

PROTESTANT TRANSUBSTANTIATION

Part 4: Origins of and Reasons for the Rejection of Wine

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Origins Of The Rejection Of Wine

The Temperance Movement

The historical origin of the modern practice of substituting grape juice for wine in the Lord's Supper is not found in Scripture or the teaching of the church. It can be traced instead to the 19th century Temperance movement. In the early 1800s the abuse of alcohol was widespread in the United States (as it was prior to then and as it has been since). Whiskey was the drink of choice on the western frontier, and saloons were extremely popular. In 1785, Dr. Benjamin Rush had published the first widely distributed article on the effects of alcohol entitled, "An Inquiry into the Effect of Ardent Spirits." It is believed that this publication was a primary cause of the movement which spread across the country.

The Methodist churches were the first to begin a notable Christian protest to this abuse of alcohol. The revivals of the Second Great Awakening throughout this century added strength to the growing protest which eventually evolved into the Temperance movement. The innovation of the movement was its teaching that alcohol itself was evil, and that any use of alcohol was sinful. While using the word "temperance," it had as its ultimate goal the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. This was one of the fundamental flaws of the movement. All Christians should support temperance or moderation with respect to the use of alcohol. The Temperance *movement*, however, confused temperance with abstinence and prohibition. The evils associated with widespread drunkenness are all too real. But we must emphasize again that the Christian answer to abuse is not disuse. The Temperance movement, in its quest to combat very real evils, never grasped this distinction.

The movement met with initial success. In 1826 a group largely composed of clergy organized an American Temperance society. By the 1850s, thirteen states had forbidden the sale of liquor. Of course, the teaching that alcohol was evil had an impact on the practice of the Lord's Supper. The logic worked its way back to the institution of this sacrament. If the use of alcohol is inherently sinful, and if Jesus never sinned, then Jesus could not have used an alcoholic beverage such as wine in the Lord's Supper. He must have used some other beverage, it was reasoned, and isn't grape juice also the fruit of the vine?

Churches which had adopted the Temperance gospel followed suit, and the sacrament was changed.

During and after the Civil War, there was a reaction against the movement, but it quickly regained momentum. In 1869 a national Prohibition Party was formed. In 1873 The Women's Christian Temperance Union was started. The tactics of the WCTU are well known. They would dress in their Sunday best, march into the saloons on Friday night, and begin loudly singing songs with titles like "Lips that Touch Liquor Shall Never Touch Mine." Religious tracts and pamphlets teaching that alcoholic beverages were drinks created by the devil himself were distributed to churches and Sunday schools nationwide. Some of these tracts taught that the devil inhabited the liquor and that he gained entrance into a person who partook of it. This kind of fanatical nonsense, which had more in common with pagan superstitions than with Christianity, soon captured the minds of a large number of Christians.

In 1895 the National Anti-Saloon League was organized. By 1900, thirty states allowed local governments to decide whether or not to allow the manufacture and sale of alcohol in their jurisdictions, and by 1916, nineteen states had forbidden alcoholic beverages altogether. Finally, in 1919 the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was ratified forbidding "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors therein, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States." The prohibition of alcoholic beverages was a political cause which had united most Protestants. It was supported by modernist liberals who saw it as one application of their social gospel, and it was supported by conservative Christians who saw it as one step back towards the "good old days" or one step forward toward the Kingdom of God.

Despite the initial illusion of success, the temperance and prohibitionist movement ultimately failed miserably. Like every other movement which places the responsibility for sin on some external "thing," it did not get rid of evil and sin in the heart of man. In fact, sin and evil raised their heads in uglier ways. Organized crime was able to gain a foothold, for example, and this country is still feeling the effects. The movement also failed to maintain its external success, for only a decade later the 18th amendment was repealed. The movement failed also because it allowed itself to be deceived into setting up a higher standard of righteousness than the Word of God. In doing so, it fell into the ditch of legalism and destroyed Christian liberty. The only thing the temperance movement succeeded at was permanently removing the biblical sacrament of the Lord's Supper from a large number of Protestant churches in the United States. Those Christians who have replaced wine with grape juice should at least be aware that the origins of this practice are not found in the Bible or in the practice of the apostolic church. They are found in a 19th century American moral/political movement which swept the church along in its crusade.

