

THE
SMITH-BLEDSON DEBATE:

A WRITTEN DEBATE
ON THE WINE QUESTION

M. Lynwood Smith and Jack Bledsoe

1946

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE:

According to what information we have been able to find, this is the only debate in which M. Lynwood Smith ever participated.

One unusual feature of this debate is that it only addresses one side of the proposition. We can (I think) safely assume that the original plan was for each side to have their own proposition to affirm, but the debate appears to have been ended prematurely, before brother Smith was able to affirm a proposition. One writer claimed that Jack Bledsoe, feeling the sting of the arguments by Mr. Smith, quit the debate. However, when you read Bledsoe's final rebuttal, it is very hard to take that claim seriously.

Whatever happened, we are still left with an interesting discussion. The issue at hand in this debate is this: Is alcoholic wine the "fruit of the vine" used by Jesus when instituting the Lord's Supper?

We believe you will find the contents of this debate to be interesting and challenging.

Bradley S. Cobb
2016

FIRST AFFIRMATIVE

Jack Bledsoe

Proposition: “*The Scriptures teach that (grape) wine, being fully fermented, is the fruit of the vine of Matthew 26:29, or answers the specifications of the passage.*”

Jesus says in Matthew 26:29, “But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this ***fruit of the vine***, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father’s kingdom.” Now, the vine is the ***only source*** of grape wine. Genesis 9:20-21, “And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine and was drunken.” Noah ***certainly drank of the wine that his vineyard produced***. And for men to say he didn’t is just as bad as some who say the disciples all did not drink of the cup that their Lord gave them at the last supper, when Mark says, “they all drank of it.” This passage shows that the vineyard is the source of grape-wine and none can successfully deny.

Jesus says that a tree is known by its fruit. Wine, being fully fermented, is still the fruit of the vine. Numbersbers 6:4, “All the days of his separation shell he eat nothing that is made of the ***vine tree***, or the ***vine of the wine***.” (See marginal reading). We learn from this that the *grape-vine* is known as the *wine-vine* in the Scriptures. Wine, then, is the fruit of the vine, as the tree is known by its fruit. Both old and new wine come from the vine.

Fruit means the same as produce. That wine is the principal product of the vine is an evident observa-

tion, for in the present day there is more of the produce of the vine kept in this form than any other. Especially is there more in this form than in the pasteurized form for which some modernists have become contentious. Bro. Waters, in his tract on the communion, states, "He (referring to Christ) used a term "*gennema*" which never was translated 'wine,' and which can only refer to the fruit and offspring of the vine." I must say that this word has never been used to denote that this offspring of the vine was pasteurized or "brought under pressure to a certain temperature" or, as he further states, "I think it can be established by history that the fruit of the vine was preserved unfermented as far back as one thousand years before Christ." He says *he thinks*. I do not accept such "think-sos" as the Scriptures teaching, do you? The word "wine" itself means *fermented grape juice*, and is only loosely applied to both fermented and unfermented. It must be qualified as unfermented to mean the same. As proof of this see Webster's unabridged dictionary. If you question his testimony, just remember he was responsible for our being able to read the English Bible with understanding.

Fermentation is a purifying process through which the juice of the grape is naturally refined by the forces that God has wrought in the world. Isaiah 25:6, "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all the people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, *of wines on the lees well refined.*" Just as the chaff must be winnowed from the grain by the wind, the wine must be set in the vessels and be poured off the dregs or lees to be

refined. Jeremiah 48:11, "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel." Wine, to be refined, is the figure of Moab ... it must be emptied from vessel to vessel — from off the Lees. The lees are the settlings in the bottom of the wine vessels, which are thick and syrupy. The first passage shows that it must set long enough for the lees to collect and the latter, that the wine must be emptied off. This will be pure blood of the grape for in Genesis 49:11, "He washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes." Did not Israel wash his garments and clothes in the same thing? Then wine must be the blood of the grape and wine on the lees well-refined is certainly the pure blood of the grape.

Paul, the apostle, says, "the *cup of blessings*, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ." Joel 2:14 tells that a drink-offering is a blessing. "Who knoweth if he will return and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering." Numbers 28:7, "In the Holy place shalt thou cause the 'strong wine' to be *poured unto the Lord* for a drink-offering."

Young's Concordance defines this strong wine as that that "satiates or pleases." So our blessed Lord rightly used strong wine in the institution of the communion for it still contained the blessing that the new wine contained when it was found in the cluster; the blessing was not destroyed (Isaiah 65:8). It was the cup of blessings. Some have translated thus contrary to Waters and others: "He took a wine cup." "He took a wine goblet."

In closing I repeat the proposition which the proofs that I have submitted rightly sustain beyond doubt. "The Scriptures teach that (grape) wine, being fully fermented, is the fruit of the vine of Matthew 26:29, or answers the specifications of the passage."

Jack Bledsoe

FIRST NEGATIVE

M. Lynwood Smith

You failed to define the terms of your propositions. I trust you will do this next time, as I presume the debate is to be published.

Argument 1 — Genesis 9:20 — Because this passage teaches that Noah drank wine and got drunk, surely you do not offer this in support of the proposition under consideration. Would you contend that Noah got drunk from drinking that which the vine produced?? I know you do not believe this. To say he did would be to say that the vine produces wine (fully fermented), and there is not one known that so produces. Then to say that he got drunk on something else, is to say just what I believe ... that Noah made the wine that he got drunk on and the vine did not produce it.

All this passage teaches is this: (1) Noah planted a vineyard. (2) His vineyard produced something (What was it? Here is where the issue lies). (3) Noah took that which the vine produced and allowed it to go through a process that would cause it to make someone drunk. (4) Then Noah drank that and became drunk from it.

