

SCRIPTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF "THE CUP"

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When this paper was assigned the subject given for consideration was stated as follows: "Scriptural implications of 'the cup' in the Lord's Supper with regard to the current practice of using grape juice or wine." For the purpose of publishing the agenda for the conference that was understandably shortened so that the agenda has it, "Scriptural Implications of 'the Cup.'" That shortened title could of course be understood as covering a somewhat more broad subject area than originally assigned, so as to include also the often debated matter of the chalice versus individual glasses, a lively matter indeed with the present concern over the threatening AIDS situation. Though your essayist does have a definite preference in this matter, we shall, however, not go into that here, but shall confine ourselves to the subject as originally assigned: "Scriptural implications of 'the cup' in the Lord's Supper with regard to the current practice of using grape juice or wine." Here let me say from the outset that I am convinced that in this matter we are not dealing merely with what can be left to preference, but with something which our Lord has determined for us, from which therefore we should not go off on another course no matter how plausible argumentation for doing so may sound. This Holy Supper is our Lord's Testament to His Church in which in, with, and under the consecrated visible elements which He has ordained that we use He gives us His true body and blood to eat and to drink, and we should let it be entirely as He instituted it and not presume to change it in the least as in the matter of what visible element the cup shall contain. What was the visible element in the cup when He instituted it? Without question it was wine, wine from grapes. And with His "This do" of the Sacrament He has ordained that we should use the same. Thus it is that we confess concerning the Lord's Supper in the briefest of our Lutheran Confessions from the Reformation period, Luther's Small Catechism, -- and all our people have learned to confess this too --, "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself." With this the rest of our Lutheran Confessions are in total agreement without a single divergence. Not "under the bread and unfermented grape juice" do we confess, but "under the bread and wine" we receive the true body and blood of our Lord.

The early part of this century saw prohibitionist-type churches, which opposed all use of alcoholic beverages, taking the liberty of substituting grape

juice instead of wine for the Lord's Supper. Here let us note that such churches, being in the Reformed camp as they were, had a far less awesome and serious view of our Lord's Supper than we do, since they did not believe and confess the Scriptural dogma of the mystery of the Real Presence. Because of their lower view of what the Lord's Supper is all about, it was with relative ease that they took the liberty to decide to substitute grape juice instead of wine. Some of those churches, though they in general now have a far less restrictive view of the use of alcoholic beverages than they previously did, still do use grape juice instead of wine for the Lord's Supper, or, should we say, at least for what they call the Lord's Supper in their churches.

More recently for another reason, but perhaps conditioned far more than what many might think by the aforementioned practice still going on among various Protestant churches, some also in the Lutheran camp have under a certain circumstance permitted and advocated the substitution of grape juice for wine for the Holy Supper, that circumstance being the case of such as are former alcoholics. I am of the understanding that it is this situation which prompted the assignment of this subject for this paper, and it certainly is appropriate that it be addressed. Alcoholics Anonymous, the most well known of the various support groups for helping alcoholics overcome the problem of their alcoholism, insists on total abstinence from alcoholic beverages for all former alcoholics. They say that a former alcoholic can never take a drink again -- that doing so will cause him to revert to his old problem. In view of this opinion stressed by Alcoholics Anonymous, some Lutherans have reasoned that for such it is acceptable to substitute grape juice for wine so that, as they say, they still may have the Lord's Supper, but without being induced by wine in the Holy Supper to return to their old problem. Christian love for the former alcoholic demands this, so the reasoning goes. But if our Lord has ordained wine as the visible element which the cup is to contain, then that is specious and faulty reasoning which we as true Lutherans, yes, true Christians, should lay aside and repudiate.