We Don't Smoke, Drink or Chew – The Heritage of Legalism

The theological origin of the use of grape juice instead of wine is legalism. The term “legalism” has been used to describe many aberrant doctrines in the history of the church. The error with which we are here concerned is the establishment of a set of man-made laws and taboos, human rules and traditions which intentionally or unintentionally nullify the moral law of God. The churches and Christians who compile these lists of rules normally begin by consciously or unconsciously rejecting God's own revealed moral laws. This rejection is usually hidden in statements such as, “That's in the Old Testament; we're New Testament Christians.” Having rejected God's standards of righteousness, they impose their own. In our case, the taboo is wine. God Himself, as we noted earlier, has declared in his inspired and inerrant written revelation that wine is a good gift that he gives to man. The abuse of this gift is called drunkenness, a sin which he everywhere condemns. Jesus, our standard of perfect holiness, made wine, drank wine, and gave wine to others to drink, but he was never drunk. The legalist, however, is not satisfied with God's standards of righteousness. He arrogantly thinks he can do better. And so he prohibits what God allows, and as a result often allows what God prohibits. Like the Pharisees, he nullifies the Word of God with his man-made traditions, and enslaves the church of God to his unbiblical rules.

What About the Regulative Principle?

One of the most disturbing aspects of this entire discussion is the fact that many of the churches which have replaced wine with grape juice adhere to the regulative principle of worship. The regulative principle may be summarized as follows: In the worship of God, that which is not commanded is forbidden. It is stated in opposition to those who teach that in worship, that which is not forbidden is allowed. In other words, any church or Christian who claims to do only what the Bible commands in their worship practice is at least implicitly stating the regulative principle. Others, specifically conservative Presbyterian churches, formally subscribe to this principle.

The story of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2) is often used as an illustration of the regulative principle. God issued specific commands about how he was to be worshipped. Nadab and Abihu decided that it would be acceptable to change something. It was just a minor change, God wouldn't mind, would he? God answered by immediately destroying them for offering the strange fire. They wanted to worship God their way, and the penalty was severe.

The regulative principle of worship was clearly stated in order to shield and guard the Church from what Calvin termed the “perpetual factory of idols” that is our human heart (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*; I, xi, 8). The ultimate

origin of all man-made changes to the worship of God is found in this idol-factory. Calvin's theological heirs were especially sensitive to additions and innovations with respect to the worship of God. Centuries of accrued worship practices with no biblical basis convinced them of the need to base their worship on the commandments of God alone.

Whether or not one formally adheres to the regulative principle is not the issue here. The issue is that many who claim to agree that it is scriptural are blatantly violating it by changing the elements of the Lord's Supper without any scriptural warrant. It is extremely inconsistent to maintain that the regulative principle is true, while offering "strange fire" at the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted the Supper with specific elements: bread and wine. We have no more authorization for changing them than we do for changing the element of water in the sacrament of baptism.

Reasons Given for Rejection of Wine

The following is a collection of quotations by 20th century theologians who have rejected the use of wine in the Lord's Supper as either indifferent or immoral. These quotations were selected because the authors are among the few who have at least made some attempt to justify their replacement of wine with grape juice.

A. H. Strong – Baptist (1907)

"Although the wine which Jesus poured out was doubtless the ordinary fermented juice of the grape, there is nothing in the symbolism of the ordinance which forbids the use of unfermented juice of the grape, obedience to the command 'This do in remembrance of me' requires only that we should use the 'fruit of the vine'" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 960).

Answer

1. It should first be pointed out that even Strong admits that it was "doubtless the ordinary fermented juice of the grape" that Jesus used.
2. As noted earlier "fruit of the vine" is a common Jewish phrase referring to wine used on sacred occasions such as the Passover.
3. Since Christ's command "requires" that we should use the "fruit of the vine," and since the "fruit of the vine" in this context means nothing other than wine, then Christ's command requires us to use wine.

