

Understanding the Use of Wine in the Lord's Supper

by Rev. Tom Wenger, Jr.

Intro

Upon surveying the landscape of the American church, one of the many issues that divides it (often sharply) is the issue of using wine in the Lord's Supper. Many are so used to using grape juice that they are often shocked to hear of real, fermented wine being used. Additionally, people are often surprised to learn two things. The first is what the Scriptures say about wine. The second is the history of how the church used nothing but wine for its first 1850 years, as well as how and why evangelicals in America largely switched to grape juice. Thus, toward the end of understanding these issues, we will survey what the Bible teaches about wine, what the Bible says specifically about the Lord's Supper, what the church has practiced and taught historically, and what caused the American evangelical shift to grape juice.

Overview of Wine in OT & NT

What we find in the OT and NT is that all the words used for wine or alcoholic beverages are at some point things that God has either given as blessings or elements that He has commanded His people to use in worship of Him. There is no question as to whether these words for wine actually refer to grape juice because they are the same words used in the verses that condemn drunkenness. So we see that God describes wine as a gift that is not to be abused and an element to be used in various worship rituals that He commanded.

Old Testament words for wine (and other alcoholic drinks)¹

Yayin יָיִן

This is the most common word used for wine in the OT. “Yayin, when it first occurs (Gen. 9:21), appears as the fermented juice of the grape; and in no place in the Old Testament are we required to give it another meaning.”² It is described as the drink that intoxicated Noah (**Gen. 9:21**), Lot (**Gen. 19:32-35**), and Nabal (**1 Sam. 25:36-37**), as well as “the drunkards of Ephraim... who are overcome with wine!” in **Isa 28:1**. However it is also the same word used for the wine that Melchizedek served to Abraham in a foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper in (**Gen 14:18**) and is something that God commanded to be used in several different worship rituals (**Exod 29:38-40**, **Lev 23:13**, **Num 15:5-10**, **28:7**)

¹ The following section relies a great deal on Dunlop Moore, “Wine” in *A Religious Encyclopedia of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal and Practical Theology*, Philip Schaff, ed. (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 2536-2538; Irving Woodworth Raymond, *The Teaching of the Early Church Concerning Wine and Strong Drink* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 15-27; Edward, H. Jewett, “Communion Wine” in, *The Two Wine Theory: As Discussed by Two Hundred and Eighty Six Clergymen* (New York: E Steiger Co, 1888), 115-174; Keith A. Mathison, “Protestant Transubstantiation Part 1” *Thirdmill Magazine Online*, Volume 2, Number 49, December 4 to December 10, 2000; as well as Greg Price, *The Bible and Alcoholic Beverages*, available at <http://www.reformedpresbytery.org/books/alcoholb/alcoholb.htm>

² Moore, 2537.

Additionally, God often describes *yayin* as a gracious gift from Him to mankind and “always...was the drink that came to symbolize joy and abundance for Israel and their neighbors as well.”³

And if the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe ... **you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household**" (Deut 14:24-26).

"He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth, **and wine which makes man's heart glad**, so that he may make his face glisten with oil, and food which sustains man's heart" (Ps 104:14-15).

Go, eat your bread with joy, **and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.** Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. (**Ecc 9:7-9**)

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! **Come, buy wine** and milk without money and without price. (**Isa 55:1**)

"Behold the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; when the **mountains will drip sweet wine**, and all the hills will be dissolved. Also I will restore the captivity of my people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, **they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine**, and make gardens and eat their fruit" (**Amos 9:13-14**).

Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior, **and their hearts shall be glad as with wine.** Their children shall see it and be glad; their hearts shall rejoice in the LORD. (**Zec 10:7**)

Thus we see that God commands not just *yayin* but even the effects of it as something with which He has blessed mankind.

In Proverbs, Wisdom serves *yayin* to her guests and tells them to drink it, associating that with gaining insight:

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; **she has mixed her wine;** she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says, "**Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.** Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight." (**Pro 9:1-6**)

Conversely, in **Deu 28:39** one of the curses that God threatens on His people for disobedience is the removal of *yayin* as a gift.

So we see here that while God condemns the abuse of *yayin*, He also commands its use in worship as well as commends its proper use as a gift to be enjoyed by His people.

³ Eugene Carpenter, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), NIDOTTE, 2.441.

תִּרְוָשׁ Tirosh

This word, *tirosh* is usually translated “new wine” when referring to grapes, and while it has been common to argue that this was unfermented grape juice, this is not the case. It simply refers to wine that has not matured to a better quality.⁴

The references to wine-making in the Bible let us see that no effort was made to preserve the expressed juice of the grape from exposure to the air; and it would, of course, ferment. But long before it was matured, so as to be proper *yayin*, it could intoxicate: hence we find an inebriating power ascribed... to *tirosh* (Hos. 4:11).⁵

The Scriptures confirm this meaning when God says:

They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish whoredom, wine, **and new wine, which take away the understanding.** (**Hos 4:10-11**)

However, just as with *yayin*, we see God extol *tirosh* as a gift. When Isaac blessed Jacob he said, “Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and **new wine**” (Gen 27:28) and God promised to bless Israel’s production of new wine if they obeyed him in **Deu 7:12-13, and 11:13-14**. Similarly, in Proverbs, God promises an abundance of *tirosh* to those who honor Him: ““Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and **your vats will overflow with new wine**” (**Prov 3:9-10**).

In Judges, Jotham’s parable describes the fact that *tirosh* cheers not only men, but also God:

But the vine said to them, "Shall I leave my **new wine, which cheers God and men**, and go to wave over the trees?" (**Judges 9:13**).

Thus, just as with *yayin*, God describes *tirosh* as something that should not be abused but rather enjoyed as a blessing from Him.