In a moment we shall look further into the Scriptural implications concerning this whole matter, and see how God's Word clearly calls for the contention that it is wine that was the visible element in the cup when Jesus instituted the Holy Supper, and that this is therefore the visible element we are to use in the cup. But first let me digress a bit yet and note that the opinion of Alcoholics Anonymous that total abstinence from alcoholic beverages is a necessity for such as are former alcoholics or they will revert to their former problem, is not the unanimous opinion among all who carry on curative work among

people with this problem. There are others who maintain that a proper, controlled use of alcoholic beverages can be learned and practiced successfully by former alcoholics. A review of the evidence for this approach is given by Nick Heather and Ian Robertson in Controlled Drinking (London and New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1981). As for such as are former alcoholics partaking of the consecrated wine in the Lord's Supper, I personally have witnessed the fact that this can be done without such a person thereby being thrown back into his old problem. I think of a man who four years ago by God's grace and strength threw off the shackles of alcoholism, but not until after losing his job because of his long-standing problem. Previous attempts at being "dried out" by periods of hospitalization had not worked, but now he was succeeding in not succumbing to his old problem. He was attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and their program was helpful in numerous ways. But he came and talked to me about this very thing of Alcoholics Anonymous' insistence of no drink under any circumstances. He was troubled by that in relation to the Lord's Supper. He wondered if he should stay away from the Lord's Supper. Yes, he wondered if that meant the end of the Lord's Supper for him. He and I talked about this precious Sacrament and why our Lord had instituted it. And, making a long story short, together we firmly concluded that this high, holy, heavenly, divine, blessed, efficacious meal in which our gracious Lord gives us together with the consecrated bread and wine His true body and blood to eat and to drink to assure us of the forgiveness of our sins, to strengthen us against sin, to help us in all our problems, is just what he needed to support him in life's strife with which he was all too well acquainted. Since that time he has come regularly to this Holy Supper to eat the consecrated bread and, yes, to drink of the consecrated wine, and herein through his Lord who thus comes to him in this wonderful sacramental way he finds the strength which he needs. I would guess that others among us have witnessed the same kind of thing which I have here related. It simply is not so that such as are former alcoholics cannot under any circumstances, even at the Lord's Table, drink any alcoholic beverage. The Lord's Supper is also for them, that is, provided they are Christian, and duly prepared for this Sacrament. They do not have to feel that they must be forever cut off from this Sacrament because of the wine in it. And there is no reason for them to request that it be altered for their sake by substituting grape juice for wine, nor should they request this. Our Lord did not institute a Sacrament which as it is would be to the detriment of His Christians, even of such Christians as are former alcoholics, pushing them back into the sin of alcoholism; rather, He instituted it to their blessing, also to those who are former alcoholics, to give them

strength for their life in Him.

It is of course so, as we see as we look at the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and I Corinthians 11:23-25, that the word "wine" itself is not used in any of the accounts. All of them report that Jesus took the "cup," blessed it, and gave it to His disciples, but in reporting this they do not use the word "wine." So also the I Corinthians 10:16 passage, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ," similarly speaks of the "cup," but does not use the word "wine." However, that does not mean that we are left in the dark as to what was in the cup, but we know without any question that it was wine. Mark and Luke both report that Jesus referred to the content of the cup as "the fruit of the vine," and in Matthew we hear Him refer to it as "this fruit of the vine." The vine he is speaking of is unquestionably the grape vine. Now, some reason, "Unfermented grape juice is fruit of the vine too, even as is wine, and thus it is permissible to use either grape juice or wine; Jesus by using this term allows for this latitude." But reasoning thus fails to take into account certain pertinent and decisive facts. We need to remember well that Jesus refers to the content of the cup as "this fruit of the vine," the specific fruit of the vine that was then in the cup. And we know well what fruit of the vine that was, namely, grape wine, and not unfermented grape juice. We know that from the fact that the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper in the Gospels inform us that it was in connection with the celebration of the Passover meal that He instituted it, and, in complete agreement with the Gospels, Paul notes that it was on "the night in which He was betrayed" that He instituted it. For, to begin with, the night of the celebration of the Passover meal was in the spring of the year, and there was no unfermented grape juice at that time; the only fruit of the vine there was then was wine. Moreover, more than the matter of the time of the year is the circumstance that the cup which Jesus gave His disciples as He instituted this Holy Supper was a cup from the Passover ritual meal -- one of the four cups, all of which contained grape wine -- referred to by Jesus as "this fruit of the vine." To Jewish ears that term, "fruit of the vine," in connection with the Passover meal would have been understood as nothing else than grape wine. That is clearly what Jesus means by this term.