William W. Stevens – Southern Baptist (1967)

“The bread used by Jesus was doubtless the unleavened bread of the Passover meal, as the wine he used was doubtless the fermented juice of the grape. But this does not mean that we must of necessity use unleavened bread, nor does it mean that we cannot use the unfermented juice of the grape. Unleavened bread is what Jesus had at hand, and his phrase ‘fruit of the vine’ in Matthew 26:29 would include unfermented juice as well. The bread and the cup are symbolical only. To insist on literalism would be tantamount to legalism” (*Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, p. 344).

Answer

1. It must again be observed that the author here admits that it is “doubtless” that Jesus himself used wine, not grape juice. If this is admitted to be the case, one wonders *why* the author would even desire to change it in the first place.
2. In this context, as virtually all standard reference works will testify, the phrase “fruit of the vine” does *not* include unfermented juice. It means wine.
3. This “argument” is inconsistent with the one presented by the same author for the proper administration of the other sacrament. If the bread and the cup are symbolical “only,” then in baptism the element of water and mode of administering the water are symbolical only and can be arbitrarily changed without protest from Baptists.
4. The implication that the *only* reason Jesus used wine was that it was simply the drink he had at hand because of Passover should not be confused with an argument. It is at best merely an assertion, and an unverifiable one at that.

Charles C. Ryrie – Dispensationalist (1982)

“The Scriptures do not use the word ‘wine’ in connection with the Supper, only ‘the cup’ or ‘the fruit of the vine.’ Of course it was juice from the grape, but whether fermented or not is not stated... For the sake of converted alcoholics or even to forestall anyone beginning to drink, unfermented juice is preferable in the light of today’s worldwide problem with alcohol” (*Basic Theology*; p. 425).

Answer

1. It doesn’t need to be explicitly stated that the “fruit of the vine” is fermented when that concept is included in the phrase itself in the context. “Fruit of the

vine” in this context is a Jewish liturgical synonym for wine. Ryrie’s argument is somewhat deceptive in that it leads the reader to believe that there is some real dispute over whether or not the drink used by Jesus was actually wine. His statement is all the more disappointing in light of the honesty on the part of the other authors cited in this section who frankly admit the fact that Jesus used wine at the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

2. Ryrie’s major objection seems to assume that drinking any alcohol is a sin, an objection which has already been demonstrated to be anti-biblical, and one which would convict Jesus himself of sin.
3. The argument that we should use grape juice for the sake of converted alcoholics and a world addicted to alcohol abuse does not follow.
 - A. It wrongly assumes that the world Jesus lived in didn’t have a problem with drunkenness.
 - B. The church cannot ignore or change the clear teaching of Christ because of someone’s personal problem with that teaching. That person should be taught and conformed to the truth. The Church should not be changed to conform to his misguided standards.
 - C. The abuse of God’s gifts must not cause us to do away with its rightful use. Many Christians are converted sex addicts (i.e. fornicators). Should the church institute mandatory celibacy for the sake of their distorted consciences? Clearly not. It is wrong for the church to deprive Christians of their liberty and freedom in Christ – and of God’s good gifts – based on the fear that they might abuse them.

Millard Erickson – Baptist (1985)

“What elements we decide to use in celebrating the Lord’s Supper will depend, at least in part, upon whether our chief concern is to duplicate the original conditions as closely as possible or to capture the symbolism of the sacrament... With respect to the cup, duplication of the original event would call for wine... If, on the other hand, representation of the blood of Christ is the primary consideration, then grape juice will suffice equally well ... suitability to convey the meaning, not similarity to the original circumstances, is what is important as far as the elements are concerned” (*Christian Theology*, p. 1125).

Answer

1. What elements we decide to use will not concern duplication, it will concern obedience. If bread and wine were the elements Christ commanded the church to use to signify his body and blood, then we must use them.

2. It would be interesting to see Erickson apply the same reasoning to his chapter on baptism. The method of argument he uses here is exactly the opposite of the method he uses to argue for baptism by immersion only in water only. Baptists, including Erickson, argue from the example of Christ and the early church for the element and mode of baptism. Why change gears when it comes to the Lord's Supper? This is simply inconsistent.
3. Suitability to convey the meaning is *not* what is important. Again, obedience to Christ's commands is what is important. May the church legitimately baptize people with liquid soap just because soap suitably conveys the meaning of cleansing? Or may the church immerse a person in a hole in the ground and throw shovelfulls of soil on them? Dirt would certainly symbolize burial better than water, wouldn't it (cf. Rom. 6:3-4)?