‘asis ὄιού

This word, ‘asis, is translated “sweet wine.”⁶ Just like *yayin* and *tirosh*, it is something that God condemns the abuse of, while nevertheless designating it as a picture of His blessing elsewhere. So while God condemns those drunk on ‘asis in **Isa. 49:26** and **Joel 1:5**, He nevertheless links an abundance of ‘asis with the redemption won by Christ on both **Joel 3:18** and **Amos 8:13** with the same phrase: “the mountains will drip sweet wine.”

Shekar שֶׁקֶר

⁴ Raymond, *The Teaching of the Early Church Concerning Wine*, 20.

⁵ Moore, 2536.

⁶ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), #7278.

And again this pattern continues with *Shekar* which is translated as *strong drink*.⁷ *Shekar* is mentioned in **Isa 5:11** as something that people are condemned for abusing and **Prov 20:1** warns against the same abuse by calling *Shekar* a “brawler.” However, as already seen above, *Shekar* was one of the things commended by God to be enjoyed “in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household.” (**Deu 14:26-28**). And in **Num 28:7** God commands that *Shekar* be used in worship offerings: “Its drink offering shall be a quarter of a hin for each lamb. In the Holy Place you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD.”

Shemer שְׁמֵר

When referring to wine, this word is used to describe choice, refined, aged wine.⁸ God only mentions it in conjunction with the heavenly feast He will set before us:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, **a feast of well-aged wine**, of rich food full of marrow, of **aged wine well refined.** (**Isa 25:6**)

Chemer חֶמֶר

As the Presbyterian linguistic scholar Dunlop Moore explains:

Chemer is in Hebrew a poetic term for wine, and is derived from a verb signifying both "to ferment" and to "be red.".... *Chemer* in its Chaldee (i.e. Aramaic) form denotes the wine drunk by Belshazzar (**Dan 5:1-4**); yet it appears as a blessing (**Isa. 27:2; Deut. 32:14**).). In the latter place it explains the expression, "the blood of the grape."⁹

Sobe סָבָה

This word can be translated as *wine* or *beer* in **Hosea 4:18**, and as *drunken* in **Nahum 1:10**. However an interesting usage appears in **Isa 1:21-22** where God says:

How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, **your best wine mixed with water.**

This is important because it goes against the common (but erroneous) claim that wine in the Bible was so diluted with water that it essentially countered any effect of the alcohol. First of all, there is no proof for such a claim, but, second, we see here that God associates such a diluting as a form of corrupting or spoiling something that was once good. Thus again we see wine described as a good thing from God.¹⁰

Mishrah מִשְׁרָה

This word only appears one time in the Scriptures and it means unfermented grape juice. This passage explains the restrictions of the Nazarite vow:

⁷ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) #2388c

⁸ Jewett, “Communion Wine,” 124.

⁹ Moore, 2537.

¹⁰ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Volume 1, Chapters 1-18* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 82-83; see also Price.

[H]e shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. (**Num 6:3**)

Thus, when the Bible wants to distinguish unfermented grape juice from wine, it does so. But it is improper to try (as many have done) to explain away the alcohol content from the biblical words used for wine.

[T]he theory of two kinds of wine — the one fermented and intoxicating and unlawful, and the other unfermented, unintoxicating, and lawful—is a modern hypothesis, devised during the present century, and has no foundation in the Bible, or in Hebrew or classical antiquity.¹¹

Old Testament Alcohol Restrictions

The OT Scriptures do forbid alcohol in the following situations:

- (1) While priests ministered in the Tabernacle before the Lord they were to be careful that their judgment was not impaired so as not to incur the wrath of God as did Nadab and Abihu (**Lev. 10:9**).
- (2) When kings sat in courts to rule as judges they were not to use anything that might dull their judgment in the use of God's law (**Prov. 31:4,5**).
- (3) When one took a Nazarite vow he was to refrain from what was lawfully enjoyed by others (e.g. wine, strong drink, vinegar, grape juice, grapes, or raisins) in order to demonstrate that he was consecrated to God (**Num. 6:2-6**)...[W]hen the vow was completed (**Num. 6:20**), it was not a sin to drink the same wine (*yayin*) that one was forbidden to drink while under the Nazarite vow (**Num.6:3**).
- (4) The abuse of alcoholic beverages in drunkenness is strictly forbidden (**Prov. 23:20**).¹²

Thus when looking over the entire scope of the Old Testament's teaching on alcohol it is quite clear that while abuse of it in the form of drunkenness is always forbidden, the scriptures spend far more time describing wine and strong drink as blessings from God to be enjoyed. God even demands that wine be used in several different worship rituals. And He only restricts its use when specific circumstances require either the priests' or the kings' minds to be completely alert.

New Testament words for alcoholic beverages

We see a very similar pattern in the NT where the words used for fermented, alcoholic grape juice are mentioned in passages that clearly condemn drunkenness, and then used in others to describe wine used in worship rituals and as a gift from God to be used and enjoyed rightly.

***Oinos* οἶνος**

¹¹ Moore, 2537.

¹² Price.

It is beyond question that the word *oinos* refers to a fermented drink which can intoxicate. As the *Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament* states:

Though some persons have argued that whenever mention is made of Jesus either making or drinking wine, one must assume that this was only unfermented grape juice, there is no real basis for such a conclusion.¹³

Additionally, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) *oinos* is the word used to translate most of the terms mentioned above for alcoholic beverages: *yayin*, *tirosh*, *'asis*, *shemer*, *chemer*, and *sobe*.

However, it *never* refers to unfermented grape juice.¹⁴ There is a word in Greek *trux* (τρύξ) which specifically means “unfermented grape juice”, but it appears nowhere in the New Testament.¹⁵ Thus whenever we see Jesus himself making or drinking wine, it is fermented, alcoholic wine.

