



Table Talk

College Hill Lutheran Church

Wine or Grape Juice? Does it matter?

The Question:

“Arguing the merits/reasoning behind using wine and unleavened bread: many “modern” churches say it’s inappropriate and doesn’t really matter what you use.”

The Answer:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”- St. Matthew 26:26-29

Jesus instituted this sacrament (Greek: mystery; Latin: sacramentum) for us to receive His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. He says of the bread, “This is my body.” And He says of the cup, “This is my blood.” We believe Jesus at His Word—especially since this is His last will and testament (on the night that He was betrayed...).

A few Christian denominations reject these Words of Jesus because they place their human reason over and against what Jesus says. They must change the words to mean that the bread and wine are mere representations of His body and blood. When they do this, they have no need to consider the elements of the sacrament to be important since they are mere symbols. Thus, churches who believe that the Lord’s Supper is just a picture of Jesus’ body and blood will easily change the elements to whatever is useful for representation.

However, Christians who believe Jesus’ words here as they read in the context of which they were spoken must consider this an important matter because of faith. Faith clings to the Words of Christ. If we change the elements to which Christ attaches His Word of promise, then there is introduced an element of doubt: Am I still receiving Christ’s blood for my forgiveness if we are using grape juice?

We know that the bread of the Passover meal was unleavened. We also know that the cup was wine (οἶνος) and not grape juice because the pasteurization process was unknown in Jesus’ day. Some people today wrongly take “fruit of the vine” in Matthew 26:29 to mean grape juice as we have it today from Welch’s or wherever, but that is not the case.

Simply put, the use of grape juice cannot be tolerated, because, without question, in doing so a different element from that used by Christ at the institution of the Holy Supper would be introduced into the service. *That can only lead to uncertainty as to whether one is still following Christ's institution.* We dare not give rise to such uncertainty. Grape juice, even though it is similar to wine, is not wine—and who gave us the right to substitute or modify anything here?

It is an adiaphoran (indifferent thing- neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture) whether the wine is red or white, absolute or mixed with water (the Lord probably used this kind according to local custom), if only it is a drink from the vine plant (γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου) according to Matthew 26:29.

Unleavened bread is preferred because it follows the Lord's own practice at the Last Supper.



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College Hill Lutheran Church
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