J. Rodman Williams – Pentecostal (1992)

“In the three synoptic accounts of the Lord's Supper the content of the cup is called ‘the fruit of the vine’ (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). This doubtless was wine; however, since wine is not directly mentioned in any of these accounts, it is irrelevant to insist (as some do) that wine must be used. Grape juice equally comes from “fruit of the vine” (*Renewal Theology*; Vol. 3, p. 261, n. 178).

Answer

1. If it is “doubtless” that the ‘fruit of the vine’ mentioned was wine, then wine *is* directly mentioned in *all* of these accounts. Therefore, it is *not* irrelevant – in light of Jesus' command to “Do *this*” – to insist (as I do) that wine must be used in the Lord's Supper.
2. It is entirely irrelevant that grape juice also comes from the fruit of the vine. So do raisins. If the church may use any fruit of the vine, why would it not be legitimate to use tomato juice? After all, tomatoes grow on vines, and their juice is red like blood. There are numerous other fruits and berries that also grow on vines. Why limit ourselves to grapes?

Conclusion

It must be noted after a review of the previous paragraphs that nowhere has a cogent and consistent argument for the rejection of wine been offered. The most that each argument attempts to prove is that the use of wine is an indifferent matter. Each author attempts to argue that the bread and wine are basically arbitrary symbols. But in each case the author is forced to inconsistency – he is forced to change his hermeneutical standard as he

proceeds from his discussion of baptism to the discussion of the Lord's Supper. Each of these men argues strenuously for water baptism by immersion only, and they argue for it based upon the practice of Jesus and the apostolic church. They strongly reject the argument that water and immersion are indifferent matters in the sacrament of baptism. Yet, when the discussion turns to the Lord's Supper, the practice of Jesus and the church suddenly becomes irrelevant. The fact that Jesus used wine at the institution of the Lord's Supper is admitted by almost all who oppose continued use. And yet each argument *assumes* that the church can reject its use without providing any legitimate biblical reason for doing so. I submit that if wine is indifferent, then so is the bread; and in the case of baptism, so is the water.

Other Potential Objections

In the previous section we examined the arguments of several important 20th century theologians who have opposed the use of wine in the Lord's Supper. Their arguments were found to be inconsistent and invalid. Because some of the stronger and more commonly heard objections were not presented clearly by these theologians, they will be discussed in this section.

The Use of Alcohol is Sin

The use of alcohol is sin, and Jesus never sinned. Therefore Jesus must have used grape juice and not wine at the Lord's Supper. If Jesus didn't use wine, then we have no obligation to use wine now.

Answer

The argument that alcohol itself is evil, and that any use of alcohol is sin is a common one. This particular objection was refuted in detail earlier. We have seen that this objection is contrary to all of Scripture, that it casts doubt upon the goodness of God's creation and gifts, and that it implicates Jesus Christ in numerous sins. Advocates of this argument have continually confused the sinful abuse of alcoholic beverages (drunkenness) with the mere use of alcoholic beverages. In response, it must again be pointed out that people have found ways to abuse many, if not all, of God's good gifts. In addition to alcohol, people abuse the good gifts of food (gluttony), sex (adultery, homosexuality, etc.), property (theft), speech (lying), land (pollution), and time (laziness). Obviously, the abuse of something is not a valid reason for its disuse. If it were, the large number of gluttons and gossips would have to give up eating and talking. Absolutely no one has the right to declare evil something that God created and that he declares to be a blessing. To do so is the height of arrogance and a perfect description of legalistic Phariseism. Since the premise of this argument

is blatantly false, there is no valid objection here to the use of wine in the Lord's Supper.

The Potential Alcoholic

Some people are born with a genetic predisposition toward alcoholism. If they were to drink wine at the Lord's Supper, it could potentially lead them to become alcoholics.

