

THE JUICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER?

In making many mission trips into Ghana in West Africa in years past, I came acquainted with the claim that "tomato juice" is a scriptural and acceptable juice for the Lord's Supper in churches of Christ. This claim in Ghana seemed to come from some brethren in Accra, Ghana, under the guidance of an American missionary who had some influence in a school of preaching in that city. I actually read some material by this missionary advocating the acceptability of tomato juice in this manner, but no longer have access to that material. Let's consider the acceptability of such, however.

In the Passover meal in the Old Testament, the Jews understood that they were to use "unleavened bread", (Exo. 12:8) which in those days was made from **wheat flour**. The scripture forbade them from using "leavened" bread, and they were admonished to **not** have anything relating to leaven in their houses (Exo. 13:5). Would not this include any kind of **drink** that might be leavened? Before looking at the possible acceptance of tomato juice, let's look first at the matter of alcoholic wine in communion.

FIRST, let's look at the claim that **fermented wine** is acceptable for the Lord's Supper. Bear in mind that in the Greek language the word *oinos* is the common or basic word found in the New Testament that is translated "wine." In other words, to determine whether "wine" is intoxicating or not, is basically determined by the context of the word, as it may or may not be fermented juice of the grape, or grape wine. Actually, the process of fermentation basically changes fresh grape juice into another drink called "wine". When Jesus instituted the communion for the church, He did **not** use a word that can have a dual meaning, but rather the term "fruit of the vine" or "the cup", which is very specific and cannot have a dual meaning such as we are considering. The yeast has been added or formed that changes grape juice into an intoxicating drink. We realize that many brothers and sisters in the church casually use the word "wine" in connection with the communion, but do **not** believe it is scriptural to use "intoxicating wine", but out of long practice of hearing or reading of some in generations past who did refer to the drink of communion as "wine", continue the careless use of the word "wine" when referring to the "fruit of the vine" in the Supper of the Lord.

Then there are some areas even in North America where some identifying themselves as members of the church of Christ, that actually maintain that we MUST use alcoholic wine in communion. Question: Could this be **any** kind of wine, such as that which comes from apples, pineapples, or plums? You see, even the word "wine" can continue to be understood *generally* in our language today, and does not always relate to grapes. Just to say that "wine" is acceptable in communion, opens the door to other types of wine than that which comes from grapes. Young's Concordance gives one word for "wine as *yayin*, which means "what is pressed out, grape juice" (page 1058). So, to be consistent, one needs to specify the type of wine to be used, to be sure it comes from "the vine", with the words generally referring to grape vines. When the term "the vine" is used in Old Testament times, it was understood that grape vines were under consideration. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, states on page 3049 of Vol. IV, that the Hebrew word for "vine" was *gephen*, meaning "the cultivated grape vine." Thus, to be on the Lord's side in this matter, would be to use the terms He used in describing the particular drink He used in instituting the Supper, "fruit of the vine." This is the safe and proper term we can

use when referring to the drink of the communion, and then using that product in our observance of the supper.

SECOND, the use of “tomato juice” continues to come up now and then, even in North America. We do not know if this comes as a result of the Ghana influence or not, but it must be answered. We have already established that in Bible days it was understood that when “fruit of the vine” or “the vine” was used, it was understood that the vine was the **grape vine**. (Song of Solomon 2:13, 15; 7:12) The “vineyards” mentioned over a hundred times in the Old Testament are describing “grape vineyards.” Point is, “Where in the Bible does it ever refer to a TOMATO VINEYARD? The Lord did not use “fruit” of A vineyard, but fruit of THE (a specific word) vineyard. We are not to use just “any” juice in communion, but the juice of “the” vineyard, grape juice. Tomatoes are generally considered as coming from a “tomato plant, or tree”, and not from a vine. If we can use tomato juice (coming from a plant), why could we not use apple juice (coming from a tree), or gourd juice (coming from a vine)?? IF we have the option of choosing for ourselves as to which juice we shall use in communion, can we make the right choice, and can we make the wrong choice? Are we going to say, “Oh well, a vine is a vine, so select the vine of our choice, for one is as good as another?” This is the kind of reasoning folks make concerning the church, and in both situations, the choice is not between similar churches or similar juices for communion, but the choice is to whether do what the scripture teaches and be right with the Lord.

Research shows that there ARE some tomatoes that DO grow on vines, but most generally come from plants, and in some instances, from tomato trees. The question is, if some tomato juice comes from vines, and some (most of it) from plants or trees, HOW are we to ever know if the tomato juice we purchase came from a vine or plant or tree? We just MIGHT be drinking juice from a tree, and we would not know how to determine if it is from a vine or a plant (not a vine). There is no danger of our not being SURE about grape juice, for it all comes from “the vine”. Now, if it becomes the case that grapes can come from plants or trees OTHER THAN VINES, then we would have to deal with the matter of what “fruit of the vine” meant **in the first century**.

Clearly, the use of tomato juice is an unauthorized drink for the Lord’s Supper. Just because it is a liquid that comes from a plant, takes us away from using something specifically stated to something generally available. This is about like saying the music for Christian worship can come from any instrument or source, rather than the voice of singing as specified in the Bible. Let us be safe than sorry, let us follow the teaching of our Lord in this matter.

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