One of the uses for *oinos* that is important to examine is the idea of drinking and enjoying it socially. Christ, by turning the water into superior wine at the wedding feast in **John 2:1-11**, did so knowing full well that the people had already consumed a good deal of *oinos*. The master of the feast even pointed this fact out to Christ:

Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now. (**John 2:10**)

Many wonder at why this was Christ’s first miracle. But it is crucial to recall what we’ve already seen above: **1).** that an abundance of wine is a sign of God’s blessing; **2).** that removal of wine was a sign of His cursing; and **3).** that the coming of the Messianic Age was prophesied as a time when choice wine would flow in abundance. With this in mind, Christ utilized Mary’s observance that the wedding guests had no wine as a powerful statement about the people of Israel: they had once had wine, but they did no longer. So Christ, in announcing His arrival as their Messiah, miraculously supplies them with *over 120 gallons of choice wine*.

In this light, Mary’s statement, “They have no wine,” as a statement about the regime of the law, gains still a deeper meaning. At the same time, in this focus on the person of Jesus as “the good wine kept until now” lies the criterion of what this fullness of joy and salvation holds and means for Israel and the entire world: the rejection of every manner of life and every kind of future expectation that does not have its all sustaining foundation in His person and work.¹⁶

¹³ Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, *Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 6.197.

¹⁴ Colin Brown, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), *NIDNTT*, 3.918-923.

¹⁵ George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek - English Lexicon*, ed. Henry Stuart Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 43059; Arndt, William, Walter Bauer, F. W. Gingrich, *Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 564.

¹⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 110.

Paul also *commanded* the use of *oinos* for medicinal purposes to Timothy who had apparently been abstaining completely from wine.

Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. (**1Tim 5:23**)

Most commentators are agreed that Timothy's abstention from wine was for something theological, resulting from pressure he was under in Ephesus, and that Paul's command here is not simply a random recommendation, but is actually a corrective to Timothy.¹⁷

Paul tells Timothy to . . . no longer drink water. It is interesting to ask why Timothy was abstaining since it obviously was detrimental to his health. Paul's opponents were drunkards, and to disassociate himself totally from them and their teaching, Timothy apparently had chosen to abstain to the point that it was hurting him physically. His abstinence was an example of not exercising his Christian liberty when it might damage another's faith. While this was admirable, Paul did not want Timothy to think that the preceding statement was an endorsement of his decision to abstain, and in fact Paul thought that Timothy should change this habit and use a little wine because of his physical problems.¹⁸

And finally, there are several places in the NT where *oinos* is used in the condemnation of drunkenness (**Eph 5:18, 1 Tim 3:3**).

"The fruit of the vine" γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου

This phrase appears in **Matt. 26:29**, **Mark 14:25**, and **Luke 22:18** at the Last Supper when Jesus was instituting what would become the Lord's Supper.

The expression the "fruit of the vine" is employed by our Saviour in the synoptical Gospels to denote the element contained in the cup of the Holy Supper. The fruit of the vine is literally the grape. But 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, pars i) expressly states, that, in pronouncing blessings, "the fruit of the vine" is the consecrated expression for *yayin*. . . . 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 the 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.¹⁹

Some have argued that Jesus did not necessarily use wine at the Last Supper because the text says merely that "He took the cup." However, right after Christ said this he uttered the words of the verses above:

¹⁷ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy & Titus: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 375-376; I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles: International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999), 623-624.

¹⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 318-319.

¹⁹ Moore, 2537.

Matt 26:27-30

²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ 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."

So this illustrates two points. First, Christ undoubtedly instituted the Lord's Supper with fermented wine since the cup contained "this fruit of the vine." But second, it also shows Christ highlighting the symbolism of wine as an element of celebration to be enjoyed when all things are finally made new just like we saw in the OT prophets above.

Jesus, Himself, is looking forward to that Day when He can again drink wine in celebration with His redeemed people.

New Wine***Gleukos γλεῦκος***

This word means "sweet wine" or sometimes "new wine."²⁰ However while it is common to claim that the phrase "new wine" means non-alcoholic grape juice, this is not the case. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and enabled them to speak in tongues. However bystanders thought that they were drunk:

Acts 2:13-15

¹³ But others mocking said, "They are **filled with new wine.**" ¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For **these people are not drunk**, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day."

Thus, *gleukos* certainly had the capacity to intoxicate.

Oinos neos οἶνος νέος

The phrase "new wine" appears elsewhere in the NT, as *oinos neos*, literally "new wine." It appears in three parallel passages in the Gospels where Christ explains:

Matt 9:16-17

¹⁶ No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

²⁰ Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, *Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 6.199.

Some have tried to argue that the “new wine” here is unfermented and have then gone on to try to make the case that the new wine is an analogy of the church and that alcohol here is thus described as a negative thing. Recall again, however, that *oinos* always refers to fermented wine. The point that Christ is making is that this is young wine being poured into new wineskins so that it can continue fermenting into even better wine.²¹

But what is more important is that Christ is likening the fermenting process to the New Covenant Kingdom that He is bringing, and it is something that cannot simply be tacked on to the Old Covenant (or poured into an old wineskin). The fermenting of the New Covenant will explode the Old:

D. A. Carson

In time [old wineskins] became hard and brittle. If new wine, still fermenting, were put into such an old skin, the buildup of fermenting gases would split the brittle container and ruin both bottle and wine. New wine was placed only in new wineskins still pliable and elastic enough to accommodate the pressure. These illustrations show that the new situation introduced by Jesus could not simply be patched onto old Judaism or poured into the old wineskins of Judaism. New forms would have to accompany the kingdom Jesus was now inaugurating; to try to domesticate Him and incorporate Him into the matrix of established Jewish religion would only succeed in ruining both Judaism and Jesus’ teaching.²²

NT Alcohol Restrictions

As mentioned above, **Eph 5:18** and **1 Tim 3:3** condemn drunkenness, and to these we can add, **Luke 21:34**, **Rom 13:13**, **1 Cor 5:11, 6:10**, **Gal 5:21**, **1 Thes 5:7-8**, **1 Pet 4:3**. Additionally, Paul says in **1 Tim 3:8** and **Titus 2:3** that church officers should not indulge in too much wine. These cannot be overlooked or rationalized away. *The Bible is clear that drunkenness is a sin.*

However one of the passages most often brought up in the context of Christians and drinking wine is **Romans 14:14-23**. The particular verse in question is **14:21** where Paul says, “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.”

