celebration of the Passover. Therefore, the cup which Christ used contained wine.

The *Jewish Cyclopaedia*, under the article on the "Passover," says that in the observance of this rite wine was used.⁵

Schaff-Herzog, in the article "Lord's Supper," says: "At the end of the Supper, before the singing of the Hallel, He takes in like manner the cup of wine, which was passed from hand to hand four times during the paschal meal, and gives it to them."⁶

Let it be understood that at the time of the Passover, which was celebrated in April, such a thing as grape juice was an impossibility in Palestine in Jesus' day. The grapes were harvested in the summer. September marked the end of the grape harvest. The Jews had no method of keeping fermentation from taking place in the grape juice. They had no chemicals to keep grape juice unfermented, nor did they have methods of keeping grape juice frozen, as in modern times. They made wine of the grape juice. The process of fermentation began from six to twelve hours after the juice was extracted from the grapes. It is impossible that there would be grape juice in Palestine in Christ's day in the month of April. Neither are we told that Christ half-way performed the miracle of Cana in reverse by changing wine into grape juice.

But some would argue from the fact that the Scriptures use the term "fruit of the vine" in designating the contents of the cup, that therefore, grape juice may be used, for that comes under the term "fruit of the vine." But how about this? What is it that Christ calls "fruit of the vine?" It is wine. And let it be noted that the expression "fruit of the vine" was used in the ritual for the Passover to denote "wine." The benediction over the wine was this: "Blessed art Thou, Jehovah our God, who has created the *fruit of the vine*."⁷ And note that Matthew writes not merely "fruit of the vine," the liturgical term for wine used in the Passover ritual, but most definitely "*this* fruit of the vine," the one regularly used in the Passover.

³ [Translated from Latin in Wismar, 166.]

⁴ From Wismar, 166, [who quotes Paulus, *Kommentar ueber die drei ersten Evangelien*, pp. 575,594].

⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. II (1904), 496. Emphasis added.

The *Pulpit Commentary*, commenting on Matthew 26:29, says: "The offspring of the vine is a poetical way of describing wine (cf. Deut. 22:9; Isa. 32:12, etc.). It is absurd to find in this term an argument for unalcoholic grape juice."

In every case where the expression "fruit of the vine" is used in the New Testament, it always designates wine (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). This was not a term used by Christ to permit the greatest latitude, but it is the *terminus* of the Jews for the *Passover wine*.

In the Apostolic Church wine was used in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is evident from I Corinthians 11:20-21: "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk." The Christians at Corinth brought along to the services the earthly elements with which the Lord's Supper was celebrated. That they brought wine and not grape juice is evident from the fact that some became drunken, having overindulged. While the apostle takes them severely to task for their drunkenness, he does not at all tell them they must not bring wine. On the contrary, he points out to them the manner in which Christ had instituted the Sacrament, and this includes the use of wine.

Thus the Scriptures plainly teach us what we are to use in celebrating the Sacrament. And if we look into the writings of the early Christian father immediately after the time of the Apostles we have abundant testimony as to the material used in the celebration of the Sacrament at that time. Justin Martyr gives a description of the manner in which the Eucharist was celebrated in his time. There he says in part: "Then bread and a cup of water and wine are brought to him who presides over the brethren.... Those among us who are called deacons give to each of those present to partake of the consecrated bread and wine and water."⁸ Tertullian says: "In the bread is accounted the body of Christ. His blood He hath consecrated in wine."⁹ Cyprian and Cyril of Jerusalem likewise speak of wine in the Lord's Supper.¹⁰

In the early church, failure to use wine was accounted a mark of heresy. The Ebionites and Encratites used water instead of wine. But these bodies were catalogued as heretics, and one of their heterodox opinions that caused them to be relegated to the company of false believers was their particular view as to what was to be used in the celebration of Holy Communion.

The word "bread" does not designate whether leavened or unleavened bread shall be used, nor whether it shall be made of wheat, rye, corn, oats, or barley flour. But with regard to the cup it is different. We are to use only the "fruit of the vine," that is, wine made from grapes. Whether the wine is red or white, and whether it is mixed with water or not, is an adiaphoron. But it is not an adiaphoron whether we use grape juice or wine. When we use wine we are certain we are using the right thing. If we should use grape juice we would bring uncertainty into the matter. We quote from the Report of "Mittleren Dist." of Missouri Synod, 1889, p. 44: "If

⁸ *Apol. I*, 65, [from Wismar, 171].

⁹ *De Oratione IV, Adv. Marcion, IV*, 40, [from Wismar, 171, who quotes Krauth's *Conservative Reformation*].

¹⁰ Wismar, 171-172. [Cyprian (*Epist. 63 ad Caecilian*): "When in the cup water is mixed with the wine, the people are made one with Christ and the multitude of believers is united to Him in whom it believes." Cyril (*Cateches. IV, Epist. ad Coelosyr*): "In the type of bread His body is given thee, and in the type of wine His blood. His sacred flesh and His precious blood we receive in the bread and wine" (again from Krauth).]

any among us should copy them (namely, those who use unfermented grape juice) with the understanding that nothing more than that which comes from the vine is necessary, then he should come into severe qualms of conscience, since he, at best (*wenn's hoch käme*), would have to be acting in doubt."

Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 354, says:

In order not to introduce an element of uncertainty into the Sacrament, one should refrain from using grape juice, since it is doubtful whether it is still "the fruit of the vine" after having undergone the pasteurizing process.... Since no doubt can arise if we use genuine wine, the dignity of the Sacrament demands that we refrain from experimenting with all fluids of which it is not certain whether they are, or still are, "fruit of the vine."

The question might be asked: Why do some advocate the use of grape juice in the Sacrament instead of wine and actually proceed to use it? The answer is that some do it because of a wrong notion concerning the use of alcoholic beverages in general, holding that even the moderate use of such is sinful. But this is not the teaching of Scripture as is seen from such passages as Psalm 104:15; John 2:3-11; I Timothy 4:4, 5:3. Another reason why some advocate the use of grape juice instead of wine is the following: They do not believe in the "real presence" in the Sacrament; the bread and wine in the Sacrament are not to them the elements through which Christ imparts to us His true body and blood. Calvin and Beza held that bread and wine were only symbols and signs imparting nothing. They rejected the true Lord's Supper. It is not surprising then that they both were of the opinion that if bread and wine could not be obtained something else might lawfully be substituted in the Sacrament. Neither is it to be wondered at that their spiritual children now make a rule out of what they considered only a possibility. Where the true doctrine of the "real presence" is rejected, there it easily becomes an indifferent matter what elements are used in the Sacrament.

Neither time, nor place, nor circumstances can be allowed to dictate a change in that which the Son of God Himself has established and which He has commanded to be observed in the church "till He comes" (I Cor. 11:26).