Answer

Those who use the argument that some people are genetically predisposed to alcoholism or that alcoholism is a disease rather than a sin use a flawed and inconsistent argument. First, God in his word has revealed to us that drunkenness is a *sin*, a moral and ethical failure, not merely a physiological or genetic defect (Jer. 13:13-14; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18). Drunkenness, like all other sins, is an ethical matter, an act of moral disobedience against God. Unfortunately many fundamentalist Christians have unwittingly followed the Pied Piper of liberal theology and removed drunkenness from the realm of sin by renaming it "alcoholism" and placing it in the realm of disease. Even if they are correct that a genetic tendency toward alcoholism exists in some people, this is not an excuse to disobey God's commandments. One does not avoid one sin by committing another. Moreover, since drunkenness is a sin, and since believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and thereby enabled to resist sin, those who may be predisposed to particular sins are not without recourse or help in resisting those sins. There is no reason to think that God will abandon believers to succumb to genetic imperfections when they obediently participate in his sacraments.

A second point that must be made is that this argument implicates Jesus in an act of sheer stupidity at best, and willful sin at worst. If there are people with a genetic predisposition to alcoholism now, then there were people with the same predisposition at the time of Jesus. Yet, he created wine at the wedding feast at Cana and instituted the Lord's Supper with wine. He then commanded that the sacrament be observed by his church until he returns. If there is a genetic predisposition to alcoholism which is triggered by the use of even the smallest amount of alcohol, then Jesus is guilty of causing untold multitudes to become "alcoholics." Since the premise of this argument contradicts Scripture, the argument is invalid.

Separation from the World (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:17)

Scripture commands us to be separate from the world and worldliness. The use of alcohol is a worldly activity. Therefore we should not use wine in the Lord's Supper.

Answer

This argument is also based upon an incorrect premise. The use of alcohol is not worldly; the abuse of alcohol is worldly. To declare the use of alcohol a worldly activity is to declare Jesus himself to be worldly. Jesus drank wine. He made wine. He gave wine to others to drink. Any one of these activities would be labeled "sin" by many modern American churches. But they aren't sin, and the church must come to grips with this fact. Separation from the world does not mean separation from material things. That false doctrine comes from the ancient pagan heresy of Gnosticism. It assumes that sin and evil are things external to us that we can somehow avoid by not coming into contact with certain people, places, and things. But sin and evil are within us, and the fact that we don't smoke or drink or go to movies does not alter that fact. Separation from the world means separation from sinfulness, from the world's way of thinking, its worldview. It occurs by the inward transformation of the heart and mind, not by the external avoidance of material things. As Paul wrote,

"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."

The Lord's Supper is not a "worldly" institution that must be altered to meet some legalist standard of moral purity higher than God's own Law. It is a divine sacrament that must be observed as Christ commanded it to be observed.

Abstain From All Appearance of Evil (1 Thess. 5:22)

Scripture commands us to abstain from all appearance of evil. Alcohol is associated with all kinds of evil; therefore we should abstain from use of it in the Lord's Supper.

Answer

There are several problems with this argument. First, like many of the previous arguments, it assumes alcohol is evil. This argument has already been shown to be unbiblical. Second, this argument, like many of the others, implicates Jesus in sin. If this verse means what it is claimed to mean by some, then Jesus was guilty of sin. Jesus associated with sinners, prostitutes, the outcasts of society. The Pharisees viciously accused him of not abstaining from all appearance of evil. They accused him of being a drunkard and a glutton. When the prostitute anointed his feet with her tears, they accused him of indiscreet behavior at best (Luke 7:36-50). We are commanded to abstain from every form and appearance of *real* sin, as defined by the Bible, not the imagined sins of modern day Pharisees. If Jesus is our example of a godly life, then we will inevitably offend the Pharisees among us. Our thankful enjoyment of God's creation and our compassion for lost sinners will infuriate Jesus' enemies now just as it infuriated Jesus' enemies then. In any case, it is preposterous to suggest that a sacrament of the church instituted by Jesus himself has the appearance of evil.

Cultural Argument

In many Middle-Eastern and European cultures, wine is regularly used at weddings, meals, and other celebrations. In our culture alcohol has entirely different connotations, and therefore it should not be used in the Lord's Supper by Christians who desire to maintain a credible witness.

Answer

Our obedience to the explicit commands of Christ cannot be compromised to conform to our worldly culture's perspective. Christ *commands* the church to baptize with water and to partake of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. We must obey regardless of what our culture thinks. The church simply has no choice in this matter.

