

## Greetings Saints-

In order to shed more light on our reasons for moving to wine exclusivity in Communion, Tim and I have prepared the following document to walk you through our reasoning. Please consider these things carefully, and please send any questions that you may have our way. We'll be discussing these things at our meeting next Monday evening.

Throughout the history of the Church, it is wine that has been understood to represent the blood of the Lord in Communion. This is apparent in both Scripture (Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 11:21) and in Church History (see forwarded message: "wine in the confessions"). This is especially evident in Matt. 26:29 when the Lord refers to the "fruit of the vine." The phrase "fruit of the vine" was the consecrated title ascribed to wine in Jewish culture, which distinguished it from typical fruit. This may be seen in the "Mishna," a collection of ancient Jewish religious teachings. It is here that we read that wine is to be blessed in a manner that distinguishes it from normal fruit: "How does one recite blessing for fruits? For fruits growing on a tree, one says, 'Who created the fruit of the tree,' Except for wine; For wine, one says, '...Who created the *fruit of the vine*.'" So, whenever the Lord said "fruit of the vine," He meant wine and only wine.

It was around 1869 that the American church began to substitute grape juice for wine, based upon the teaching of the temperance movement (or "teetotalism") that *any* consumption of alcohol was inappropriate. Thus, grape juice was marketed as "unfermented wine" and largely replaced wine in many, if not most, Protestant churches. In other words, wine was scrubbed from Communion because it was viewed as evil, in spite of Scriptural (Gen. 27:28; Ps. 104:15-15) and historical testimony to the contrary.

Most Christians now agree that wine is not evil and that the teetotalers went too far in their condemnation of wine. Even so, grape juice is still used in Communion instead of wine in many churches. Should we simply accept this questionable tradition, in spite of its unbiblical roots (Mk. 7:8-9; Col. 2:20-23)? Consider the words of Doug Wilson: "Traditions are at their worst when they grow up and are simply assumed in the bones, with no examination. But sinful human beings always need accountability - and sinful human opinions and traditions are the same. Those who compare themselves with themselves are not wise (2 Cor. 10:12)" ("Reformed Is Not Enough", p. 51).

So the question arises: Why *continue* the use of grape juice in Communion? It was instituted with wine; the use of wine in Communion has been the historical practice of the Church from the very *beginning* of the Church; and wine was replaced by grape juice for utterly unbiblical reasons. The burden of proof clearly rests not with the Reformers, but with the liturgical *innovators*.

There are a few objections that one might raise against moving *back* to wine exclusivity in Communion, and these are addressed below.

1.) *We've always used grape juice; why change now?* Answer: The passage of time does not magically make an erroneous practice suddenly acceptable. Error + 140 years = 140 years of error. In other words, substituting grape juice for wine is just as unbiblical today as it was in 1869, and the reasons for doing so remain unchanged. So when we continue

the practice of the teetotalers, we are in essence agreeing with them that wine is evil - no matter how vehemently we may deny it. Thus, the Church should be diligent in separating bad traditions from good traditions, as Mr. Wilson implies above, and remove grape juice from the Lord's Table.

2.) *Grape juice and wine are similar, so why not use both?* Answer: As was stated above, when Scripture speaks of the "fruit of the vine," it means wine and only wine - *not* unfermented juice. The similarity between wine and grape juice may be of concern to us if wine were not available, but wine *is* available to us. Why should we use anything else, regardless of how similar it might be? Simply pointing out that both wine and grape juice come from grapes does not prove that they are interchangeable (because they are not), nor does it justify substituting one for the other.

3.) *There is no Scriptural mandate to use wine in Communion.* Answer: Neither is there an explicit Scriptural mandate (or command) to use the "fruit of the vine" in the Supper. So, following this line of reasoning, we may use whatever drink we like in Communion, for lack of a Scriptural mandate. Thus, if we're going to argue for the exclusivity of the "fruit of the vine," we must also argue for the exclusivity of wine. If we deny one, we cannot help but lose both. Of course we understand Scripture to teach that the Supper is to be taken with the "fruit of the vine" - which is why we use wine to the *exclusion* of all other alternatives.

4.) *I don't like the taste of wine, and prefer grape juice.* Answer: Then drink Welch's to your heart's content - anywhere except at the Lord's Table. Some people like classical, others rock; "I'm a little bit country -- I'm a little bit rock n' roll" as the song goes. We don't take requests during the Lord's Service, nor do we at the Lord's Table. When we come to His Table, to which He has graciously invited us to share in the meal that *He has provided*, we set aside our personal tastes in order to gratefully receive His blessing, and to stand in unity with our brethren in Christ. Along with this is the obvious truth that personal preference must never be given so much weight that it is permitted to reinterpret Scripture.

5.) *Wine distracts me during Communion.* Answer: Any number of things about Communion could potentially be construed as a distraction, but this does not mean that we simply remove them. As Paul implies in 1 Cor. 11:33-34, where the Corinthians were certainly distracted by the wine (11:21), it is self-discipline that is needed, as opposed to a change in the Supper. Notice that Paul does not instruct them to replace wine or even to water it down, but to "wait for one another" and "if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home." So the answer is not to change the Supper itself, but to exercise self-discipline and be changed *ourselves*. In the end, we must admit that the problem lies not in the elements of the Supper - but in our own hearts. Thus, if we are distracted by wine in the Supper, then it is *we* who need to change.

6.) *Wine is evil because it contains alcohol, and should not be used in Communion.* Answer: This is unbiblical thinking, which is condemned in Scripture (Mk. 7:8-9; Col. 2:20-23). We are not to set aside the teaching of God's Word in order to humor the ill-conceived traditions of men, which require things of the Church that God Himself does not require. Thus, this line of reasoning must be decisively rejected.

7.) *What about the "weaker brother" and ex-alcoholics?* Answer: It is clear from Scripture that the church at Corinth contained what we would call ex-alcoholics (or "drunkards"- 1 Cor. 6:10-11), and the problem also existed in the church at Rome (Rom. 14:21). And yet, we read in 1 Cor.11 that they *continued* to use wine in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and this group included those same ex-alcoholics. Scripture does not contradict itself, therefore, there is no biblical precedent for changing what the Lord has instituted in order to accommodate the weaker brother or former "drunkard" (see para. #5 above). Paul, who wrote 1 Cor. 11 as well as Rom. 14, saw no tension between the use of wine in the Supper and honoring the conscience of a weaker brother in situations outside of the Church. For example, if an ex-alcoholic came to your home for dinner, you wouldn't serve him a glass of Merlot with his T-bone. However, when that same ex-alcoholic comes to the Lord's Table, he is to thankfully receive with a clear conscience what the Lord has provided (see also 1 Cor. 10:27-33).

It is for the reasons briefly discussed above that Trinity will move *back* to wine exclusivity in September, in accord with Scripture and the historical practice of the Church. This move is not innovative; rather, by this move we are freeing ourselves from an unbiblical innovation (or new practice) that has been handed down to us - it is a move made in the spirit of the Reformation. May it bring glory and honor to our Lord, and unity in His church.

In the Name of Jesus Christ,

Tim Bushong

Nate Harlan