In noting that the Lord's Supper was instituted in connection with the celebration of the Passover meal, let us also note that that connection is a profoundly meaningful one. In preparing to write this paper, my attention was called to a research report which is in the Concordia Theological Seminary library at Fort Wayne, written by Robert L. Kriete titled, A Study of the Use of

Wine in the Lord's Supper with Application for Individuals Suffering Problems with Wine. Kriete, who is now a pastor in the LCMS, wrote this report while a student at the seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master of Divinity degree in 1984. In this report he briefly traces that meaningful connection between the Passover meal and the Lord's Supper in an interesting manner, and I would now present some excerpts of interest from a section of his report headed, "The Setting of the Old Testament Passover in Jesus' Day." In the excerpts which I will here bring, Kriete is mostly summarizing and quoting from others who have written much more extensively on the subject. Because of his brevity, his work will serve us well, being of sufficient scope for our purposes here. Kriete leads into this saying:

"A general outline will now be given of how the Passover meal was celebrated among the Jews in the time of our Lord. This is important for Christ did not institute the Lord's Supper apart from the Passover....The provisions for the Passover included unleavened cakes, bitter herbs, four cups of red wine, and the Passover lamb....They drank the wine at intervals in the meal and also diluted the wine with water. Depending on the strength of the wine it would be mixed with two or three parts of water to one part of wine.

"The Passover meal was generally divided into four courses, and during each course a cup of wine was consumed by the participants. The third portion of the meal was when the unleavened cakes (or bread) and the Passover lamb were eaten by all the assembly. The head of the house would take one of the unleavened cakes, break it, and pronounce the blessing over it, 'Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, Thou King of the universe, Who bringest forth fruit out of the earth.' Then he gave a portion of the bread to each person, who wrapped it in bitter herbs, then dipped it into the "Charaseth" (sauce) and ate it. (This is the "sop" or morsel Jesus gave to Judas.) After this the Passover lamb was eaten by all the assembly. The head of the house now lifted up his hands and gave thanks over the third cup of wine, which was referred to as the "Cup of Blessing." This cup was then passed to the assembly and drunk by all. Some feel that this "third cup" was the one used by the Lord in the institution of the Lord's Supper. In I Corinthians 10:16 St. Paul refers to the cup of the Lord's Supper as "the cup of blessing." It is possible that if this was the cup the remaining portions of the Passover meal were not completed, except for the singing of the Hallel (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26)...."

After listing, among others, Joh. Ylvisaker, The Gospels, as representative of this view, Kriete continues, " The Passover meal was important to the Jewish people. For the Passover at the time of Jesus looked both backwards and forwards.

This meal was a celebration by the people of the way God brought the nation of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. This occasion reminded them of what God had done, and an integral part of this meal was the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Though this sacrifice did not atone for their sins, it did show them God's mercy. It was a constant reminder of the covenant God had established with them. Finally, the Passover had become an occasion for looking forward to the future redemption of Israel from its sorry plight at the coming of the Messiah.

"This gives some indication why Jesus chose this festival to institute Holy Communion. He grafted the Lord's Supper into the Passover, better still, superseded the Passover, and fulfilled the essence of the Passover with this New Covenant known as the Bread and Wine, or Body and Blood, of the New Testament which He instituted as the perpetual permanent sacrament. With the institution of the Lord's Supper in connection with the Passover Jesus shows that the Old Covenant established by God which required the continual shedding of the blood of bulls, goats, and lambs had come to an end. A New Covenant....is now established in His blood, "This is the New Testament in my blood." (Matthew 26:28).