But what about the use of wine outside the Lord's Supper? In contrast to our culture's abuse of God's gifts, the church should demonstrate the godly use of them. God's good gift of sex is abused in our culture and has numerous degrading connotations placed upon it by the world. Should the church's response be total abstinence? No. The church must demonstrate the right use of this good gift within marriage, and by doing so glorify God and bear a credible witness to the world. Christians who are sexually active only in marriage are not guilty of somehow condoning fornication, adultery, homosexuality or any other sinful abuse of God's gift of sex. And neither is the Christian who thankfully partakes of God's good gift of wine in moderation implicitly condoning

drunkenness, the sinful abuse of this gift. Christians simply must be shown from Scripture that it does not glorify God to abstain from every gift of his that unbelievers abuse. This would be an impossible task anyway, since unbelievers find a way of abusing everything that God has given us. In order to glorify God and bear a joyful witness to a depraved world Christians should obediently and thankfully use God's gifts, including wine, in the way that God intended them to be used, not reject them altogether. A rejection of the gift is an ungrateful rejection of the Giver.

Moreover, since this argument is concerned with a "credible witness," it is important to remember that the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper is itself a credible witness. It is the proclamation of the gospel in visible form. As Paul told the Corinthians, "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

The Weaker Brother (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8)

The use of alcohol is allowable, but many Christians believe its use is sinful. Therefore we should abstain from using alcohol in the Lord's Supper in order that we do not offend these weaker brothers.

Answer

In the preceding argument we argued that it is not right to reject God's good gifts simply because unbelievers constantly abuse them. But what if there are Christian brothers who are offended by the use of alcoholic beverages? How would Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 apply?

First, it should be pointed out that in these passages eating meat and drinking wine are in and of themselves indifferent matters. In fact, Paul clearly stated that neither is inherently sinful (Rom. 14:14,20).

Second, these passages are not referring to social drinking or to alcohol use in general. In both contexts Paul is addressing a specific *religious* use or non-use of certain foods and drinks.

Third, it should be pointed out that if prohibitionists applied these verses consistently, they would also have to become vegetarians (Rom. 14:21).

Fourth, the primary teaching of these passages is that we should put love for our brothers in Christ ahead of some concern for our "rights." If that means voluntarily abstaining from the public use of some food or drink when a brother with a sensitive weaker conscience is present, we should not object.

Fifth, and most importantly, legalist Pharisees (ancient or modern) are not who Paul is talking about when he speaks of “weaker brothers.” Paul’s description in both of these passages is of one who has a weak and sensitive conscience, who is perhaps new in the faith, who isn’t sure what to do in these practical situations, who isn’t sure if certain things are biblical or not, but who is at least teachable. Legalists do not fall into this category. These are arrogant, unteachable, self-appointed judges whose conscience isn’t weak but hardened and cold. Unlike a weaker brother, they think they know exactly what is right and wrong in every conceivable situation. If a Christian partakes of wine in their sight, their conscience is not wounded – it is outraged. Unlike a weaker brother, the legalists are not tempted to imitate this action while remaining unconvinced that it is biblical to do so. They know for sure that this action is wrong because it violates the man-made moral standard which they have substituted for the Word of God. This is why Jesus, who was and is kind and patient with weaker Christians, would seemingly go out of his way to offend the self-righteous Pharisees. The weaker brother, despite his weakness, is still a Christian brother. The legalist Pharisee, on the other hand, is either unsaved, or he is a Christian with desperately poor theology and a terribly inflated opinion of his own righteousness. The weaker brother is unsure about the holiness of many of his actions. The legalist Pharisee has no doubt of the holiness of any of his. The weaker brother needs scriptural instruction and maturity, the legalist Pharisee needs repentance and/or salvation. Now, this is not to say that anyone who insists on the use of grape juice in the Lord’s Supper is a Pharisee, but it is to say that anyone who does so is at least *acting like* a Pharisee and needs to repent.