The context of this chapter is often overlooked, however. In this section of Romans Paul is referring specifically to the scenarios that primarily the Jewish Christians faced who had to both let go of the Old Covenant practices as well as figure out how to live among pagan gentiles. So Paul describes letting go of strict Jewish Sabbath observance as well as their freedom to partake of things that had been used in pagan rituals (which would have been *strictly* forbidden under the Old Covenant).²³ Many of them did not think

²¹ See also, John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 391-392; David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 255; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 357; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33 a (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 244; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 343; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 226-227.

²² D. A. Carson, *Matthew: Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 267.

²³ The following scholars all defend this view: John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1947), 14:1; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 830-831, 861; also C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: vol.2, International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T

that they were permitted to partake of such things, whether it was eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols or wine that had been part of a libation ritual. Thus he is not referring simply to general social use of meat and wine, but to a specific situation which brought up a crisis of *faith* for them.

Charles Hodge

The ground on which some of the early Christians thought it incumbent on them to abstain from wine, was not any general ascetic principle, but because they feared they might be led to use wine which had been offered to the gods; to which they had the same objection as to meat which had been presented in sacrifice.²⁴

Douglas Moo gives a very helpful explanation of how we should relate this historic scenario to our day:

All three specific issues are still debated by Christians: whether it is necessary to abstain from meat and from wine, and to observe the Sabbath and other “holy” days. But only on the issue of Sabbath observance is there a real parallel for it was out of continuing reverence for the Mosaic law that some of the Roman Christians adopted these practices. But modern Christians who, for example, abstain from all alcoholic beverages do so not because they fear ritual contamination. Some abstain because they... do not want to set a bad example for others who might not be able to handle alcohol. Abstinence on these grounds may be a laudable course of action; *but this has little basis on Paul's argument in these chapters*. For the “weak” here are not those who cannot control their drinking. They are people who are not convinced that their faith in Christ allows them to do a particular thing. They are not “weak” in respect to handling alcohol; they are “weak” in respect to their faith (Romans 14:1). And Paul urges the “strong” to abstain, not because their example might lead the “weak” to drink to excess but because their example might lead the “weak” to drink and so to violate their conscience.²⁵

So it is not wine in general that might cause them to stumble in this fashion because, as we have seen, it was not anywhere forbidden to the Jews to drink wine. In fact, they couldn't have participated in Passover if that had been the case. The weaker brother of Romans 14 is not the person who struggles with alcohol abuse; it's the person who fears that some particular meat or wine has been forbidden because of its association with pagan worship.

So just as we saw with the OT, the NT uses various words for fermented, alcoholic wine, and God reveals through these Scriptures that wine is something to be viewed as a gift to enjoy and never to abuse in drunkenness. Additionally, just as in the Old, God commands the NT believers to use wine in worship rituals and for medicinal purposes as well. Wine, in and of itself, is never condemned nor are God's people ever forbidden to drink it, even socially. God describes wine as a gift which points to the celebration that even Christ Himself is looking forward to someday to enjoying with His people.

Survey of NT Scholarship on Wine in the Lord's Supper

Clark, 1975), 694-97; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 736-737; James Dunn, *Romans 9-16, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38b (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 799-802;

²⁴ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1893), 426.

²⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 881.

We've already seen above that when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper He said:

²⁷ **And he took a cup**, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you,²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

²⁹ 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.**" (Matt 26:27-29)

It is indisputable that this term, "fruit of the vine," refers to fermented, alcoholic wine.²⁶ Thus when examining the question of whether or not wine should be used in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, it is crucial that we not undervalue what Christ, Himself, commanded.

When we examine other Scriptures that describe the celebration of the Lord's Supper we see that in 1 Cor 11 Paul condemns the practices of the Corinthian church which had so greatly disrespected Christ and His sacrifice for us. One of the ways that this occurred was that when they were partaking of the Supper, some were drinking all of the wine and getting drunk on it.

1Cor 11:20-22

²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, **another gets drunk.** ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

Now this is surely a gross sin and Paul rightly condemns it. However it is crucial that we take note of several things here. First, it would not be possible for them to get drunk off of grape juice so clearly the early church established by the Apostles understood that Christ had commanded them to drink wine.

But second it is important to see what Paul's remedy is for this terrible situation. Was his answer to switch to grape juice? No; it was rather to instruct them to reflect on what the Supper was actually about. He begins by quoting Christ's words of institution and it is very important that we see how carefully Paul quotes them.

1Cor 11:23-25

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

²⁶ See also, John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1085; David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 625; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 995; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33 b (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 774; D. A. Carson, *Matthew: Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 604; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 661-662; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 631-632; Moore, 2537.

In a culture that had very little written material in their possession it is amazing that at this early of a date, Christ's words are quoted nearly verbatim from what we have in our Gospel accounts. This is not a normal thing for Paul to do. It shows that getting Christ's exact formula for celebrating the Supper was of extreme importance to the Apostles.²⁷ Thus, seeing how faithfully they copied it, those who would stray from it in any way ought to take heed of Paul's example.

But then he goes on to instruct them concerning what the Supper teaches us:

1Cor 11:26-34

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. ³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another-- ³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home--so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.

Clearly these people had a problem with abusing alcohol as well as the Lord's Supper. Taking away the alcohol, however, is nowhere in Paul's resolution to the problem. Changing their minds and their hearts is.

Historical position of the Church

Ascertaining the historical position of the Church on this issue proves to be a simple task. Prior to the Temperance movement and the invention of pasteurized grape juice in the 19th century the use of fermented wine in the Lord's Supper was universal.