"Thus did our Lord ordain Bread and Wine to be the 'outward part' or 'sign' of the Sacrament of our Redemption by His death. In the ordinary Paschal Feast these elements had been subordinate. He now gives to them the first importance."

So much for quoting from Kriete's paper. And here I would proceed immediately to lead you into another document. This document was produced by the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and brings a good, solid treatment of the matter we are dealing with in this conference paper. The document is printed in the Concordia Theological Quarterly, Vol. 45, Numbers 1-2 (January-April 1981), p.p. 77-80. It is headed, "Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology," and titled, "The Fruit of the Vine in the Sacrament of the Altar." It reads:

"The classic definition of the Lord's Supper was given by Luther: 'It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and drink, instituted by Christ Himself.' Luther cites Matthew (26:26-29), Mark (14:22-25), Luke (22:15-20), and the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 10:16; 11:23-29) as Scriptural proof for the institution, nature, and meaning of the Sacrament of the Altar.

"In recent years some have raised the question whether grape juice might be substituted for wine in the Sacrament in view of the fact that the texts do not expressly state 'wine,' but 'fruit of the vine' or 'cup.' The reasoning is that grape juice should be an allowable substitute for wine in sacramental use, since grape juice can rightly be termed 'fruit of the vine.'

"The Scriptural texts leave no doubt that Christ was celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples. Among the foodstuffs on the table would have been unleavened bread and wine. As regards the latter, it was without question the fermented product of the grape vine, in view of the fact that this was the spring of the year, probably April. Moreover, wine was the customary drink of the Jews at solemn festival meals, the peri haggephen (liturgical Hebrew for 'fruit of the vine'). There can be no doubt then, as Lenski points out, that this 'fruit of the vine' -- with emphasis on the this -- which the Passover cup contained 'shuts out any and all other products of the vine save actual wine and thwarts all modern efforts that speak of unfermented grape juice, raisin tea, or diluted grape syrup' (Commentary on Matthew, p. 1028). The point is that 'fruit of the vine' is a technical term which in the stated contexts can have no other meaning than wine. The church has never, from that day forward, felt at liberty to alter the solemn testament given by Christ in conjunction with the bread and the wine of the Sacrament (cf. Matt. 28:20; Gal. 3:15). Whenever such altering or substitution was introduced, it was promptly repudiated, lest any doubt be cast upon the validity of the sacrament as Christ instituted it.

"In an article dealing with the 'Archaeology of the Sacraments' (CTM, X (1939), p. 328), P. E. Kretzmann avers: 'There never was any doubt in the minds of the teachers of the Church as to the meaning of the expression (fruit of the vine). For this reason they resented the use of any substitute for wine.' The consensus is virtually unbroken. The chief quibble seems to have been whether water was to be added to the wine. This Jewish custom was followed later in the Roman church, on the grounds that this action symbolized the uniting of the people with Christ in the priest's celebration of the Mass and on the fact that blood and water flowed from the side of the crucified Christ.

"The Lutheran Confessions stand as a phalanx behind Luther's simple and beautifully clear definition in the Small Catechism, 'under ... the wine.' There is not a single concession, nor any implication, that anything else was ever to be substituted or understood for 'wine.' The Small and Large Catechisms enjoy the support on this point of the Augsburg Confession (Article X), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article X), the Smalcald Articles (III, vi) and the brilliant exposition and defense of the Lord's Supper in the Formula of Concord and its Epitome (Article VII). There is a total concurrence that in the Lord's Supper Christ "offers His disciples natural bread and wine" (FC VII, 64). Countless other references in the Confessions attest the same fact.