Finally, two other facts must also be taken into consideration. First, the elders of the church have a responsibility to help the weaker brother to grow to maturity, not to coddle him and allow him to remain a spiritual infant forever. Second, nothing in these passages has any bearing whatsoever on the Lord’s Supper. However else these passages are used, they may not be used to negate the command of Christ in the institution of the sacrament. Even if we voluntarily give up every other use of alcoholic beverages for the sake of weak consciences, we cannot allow this argument to be used as an excuse to change the Lord’s Supper. Believers must be conformed to Christ’s will. Christ must not be forced to bow to theirs.

Grape Juice wasn’t an Option

Wine was used in the Lord’s Supper only because it was what Jesus had on hand. Grape juice wasn’t a real option because it was difficult to store prior to the invention of refrigeration.

Answer

Occasionally one hears the argument that the use of wine by Christ and the universal use of it for over 1,800 years in the church carries no weight due to the fact that they had no other choice. Grape juice quickly spoils if not stored properly. So it wasn't an issue, they argue, because grape juice wasn't an option. But even if it were granted that until the invention of refrigeration the use of grape juice was not an option, that would not prove that we should now use grape juice. The mere fact that we *can* do something now is not proof that we *should* do it now.

Perhaps an illustration would clarify this point. For almost two thousand years the universally accepted practice of the church has been to gather together to receive the sacraments and to hear the preaching of the word. Today, technology has made it possible for Christians to stay in the comfort of their homes as they watch and listen to the sermon via satellite feed. The bread and juice can be delivered to them weekly, monthly or quarterly (depending upon the church or denomination), and at the appropriate time in the video worship they can be instructed to eat and drink. This was never an option for the church until modern advances in technology made it possible. But is the mere fact that this is now possible a legitimate argument for changing the biblical and historical practice of the church? No, it is not. And neither should we reject the biblical and historical use of wine in the Lord's Supper simply because we can.

Summary

Because of the irrefutable fact that wine was used in the biblically revealed institution of the Lord's Supper, and because the use of wine in the Lord's Supper was also an undisputed practice for over 1,800 years of church history, the burden of proof rests upon those who have substituted grape juice for wine. After reviewing the most commonly heard objections to the use of wine in the Lord's Supper, we are forced to conclude that this burden of proof has not been met. In fact, there has never even been an attempt to meet this burden of proof in many churches which have made this change.

There is simply no legitimate reason for the replacement of wine with grape juice in the sacrament. Each of the preceding arguments against the use of wine in the sacrament fails either because it is based upon a false and unbiblical premise, or because it is a biblical command taken out of context and radically misapplied. All of these arguments also fail for the same reason that every possible argument against the biblical observance of the sacrament will fail: they all inescapably involve Jesus Christ himself either in gross incompetence, utter stupidity, or willful sin.

Conclusion

This is a challenge and a plea to those churches which have rejected the God-ordained use of wine in the Lord's Supper, a usage which for over 1,800 years was undisputed among all orthodox Christians. As we have seen, there is absolutely no valid biblical, historical, theological, or practical reason to replace wine with grape juice. This 150-year-old man-made tradition should be rejected immediately, and the biblical practice should be restored. It is time for churches which claim to worship only as Christ commands (i.e. Presbyterian churches that adhere to the regulative principle) to conform their teaching to the Bible's actual commands and example. Baptists who use grape juice instead of wine, yet claim that baptism must be by immersion because we are to "follow Jesus in baptism," also need to address their own inconsistencies and double standard in their interpretations of the sacraments.

Undoubtedly the reinstatement of the biblical and historical practice will cause difficulties in churches with members who either falsely believe that any use of alcohol is sin, or whose weaker consciences have held the remainder of the church captive for years. But the solution is not to continue in a manifestly unbiblical practice which, from one perspective, results in the withholding of the cup from God's children (a *de facto* sentence of excommunication). The solution is gently to correct those who have been taught false doctrine by teaching them the truth, to help the weaker brother to grow up into Christian maturity, and to call to account those Christian teachers who continue to alter the Lord's sacrament despite the teaching of Scripture and the practice of the historic church. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a blessed and glorious communion with our Lord Jesus Christ in which we proclaim his death until he comes again. We must always keep this in mind and remember that in comparison with whom and what they signify, the physical elements of bread and wine pale in significance. But we must also remember that precisely because of whom and what they signify, the physical elements are not insignificant.