Though there were sects here and there such as the Encratites that demanded total abstinence from alcohol (as well as meat and marriage) and used water in the Lord's Supper, they were condemned numerous times as heretical by the Church.²⁸

The Reformed Confessions are in complete harmony on this issue, with all and each commanding the use of wine in the celebration of the Lord's Supper:

²⁷ See Gordon Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 545-556; Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 866-886; David Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 544-548; Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians: Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 548-553; J.N.D. Kelly, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Black's New Testament Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 264-270.

²⁸ J. Arendzen, "Encratites," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company., 1909).

Belgic Confession (1561) “To represent to us this spiritual and heavenly bread Christ has instituted an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and **wine** as the sacrament of his blood” (Article 35).

Heidelberg Catechism (1563) Question 79: Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood? (Paul uses the words, a participation in Christ’s body and blood). Answer: Christ has good reason for these words. He wants to teach us that as bread and **wine** nourish our temporal life, so too his crucified body and poured-out blood truly nourish our souls for eternal life.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) “Likewise, in the Lord’s Supper, the outward sign is bread and **wine**, taken from things commonly used for meat and drink; but the thing signified is the body of Christ which was given, and his blood which was shed for us, or the communion of the body and blood of the Lord” (Chapter XIX).

Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God (1645) “The minister is to begin the action by sanctifying and blessing the elements of bread and **wine** set before him.”

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) “The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to declare His word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and **wine**” (Confession of Faith 29:3).

Westminster Larger Catechism (1648)

Question 168: What is the Lord’s Supper? (See also WSC 96.) Answer: The Lord’s supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and **wine** according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is shewed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with him confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship each with the other, as members of the same mystical body.

Question 169: How hath Christ appointed bread and wine to be given and received in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper?

Answer: Christ hath appointed the ministers of his word, in the administration of this sacrament of the Lord’s supper, to set apart the bread and **wine** from common use, by the word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants: who are, by the same appointment, to take and eat the bread, and to **drink the wine**, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and his blood shed, for them.

Question 177: Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper differ?

Answer: The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord’s supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and **wine**, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.

The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

“The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to pray, and bless the elements of bread and **wine**” (Chap. 30, sect. 3).

In addition to the Confessions, our theologians argued for the same, often, as Calvin, explaining the fact that wine is used because of the Scripture’s commending its benefits:

Calvin

And so as we previously stated, from the physical things set forth in the Sacrament we are led by a sort of analogy to spiritual things. Thus, when bread is given as a symbol of Christ’s body, we must at once grasp this comparison: as bread nourishes, sustains, and keeps the life of our body, so Christ’s body is the only food to invigorate and enliven our soul. When we see wine set forth as a symbol of blood, we must reflect on the benefits which wine imparts to the body, and so realize that the same are spiritually imparted to us by Christ’s blood. These benefits are to nourish, refresh, strengthen, and gladden.²⁹

But this testimony did not cease once the Temperance Movement and Prohibition rose to power. As will be seen below, the conservative Reformed theologians opposed the removal of wine from the Lord’s Table because there was no biblical or historical backing for such a decision. Herman Bavinck, a Dutch Reformed theologian in the late 19th century represents their response as a whole when he said:

Herman Bavinck

But we must not be **wiser than Christ**, who expressly designated **wine** as the sign of his blood and whose command in this matter has at all times been followed in the Christian Church.³⁰

And our own Book of Church order to this day instructs us to use wine in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper:

PCA Book of Church Order

58-5. The table, on which the elements are placed, being decently covered, and furnished with bread and **wine**, and the communicants orderly and gravely sitting around it (or in their seats before it), the elders in a convenient place together, the minister should then set the elements apart by prayer and thanksgiving.

As we have seen, using wine in the Lord’s Supper is the incontestable historical practice of the Christian Church. Since crushed grapes will begin fermenting within days, it was not even feasible for the church to substitute unfermented grape juice in the Lord’s Supper until the 1800’s in America.

It is crucial in this discussion that we understand what cultural phenomena took place in the mid to late 19th century American church which brought about the massive shift from using wine to grape juice in the Lord’s Supper. We say “cultural phenomena” because, as history shows, it was not exegesis of Scripture that enacted the change but rather social and political forces.

Temperance Movement

²⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (1559) in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vols. XX-XXI, ed. J.T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 4.17.3.

³⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4.564.

Many scholars and records note that in the early 19th century alcohol abuse rose sharply in America. Due to some odd theories back then which viewed even hard alcohol as a stimulant (and as something recommended for use on the job in many industries) as well as the fact that innovations had made the manufacture and sale of hard liquor much more accessible, it is hardly surprising that a great deal of abuse resulted.

Many concerned voices spoke up and began advocating temperance, initially in the form of stemming the tide against the abuse of alcohol. However, this very quickly morphed into a demand for the total abstinence from any and all alcohol. The man most associated with getting the Temperance Movement off the ground was Lyman Beecher.³¹ A Congregationalist minister (who served in a few Presbyterian churches as well), he was very influenced by Charles Finney and was an ardent supporter of the Arminian revivals that were sweeping through much of the mid-Atlantic and New England. Many have noted the fact that he saw how revivalism was a powerful force for social change and began linking his desire for total abstinence from alcohol to these revivals. He also borrowed from Finney the idea that man was not totally depraved, that he had a completely free will, and that all mankind has the power to obey God perfectly. This was a very important component of both the Finney's and Beecher's revival crusades because they did not focus on mankind's utter need for Christ but rather on their need to change morally.

Finney committed the gross heresy of full Pelagianism by denying the atoning power of Christ's life and death and putting man's salvation completely in his ability to obey. Beecher, on the other hand, while not going as far as Finney, was nevertheless charged with heresy by the Presbyterian Church for his denial of the sinfulness of man and the sovereignty of God.