"Luther's many writings on the Sacrament of the Altar also bespeak the same consistency of usage. There was no substitute for wine in the Sacrament. For

Luther, of course, Christ's precious gift of His true body and blood in the Sacrament was the pre-eminent thing, but never apart from the stated bread and wine. He advised those who had doubts or misgivings about receiving both kinds in the Sacrament to forego reception for the time being. That they could do without sinning (St. L. 22, 1862; 21a, 608). He noted, too, that the Sacramentarians, for all their wild notions concerning the meaning of the Sacrament, were at least agreed on one point, viz., that the bread was bread, and the wine, wine (St. L. 20, 1773). While he considered it an adiaphoron whether water was mixed with the wine, Luther's personal emphasis was on natural wine, without additional diluting or mixing with water (St. L. 19, 258). Luther noted that the Scriptures did not specify whether the wine should be red or white (though it was to be of or from the grape vine), nor whether the bread was to be of wheat or barley flour or another grain (St. L. 20, 188). These matters were adiaphora, as were also the quantity and shape of the host or bread, manner of distribution, and other externals or usages connected therewith.

"Sometime during the winter of 1542-43 Luther was asked whether a sick person, wishing to have the Sacrament but unable because of nausea to use wine, could be given something else in place of wine. According to Kaspar Heydenreich, who recorded the conversation, Luther replied (WA 74, TR 5, 5509; emphasis added.): 'The question has often been put to me; but I have always responded as follows: Nothing else but wine should be used. If wine cannot be taken, then let the matter rest that way, in order that nothing new is done or introduced. Must a person who is dying receive the sacrament yet? In times past it was said that he who received the one kind might consider himself to have partaken of both kinds. Why do we not rather say: If you receive nothing, consider yourself to have received both?'"

"Clearly Luther rejected any idea of substitution for the materia terrestris. Hence the barbed reductio ad absurdum above, suggesting that then a person take or receive nothing and just simply believe that he has received something.

"Luther's stance, as also that of the Confessions, is upheld by all Lutheran theologians. (Cf. Baier-Walther, Compendium, p. 498; N. Hunnius, Epitome, p. 208; F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics 3, p. 354; T. Engelder, Popular Symbolics, p. 93; J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p. 525; Ad. Hoenecke, Dogmatik 4, p. 115; E. Hove, Christian Doctrine, pp. 340f; et al.) Martin Chemnitz, the Lutheran church's greatest theologian in the generation after Luther, wrote definitively of the Sacrament of the Altar in his Enchiridion, in his famous Examen Concilii Tridentini, and in his beautiful De Coena Sacra. As with Luther there is no question in Chemnitz's mind as to the prescribed elements, bread and wine; Holy

Scripture clearly teaches them.

"Nor ought the question be raised for dispute in our day. Those who do so, that is argue that 'fruit of the vine' should also allow for the use of grape juice, processed or unprocessed, are clearly making this suggestion for other reasons than on Scriptural grounds. The idea of insinuating or substituting grape juice (or something else) for wine is of sectarian background, stemming specifically from religion bodies which pledge total abstinence from all liquids that have alcoholic content.

"There is no ground for the notion that the use of wine in the Lord's Supper contributes to alcoholism or even threatens the so-called alcoholic. The sin of drunkenness, like adultery, homosexuality, etc., is clearly expoxed in Scripture as serious (I Cor. 6:10); but the source of the evil in each such case of sin is man's own depraved, evil heart. Even though some may argue on scientific grounds that certain individuals are naturally and constitutionally more inclined to alcoholism, for example, than others, this still would not remove the onus of sin. By virtue of his sinful nature man is prone to all manner of sin, but Scripture nowhere allows us to teach that man is, as it were, biologically programmed by God to be so and so. This would virtually remove from man the responsibility for his sin and place it on God, something totally repugnant to Scriptural teaching. We may be sure that Christ, who knew perfectly what was in man (John 2:25), would not have instituted anything, including the Lord's Supper and the use of wine, if it in any way would contribute to man's delinquency. The Apostle Paul's pastoral practice also underscores this fact (I Cor. 11). The wine in the Lord's Supper threatens no sinner who comes in repentance and faith, but consoles and lifts him up with the precious gift of the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and gives him strength for godly living. This is the only teaching Scripture supports.

