

Before We Come to the Table

A few of you have asked me a good question recently: why don't we use wine at the Lord's Table? I want to answer it honestly, because it's worth explaining to all of us.

I grew up in churches that only used grape juice, and I never thought to ask. When I looked into it, here is what I found.

The church has used wine for most of its history. Christians in the second century describe bread and a cup of wine. The Reformers used wine. Our own Baptist forefathers, in the 1689 Confession, speak of the Supper as "bread and wine."¹ Grape juice only appeared about 150 years ago. In the 1800s, many American Christians joined the temperance movement because they saw what drunkenness was doing to families and communities. One of them was Thomas Welch, a Methodist dentist who served the communion elements at his church. In 1869 he developed a way to keep grape juice from fermenting so his church could take the Lord's Supper without alcohol². Methodist churches adopted it first, and many Baptist churches followed. Their concern was sincere, and it came from real compassion for people harmed by alcohol.

History isn't our authority, but Scripture. Jesus used wine. The Last Supper was a Passover meal, and the Passover cup was wine. When Jesus said, "I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine..." (Matthew 26:29), he was echoing the Jewish blessing spoken over the cup of wine. In Corinth the church was using wine too. Paul rebukes some of them for getting drunk at the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:21). Notice, he *corrected their behavior, not what was in the cup.*

Next week we will offer both. The wine is one tray and the juice is in the other tray. Both are labeled. You may see some juice cups that have a cover, and that is for those who have health sensitivities. Here is why we're keeping the juice: Paul says, "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble" (Romans 14:21). Some of us have a history with alcohol, a health reason, or a conscience that says no. That brother or sister belongs at this table as fully as anyone else. Both cups are the fruit of the vine. Both proclaim the same thing: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25). Neither juice nor wine is more spiritual, genuine, or honoring to the Lord. Take the one you can take with a clear conscience.

¹ <https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-30> (accessed October 22, 2026).

² <https://www.umc.org/en/content/communion-and-welchs-grape-juice> , <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2016/09/how-methodists-accidentally-invented-your-kids-grape-juice/> (accessed October 22, 2026).