Beecher never recanted of these teachings and continued to marry the social causes of abolition and temperance to converting to Christianity. In what are regarded as the most influential documents in the founding of the Temperance Movement, Beecher's *Six Sermons on Intemperance* proclaimed:

Men who are mighty to consume strong drink, are unfit members of that kingdom which consisteth not in "meat and drink," but in "righteousness and peace." The time, we trust, is not distant, when the use of ardent spirits will be proscribed by a vote of all the churches in our land, and when the commerce in that article shall, equally with the slavetrade, be regarded as inconsistent with a credible profession of Christianity.³²

It is important to note that Beecher's union of Temperance with the revivalism of the day was driven by the desire for social reform not the exegesis of the Scriptures. As historian Charles Hambrick-Stowe has noted, "the primary means by which individual salvation led to social reform... was the wedding of the revival with the temperance movement" which "united evangelical protestants in America like no other social movement had, and it would continue to do so for almost a hundred years."³³

³¹ Leo P. Hirrel, *Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform* (Lexington: University press of Kentucky, 1998), 120.

³² Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on Intemperance* (New York: American Tract Society, 1927), 90.

³³ Charles E. Hambrick – Stowe, *Charles Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 111, 113; see also, Robert R. Mathisen ed., *Critical Issues in American Religious History: A Reader* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2001), 211-212.

Charles Finney replicated this very methodology espoused by his friend Beecher and put in motion the seeds of what would later become the liberal Social Gospel which preached cultural reform at the expense of preaching Christ. As *Christian History* magazine recently noted,

Finney ... unleashed a mighty impulse to social reform by insisting that new converts make their lives count for the Kingdom of God. The result was an optimistic, postmillennial theological thrust and the revitalization of a “benevolent empire” of Protestant organizations determined to make the world a better place by hastening the coming of the Kingdom. The reform movements involved were: the temperance movement, Sabbath keeping, manual labor schools, and abolitionism.³⁴

However, the Temperance Movement was not without its opponents. Charles Hodge and other “Old School” Presbyterians were quite concerned with the absolute lack of Scriptural grounds for the claims that they made about the inherent evil of any and all alcohol consumption.³⁵ In order to deal with the claims we’ve already noted above in Scripture, which both command and commend the drinking of wine, some in the Temperance Movement devised what became known as the “Two Wine Theory” which argued that there were two kinds of wine in the Bible: fermented and non-fermented. Wherever the Bible described wine in a negative light, this was to be a signal that it was the alcoholic sort; wherever it described wine in a positive light, that proved that it was the non-alcoholic sort. Total abstinence advocate William Ritchie explained it this way:

How, then, can we account for His here, always approving one thing, which He names by one word, and as uniformly condemning another thing which He names by a second, except on the principle that the former is good in itself, and beneficial to man, while the latter is evil and injurious? This line of inquiry, therefore, leads us to the same conclusion as the other formerly indicated, that it is the innocent, unintoxicating wine that the Spirit of God, in His Word commands, while it is the deleterious inebriating wine which He condemns.³⁶

This was rightly viewed by many to be mere speculation and a particularly circular argument. Where was the proof for such a distinction, the Calvinists asked? Eliphanet Nott, one of the most influential “Two Wine” theorists attempted answers which argued that the Hebrew words made this distinction for us since “*tirosh* is uniformly used for the unfermented fruit of the vine, as it exists in the cluster on the vine or in the vat, and never for the fermented fruit of the vine as it exists in the cask.”³⁷ Ritchie followed Nott’s lead as did many other Two Wine theorists claiming that the Hebrew words differentiated which wine was holy and which one sinful:

In short, is the same kind of language applied indiscriminately to the things in question, so as to leave us in doubt what was their respective character? No, we reply emphatically—NO. On the

³⁴ James E. Johnson, “Charles Grandison Finney: Father of American Revivalism” *Christian History*, 1988 , Issue 20, 5.

³⁵ Hirrel, 132.

³⁶ William Ritchie, *Scripture Testimony Against Intoxicating Wine* (Glasgow: Scottish Temperance League, 1850), 12.

³⁷ Eliphanet Nott, *Lectures on Temperance* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co, 1857), 149.

contrary, the thing denoted by one of these words (*Tirosh*) is, without a single exception, spoken of as a blessing; not a syllable of disapproval or of caution is uttered respecting it in the whole Book of God. Again, the thing denoted by another of these words (*Shechar*) is, almost with the same uniformity, represented as a curse; and, unless in one solitary instance,³⁸ in the early period of the Hebrew people, where it is mentioned in connection with a religious observance, it is, in every other case, spoken of as an evil, only evil, and that continually. Once more, the thing denoted by another of these words (*Yayin*) is represented as very doubtful in its character, a possible good, yet generally an evil; and, hence, for *one* text in Scripture which speaks of its use with approval, there are *three* that point to it with warning. These are facts—what are we to make of them?

Thus, their claim was that words like *tirosh* always mean non-fermented, permissible “wine” and words like *shekar* always mean alcoholic, sinful wine.

Opponents of the “Two Wine Theory” were quick to point out, as we've seen above, that these claims are demonstrably false. The Scriptures most certainly use *Tirosh* to define something that can and did intoxicate. As God says in **Hosea 4:10-11**,

They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish whoredom, wine, **and new wine [*tirosh*], which take away the understanding.**

And while they would lead us to believe that the Bible does not speak approvingly of Shekar (because it is alcoholic), God commands its use in worship in **Num 28:7**. Moreover, as we saw above, not only is its use commanded but it is also commended as a gift from God to be enjoyed by His people in **Deu 14:24-26**:

And if the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe ...you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, **or wine, or strong drink [*shekar*], or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household"**

In addition to pointing out this kind of flawed exegesis, the Old School Calvinists also demanded to know how the ancients were able to keep this juice from fermenting.³⁸ Historian Leo Hirrel explains:

As the theory developed, it appeared that the ancients had a method of preventing the fermentation of grapes. They boiled the grape juice down into a thick syrupy substance and then stored it inside a goat's stomach...Allegedly the syrupy nature of the substance plus its insulation from the air prevented its fermentation. The ancient people supposedly preferred the unfermented wine as being of a higher quality than fermented wine.³⁹

However, this was soon revealed to be complete speculation without evidence, as the opponents of this theory showed that there was no example of anyone in the ancient world practicing such things.⁴⁰

³⁸ See R. S. Crampton, *The Wine of the Bible and the Bible Use of Wine* (New York: John A. Gray, 1859).