"Those who simply 'prefer' to receive grape juice instead of wine should be led to see that their 'preference' is in violation of Scripture's own clear teaching and that they are thereby making the Sacrament an uncertain matter, if in fact not invalid. Moreover, it is to be feared that such tampering with the Sacrament may in the final analysis involve a deeper error, the relegating of the Lord's Supper to a mere memorial meal instead of the blessed means of grace that Christ has constituted it to be for our spiritual well-being, for the forgiveness of sins.

"Any substitution for the Scripturally stated elements is especially offensive because it yields to the intrusion of Reformed theology and practice into the Lutheran church. It is to be expected that those who hold the Lord's

Supper to be a symbolical eating and drinking will have little difficulty substituting other elements for the bread and wine. This has been true in some Reformed circles. Needless to say, the strength, or alcoholic content of the wine, is not the issue, as long as natural grape wine is used. This, therefore, rules out some bizarre concoctions, or mixtures, which are sometimes sold as wine, such as grape juice mixed with alcoholic spirits distilled from grain.

"We strongly urge, therefore, lest confusion be multiplied, offense be given, consciences and peace within the church be disturbed, that Lutheran pastors and people continue a consistent practice in support of the Scripturally designated elements in Holy Communion, especially as regards the use of wine, 'the fruit of the vine,' which Christ instituted when He gave to His church this new testament in His blood."

Thus concludes this document by the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Only one concern would I deal with a bit more before concluding this paper, and that has to do with persons who are former alcoholics, as well as, we would add, with persons who experience a feeling of nausea from wine and those who are affected by wine more readily than usual, etc. In partaking of the Lord's Supper, it of course is not necessary to drink much of a quantity of wine. Whereas the former alcoholic of whom I told you before drinks freely from the cup at the Lord's Table, it is possible for one communing to take only a very small sip of the consecrated wine. Another thing: While Luther says that "fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training" for persons preparing to go to the Lord's Supper, fasting is, of course, not necessary, but, as Luther says, "he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'" Rather than fasting and thus coming to the Lord's Table on an empty stomach (which I am of the impression very few today do), it may be very helpful to such as sometimes experience nausea from the wine at the Lord's Table or who very readily experience affects from wine, if they will make sure to eat a good breakfast not too long before the Communion service. Moreover, for all such persons with whom we are concerned in this paragraph, there is the possibility of mixing water with the wine given them in the Holy Supper, thus diluting down the alcoholic content of what they receive. For mixing water with wine is, as we have noted in this paper, an adiaphoron and thus allowable, though many of us under ordinary circumstances may, as Luther, prefer that the wine of the Holy Supper be undiluted. I do not know whether the possible practice of diluting the wine with water for such with whom we are concerned in this paragraph is presently recommended as a possibility at our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at

Mequon. Those of you here who have recently graduated can inform us on that. But I do know that this practice is recommended as a possibility by President Wilhelm Petersen in his dogmatics class at the seminary of our sister synod, Bethany Lutheran Seminary at Mankato. I know that from my two sons, one of whom graduated from there a year ago, and the other of whom will graduate from there next year.

Yes, for special cases dilute the wine of the Holy Supper with water if need be; but let it be wine in the cup; let it be that visible element that was in the cup when our Lord instituted this Sacrament and said "This do." Let it be "this fruit of the vine" of which he spoke, and not some other kind of fruit of the vine or anything else! Proper regard for the words of our Lord in regard to this in the words of institution should move us to this. Well does Martin Chemnitz in his book, The Lord's Supper, write, "The words of the Lord's Supper are not to be treated in a light or frivolous way, but with great reverence and respect and in the fear of the Lord, because they are the words of the last will and testament of the Son of God." Thus let us be utterly faithful to those words, including in the matter of using wine as the visible element in the cup, and then

With treas'ring hearts let us partake
Of that dear Supper, gracious God,
In which our Savior for our sake
Gives His true body and true blood
'Neath consecrated bread and wine
To help us with this food divine. Amen.