



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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August 6, 2020

Dear Beloved in Christ Jesus and Saints of God,

This letter was supposed to go out back in March, but our communion was - in many ways - disrupted, so we delayed sending this letter for nearly six months! But now as we commit to persevering through difficult circumstances, we are ready to announce a change in the way the Lord's Table is observed here at First Presbyterian Church.

I. The Elements of the Lord's Table

One of the great battle cries of the saints following the Protestant Reformation is, "the Church is Reformed, always being reformed according to the word of God." We are in a long line of saints who struggle to "*contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3).

Because we believe the Scripture not only teaches us what is necessary for salvation, but also how to worship God and live by faith, the Session is continually examining our practice in light of Scripture. Our goal is to be a church that is pure in both doctrine (what we believe) and practice (what we do and how we live); the standard by which that purity is measured and tested is the Word of God.

Back in the winter, the question was asked to the Session as to why grape juice is served with the Lord's Table rather than wine. As Session grappled with the reasoning and attempted to respond, we realized we could not make a biblical argument to support the use of juice instead of wine at the Lord's Supper.

For that reason, Session voted to begin using wine with communion starting in April. Well, we haven't come to the Lord's Supper in quite some time, so that transition has been delayed to this month.

As we come to the Lord's Table on August 16, we will do so in a way that is consistent with Biblical practice as well as the Westminster Standards by setting bread and wine before the people of God. Nonetheless, for those with medical concerns and cannot imbibe any alcohol, juice will still be available.

We had planned to have a forum to discuss this reform with the congregation in the Spring, but the Lord had other plans for us! However, if you have questions about this, you are welcome to call the church and make an appointment to discuss this with me or one of the other elders. As we make this transition, I hope it will become abundantly clear our desire is to conform our church practice to the commands of our beloved Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As we reform our Lord's Supper practices, I want to take a few moments to address some of the frequent questions or concerns people have to observing the Lord's Supper as it was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Doesn't the Bible forbid Christians to drink alcohol or call it sinful?

No. The Bible nowhere forbids God's people from drinking alcohol. The Bible warns about drunkenness and makes it clear to be "addicted to much wine" (1

Tim 3:8) not only disqualifies one from church office, but is sinful. Nonetheless, the Bible nowhere condemns the act of consuming alcoholic beverages as sinful. Instead, Jesus commanded His disciples to drink wine and looked forward to drinking wine with His disciples in His Kingdom (Matt 26). Likewise, the Apostle Paul commended wine to his disciple (1 Tim. 5). Far from being sinful the overall testimony of Scripture is that wine is a covenant blessing of God for His people, so it is very appropriate to drink wine with the new covenant meal in anticipation of doing so in the New Heavens and New Earth with all the saints.

2. ***Wasn't what the Bible calls "wine" or "fruit of the vine" actually nonalcoholic?***

No. What the Bible calls "wine" or "fruit of the vine" was wine. In fact, it was not possible to distribute unfermented juice until the late 19th Century and the development of pasteurization. In fact, up until the late 19th Century all Christian churches utilized wine with communion; it was only heretics (e.g. Mormons) who abandoned the use of wine with communion before the very late 19th Century.

3. ***Isn't it illegal to serve wine to minors?***

No, at least not in every instance. Georgia Law does not prohibit children from drinking wine as part of religious services. Additionally, the amount of alcohol served is substantially less than what is in cough medicine or mouth wash.

4. ***Won't this harm someone who is an alcoholic?***

No. When we follow the form of prayer that Jesus taught, one of the things we ask is that God not "lead us into temptation." Since God has commanded us to pray along those lines, we firmly believe He will *not* lead us into temptation. Therefore, we must trust our Saviour - who instituted His supper with bread and wine - will not harm us by what He has given for our spiritual nourishment. Moreover, if someone is so deeply in bondage to alcohol that a small amount of wine from Christ's table will cause him or her to fall back into previous sin patterns, that suggests deeper spiritual issues, which should be discussed with members of the Session before coming to the table.

5. ***Will drinking wine at communion impact my ability to drive home?***

No. The amount of wine consumed will be so minuscule, it should not have any impact on your ability to operate a vehicle. The communion supper is a foretaste of the heavenly feast, so only a small amount of bread and wine are served (only about a quarter of an ounce of wine, which at 10% alcoholic volume will not even register in the blood). However, if you are concerned about driving home, please linger after worship for fellowship with the body of Christ! If you are on blood thinners or other medication and have been instructed never to consume alcohol, there will be juice available.

6. ***Isn't wine with communion something for Roman Catholics?***

It is true that the Romish Mass features wine, but the Romish Mass also features bread. And Roman Catholic worship services also feature singing and Scripture readings. Moreover, simply because the Romanists do something, does not mean we shouldn't do it; we are governed by Christ the King who has given us His word. Are we permitted to change what Christ has instituted simply so we don't look Roman Catholic?

7. *Are you sure Jesus used wine?*

Yes. Jesus took the *cup* at the (final) Passover meal, and in the Passover cup was wine, since that is what was consumed during the passover meal (and most other meals in the First Century). Remember, Jesus not only commanded His people to drink wine (“do this in remembrance of me”), but made wine as well. The wine He made even impressed the catering director, which was surely no easy task! Our Lord clearly saw no problem not only with His people drinking (responsibly), but also to provide an abundance of wine for a party and for the first several years of a young married couple’s life together (cf. John 2).

The culture in which we live heavily impacts us in many ways, sometimes in ways we don’t even realize. One of the ideas the culture often enforces is the idea that “Christians don’t drink alcohol,” but that is simply not based on the Bible. I remember when I was younger, I would take juice rather than wine at communion because I thought that was more spiritual, but I was wrong because in that choice I was not obeying Him who commanded, “do *this* in remembrance of Me.”

Our goal in this is to be faithful to Christ and honor the conscience of those who desire to come to the Lord’s Table with the elements Christ instituted. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please give me a call. Thank you for taking the time to read our reading for doing this. It is my prayer that our congregation can move forward together in obedience and devotion to as well as delight in our Saviour as we come again to His table.

II. *Communing with Christ and His People*

As I noted earlier, we will return to the Lord’s Table in Evening Worship on **August 16**. The procedure will be rather different because of our extraordinary circumstances. For example, the elders will wear masks and gloves to distribute the elements in order to avoid giving offense by the appearance of carelessness as we distribute the communion elements.

The elders will continue to bring the people the bread and wine, however instead of each communicant ripping off a piece of bread or taking a cup of the wine, the elders will place enough bread and wine for the communicants in a household on a plate at the end of the pew. After the elders have moved to the next pew, the communicants can pass that plate to one another. After all the people coming for communion have been served, we will eat the bread and then drink the wine together.

Although we’ll try to provide clear instructions when we come together on August 16, this first observance of the Lord’s Supper under this strange protocol will surely have missteps. So please be patient and flexible as we continue to muddle our way through this season of life confident because of Christ’s finished work on the cross and His ongoing intercession for us at the Throne of Grace.

Your servant for Christ’s sake,



Ryan Biese,
Pastor