³⁹ Hirrel, 129.

⁴⁰ Edward H. Jewett, *The Two Wine Theory: As Discussed by Two Hundred and Eighty Six Clergymen* (New York: E Steiger Co, 1888), 115-174; John McLean, “Bacchus and Anti-Bacchus,” *The Princeton Review*, no. IV, Oct. 1841, 471-523.

However, admitting to claims like this resulted in drastic consequences, even for those within the Temperance Movement. When the leading Two Wine theorist, Eliphilet Nott, admitted that there was perhaps some small amount of alcohol in some of the wine permitted in Scripture, the following was appended to the next edition of his *Lectures on Temperance*:

The admission in Dr. Nott's *Lectures*, that there may perhaps be a very slight degree of alcohol, even in the wine allowed and pronounced good by the Bible, gave offence to many sincere friends of temperance, when they were first published; and several able and esteemed advocates of the cause felt it their duty to repudiate and condemn it as a needless and injurious concession....

But let it be observed, even by those who regard this admission by the author as gratuitous, and unfortunate, that his Lectures elsewhere contend for abstinence, not only from intoxicating, alcoholic and fermented wine, but also from the freshly expressed juice of the grape. So that, if the author here is in error, he has not left the reader entirely without an antidote. In the closing paragraph of the fourth lecture, he says:

Still it does not follow that *even the pure blood of the grape* should now be used by us as a beverage. The circumstances of society... have changed; distillation has been discovered; chemistry has mixed new poisons with the wine cup; and, to save the church and the world from ruin, it has become necessary, and it is, therefore, as we have already said, incumbent on us, in the spirit of the first law of Christian love, *wholly to abstain from the use of vinous beverage of every sort.*⁴¹

In essence, Nott felt the need to abstain even from grape juice just to make certain that he was true to the Temperance cause.

Additionally, even those who personally swore total abstinence from all alcohol were not safe from condemnation by the Temperance Movement unless they agreed that the Bible *forbade* all alcohol because of its intrinsic sinfulness. Such a proposal came to the 1859 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, requesting that those who disagreed with such a claim be barred from Communion. However, since these were the Old School Presbyterians, it failed by a near unanimous vote.⁴² Charles Hodge argued that these unbiblical means to promoting temperance had a directly destructive effect on Christianity itself:

It has led to a disregard of the authority of the word of God, to a shameful perversion of its meaning, to shocking irreverence in the manner of speaking of our blessed Redeemer. It has in all these and other ways tended to undermine the foundations of religion, and has given, in many places, an infidel character to the whole temperance movement.⁴³

⁴¹ Editorial note by Amasa McCoy in Eliphilet Nott, *Lectures on Temperance* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co, 1857), 117-118.

⁴² *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1859* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1859), 535; see also, Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions Evangelical and Theological*, vol. 2 (London: Banner of Truth, 1891), 467.

⁴³ Charles Hodge, *The Church and Its Polity* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons., 1879), 227.

But the tide was turning against Hodge and the Old School Presbyterians elsewhere in the country. The Arminian revivals which were sweeping the land through the efforts of the Methodists and New School Presbyterians convinced thousands that to qualify as a convert to Christianity one must not only abstain from all alcohol, but also affirm its intrinsic sinfulness.

Prominent Temperance advocate and Congregationalist minister John Marsh convinced many in his pamphlet, *The Battle Not Man's But God's*, that it was not enough simply to agree with their view of the sinfulness of alcohol; what was required was to go the next step and see that it was God's will that alcohol should be made illegal. Not to agree with this "would be the greatest of absurdities; not to say, blasphemy itself."⁴⁴

If the battle with Intemperance is God's battle, then prohibition and not license of the traffic, its great source, is the true principle of legislation. Civil government is an ordinance of God, established for his glory, and for the good of men... To license an evil doer, is to protect the criminal and not the victim. The licensed vender selling poison to his weak brother and bringing him to the drunkard's grave, is the criminal protected by the State; and the cries of the broken-hearted victim and his beggared family will go up, and not in vain, into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Be instructed, O States of America! God has a controversy with the desolating traffic; a controversy with every voter who, at the ballot-box sustains it; with every legislator who makes laws for its protection: with every magistrate and citizen who fails in his duty to proscribe and abolish it. If ye be with him, he will be with you," ... but if ye fight against him, he will fight against you, and your land shall be a desolation and a curse.⁴⁵

It is very important to note how our forebears, the Old School Presbyterians, responded to such statements. Charles Hodge, who did not oppose personal abstention from alcohol, nevertheless argued the following in light of such Temperance Movement claims:

It makes all the difference in the world, whether a thing is wrong in itself, or for reasons extraneous to its own nature. If it is wrong in itself, it is always wrong; it is always the ground of reproach or censure; and it should be opposed in a way entirely inadmissible on the supposition that it is, in its own nature, a matter of indifference. It is evident that it is the prevalent doctrine of our Temperance Societies, and of our self-called temperance men, that the use and sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage is in itself an immorality. As to this point there can be no higher authority than the National Temperance Convention held at Saratoga, July, 1841, who declared, "That the tendency of all intoxicating drinks to derange the bodily functions, to lead to drunkenness, to harden the heart, sear the conscience, destroy domestic peace, excite to the commission of crime, waste human life, and destroy souls; and the rebukes and warnings of God in his word in relation to them, in connection with every law of self-preservation and of love, imposed upon all men a solemn moral obligation to cease forever from their manufacture, sale and use, as a beverage, and so unitedly call upon us as men and Christians, not to pause in our

⁴⁴ John Marsh, *The Battle Not Man's But God's* (New York: American Temperance Union, 1858), 18.

⁴⁵ Marsh, 18.

work until such manufacture, sale and use, shall be universally abandoned.” This declaration of the immorality of the manufacture, sale and use of all intoxicating drinks as a beverage, being founded, not on the peculiar circumstances of any time or place, but on the inherent nature and tendency of such drinks, is a declaration that their sale and use are, and always have been sinful. *And as it is a fact, just as clear as any other fact contained in the Scripture, that God and Christ did not prohibit, but allowed the use of such drinks, we cannot hesitate to say that the above resolution is infidel in its spirit and tendency, however many good men may have been cajoled or driven into the sin of giving it their sanction.*⁴⁶

In the midst of this new cultural opinion “Edward Delavan, the President of the New York Temperance Society, proceeded to carry the crusade against wine to its next logical step, denial of fermented wine at Communion.”⁴⁷ Many in confessional denominations (i.e. Old School Presbyterians, Episcopals, Lutherans and Catholics) responded with great concern to this invention. Old School Presbyterian A. A. Hodge’s response to this new measure was quoted by many of them:

A. A. Hodge

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 Saviour 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.⁴⁸

These protests notwithstanding, the movement continued to gain ground as the ranks of conservative, confessional Christians depleted and those of the new liberal, social theology grew. The invention of pasteurized grape juice by the Methodist and Temperance advocate Thomas Bramwell Welch not only made unfermented grape juice something that was cheap and able to be preserved, but started a campaign which swept the nation, replacing wine with grape juice for use in the Lord’s Supper.⁴⁹

As the 20th century dawned these battles had become almost completely political and social.⁵⁰ This does not mean that the American church was uninvolved. On the contrary, with the rise of theological

⁴⁶ Charles Hodge, *The Church and Its Polity* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons., 1879), 226-227. (emphasis added)

⁴⁷ Hirrel, 130.

⁴⁹ Daniel Benedict, “Changing Wine into Grape Juice: Thomas and Charles Welch and the Transition to Unfermented Fruit of the Grape” (Nashville: General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church).

⁵⁰ Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), 31-44; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domestication: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University press, 1981), 91-93.

liberalism one of the few things uniting many of the mainline denominations was the Social Gospel, and nothing was more central to the Social Gospel agenda as Prohibition.⁵¹ As historian Paul Carter has shown, “all churches which had been permeated by the Social Gospel were also officially committed to Prohibition.”⁵² The very influential liberal theologian, Walter Rauschenbusch, often credited with being the author of the Social Gospel movement, believed that Prohibition was one of the crucial keys to the social Christianizing of the world.⁵³ Even once Prohibition was repealed, many churches retained their recently adopted practice of using grape juice instead of wine in Communion. What this story shows though, is that this massive shift away from the universal practice of the Christian church for nearly 2000 years occurred not as the result of a careful study of the Scriptures, but instead as the result of social and political pressure.

Conclusion

Given the overview of Scripture, the historical position of the Church, as well as the cultural reasons why Americans replaced wine with grape juice, the question remains, is there a good reason to substitute an element in the Lord’s Supper for one that Christ instituted? If the Scriptures clearly designated fermented wine in the Supper what are we saying by deliberately choosing grape juice? Serving fermented wine in the Lord’s Supper often comes as a surprise for people in the 21st century American church because so many people are more familiar with using grape juice. And often the choice to use real wine seems to require a “defense.” But given the Scriptural and historical evidence, the choice to use of grape juice rather than wine is what requires defending. Michael Horton provides a helpful summary for our discussion:

Michael Horton

One final appeal. Some of us have come from charismatic, non-Reformed backgrounds influenced by the “Jesus People” and the California beach culture in which a Communion service of Coke and potato chips was thought to underscore the unimportance of the physical element and play up the spiritual meaning. We may respond in horror at such a thought, but then we must ask ourselves why we refuse to use the element that the Savior and King of the church prescribed, viz., wine. Abandoning wine in favor of grape juice was unknown in the church until American Prohibition, a movement led almost entirely by Arminian revivalists (especially Methodists and disciples of Charles Finney). American fundamentalism rested its case against wine in Communion on the exegetically untenable position that the “wine” in the New Testament was never fermented. While many conservative Reformed and Presbyterian brothers and sisters would regard this conclusion as naïve, many of us have nevertheless argued that fermentation is not

⁵¹ Jason Lantzer, “Prohibition is Here to Stay”: *The Reverend Edward S. Shumaker and the Dry Crusade in America* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2009), 1-6, & 23-24.

⁵² Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel*, 33; see also, Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism and Modernity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003), 141, 446, 542.

⁵³ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 375-376.

essential to wine. This argument was unknown to our forebears, as it was to Scripture. And if it is not a sound argument, why should we continue to replace our Lord's required element with an element that he has not commanded?⁵⁴

Thus, as we've seen, the weaker brother in Rom 14 does not refer to this situation, and the Corinthian abuse of alcohol during the Lord's Supper itself did not cause Paul to take away the wine. Rather, in both situations, the people involved needed to have their faith strengthened to understand better what God required of them and permitted them to do.

Since God has provided such rich imagery for the joy that His gift of wine brings which points us to the joy of the finished work of Christ, it is only fitting that we would follow His command and example in celebrating and proclaiming that very blood that purchased our salvation.

⁵⁴ Michael S. Horton, "At Least Weekly: The Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper and of its Frequent Celebration," *Mid-America Theological Journal* 11 (2000) 147-169.