Does this teach your proposition? Does this teach that fermented wine is what the vines in his vineyard produced? This only teaches that one can make wine out of what the vines produce, and no one is denying that. I deny that the vine produced what Noah got drunk on. Would anyone believe that Noah could have gotten drunk from drinking what was in the clusters??

Noah drank “his wine” and it made him drunk (v 24).

Argument 2 — Numbers 6:4, “All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree (or wine of the vine) ... etc.” Surely you can see that this does not help your cause any, even though it says “wine of the vine,” which I verily believe. I believe the vine is the “wine vine.” I believe that the vine produces wine. But I stoutly deny that it produces what you have obligated yourself to prove ... wine — fully fermented. That is what you must find before your proposition is sustained. I know that wine (unfermented wine) is produced by the vine. “As the new wine is found in the cluster ...” (Isaiah 65:8). Now the kind of wine that is found in the cluster is the kind that the vine is called for. Hence the passage is void of support of your faltering proposition.

Argument 3 — Yes, “fruit” means “product.” It also means “produce and offspring”! Thus you have affirmed that “The Scriptures teach that grape wine (being fully fermented) is the fruit of the vine ... etc.” Where do the Scriptures teach this, Bro. Bledsoe? Where do they teach that fermented wine is the product, produce, or offspring of the vine? Surely you would not say it is taught because Noah made some wine and got drunk from it (*his* wine), or because the vine is called a “wine tree.”

I stoutly deny that fermented wine is the principal product of the vine. You say that it is “evident from observation.” You affirmed it by the Scriptures. But where do the Scriptures teach that fermented wine is the principal product of the vine?? Many things may be “evident from observation,” but may not be evident

from the Scriptures. I contend that the product that comes from the vine is the product that my Savior used in Matthew 26:29. Call it what you may, but this ***I know*** is the fruit of the vine.

Argument 4 — You state that fermentation is the process by which grape juice is purified. Do you contend that grape juice is impure until it has been made wine? Is that your contention? I call on you for your authority on this. I deny that Isaiah 25:6 hints at any such thing. “The grape juice that is in the cluster is impure until man’s hands have assisted in purifying it.” Is that your position??? In Genesis 1:11-12 God commanded the earth to bring forth. The fruit trees yielded fruit, and God said it was good. Was it good, Bro. Bledsoe? Or was it impure? Remember, the vine is called a tree in Numbers 6:4. It seems that you are taking a one-sided position. You say that you will use grape juice, yet here your position forces you to say that anything besides fermented wine is impure. You better get a position to suit this passage or let it alone.

You offer Joel 2:14 and Numbers 28:7 ... then you say that “the Lord rightly used strong wine in the institution of His Supper.” That is strange indeed! Now if “strong wine” in Numbers 28:7 means ***fermented wine*** as you contend, that forever shows that there is a difference between fermented wine and grape juice. We are not sure that the Lord used strong wine. Do you know why we know he did not use strong wine??? Because He said “***fruit of the vine***” and not “***strong wine*** “ It seems that brethren could see this. You know that the strong wine in Numbersbers is from “***shekar***” and “fruit of the vine” is from “***gennema***”

You would do well to notice the difference.

If Jesus used strong wine as you contend, and you claim it is so plainly taught, why do you not contend for it stronger than you do? Why do you say that grape juice will do as well?

You have **not** proved your position, nor can you do so. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby, is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

Yours for the Truth,
M. Lynwood Smith

SECOND AFFIRMATIVE

Jack Bledsoe

Proposition: “The Scriptures teach that (grape) wine, being fully fermented, is the fruit of the vine of Matthew 26:29, or answers the specifications of the passage.”

A definition of the proposition is requested. It has been my desire to use in this discussion a proposition that was self-defining, so that all of the contrary party could easily understand. Sometimes, however, defining needs “defining.” I’ll try again. By **Scripture** I mean the Old and New Testaments. By **teach** I mean in any way the Bible teaches by commands, examples, or inference. **Fruit** is produce or offspring as we have already noticed. By **answers the specifications** I mean fully fermented grape juice meets all the requirements of the phrase “this fruit of the vine.” By **fully fermented** I mean well-refined by age as “wines on the lees well-refined,” and “No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth the new; for he saith, the old is better.” See Isaiah 25:6 and Luke 5:39.

There was no reply as to whether you accepted Waters’ and other’s think-sos as proof. If you do, I confess I am not trying to prove my position by them. In closing you cite “wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Notice Hosea 4:11 fits well in this connection. “Whoredom and wine and new wine destroy the heart.” He says wine *and* new wine. Will you now remain as you are for “new wine that is found in the cluster” (Isaiah 65:8)? We have now learned that **new**

wine is a mocker, too, for it takes away the heart. Will you now say that this did not come from the cluster?? If you can't use the new wine Hosea named in this verse in your communion service, you cannot give **one bible Scripture** for new wine that you **will** use except Isaiah 65:8. I grant you this one, for it serves your position well. "Found in the cluster." Do you, would anyone, think of using "wine in the cluster" on the Lord's table?? It says, "as (it) is found." I have never yet heard of anyone using grapes on the Lord's table, have you?? Now will you not admit that the new wine comes forth out of the cluster, and does not stay as it is in the grape as you have maintained Isaiah 65:8 to teach. "Fruit of the vine" comes from or out of the vine. It can only mean grapes unless it is specified as a drink.

My contention is as strongly stated in my proposition as I know how to give it. May the Lord help you to see *that wine is grape juice, known in the Scriptures as both old and new wine.* The old is **better**, the Lord says in Luke 5:39. I'd rather believe he used the best, hadn't you? You said nothing about Webster saying wine meant fermented grape juice, and must be qualified to mean "unfermented." Now in English that is what "wine" means, and I don't believe the translators changed it to get this meaning, do you?

Joel 2:14 says, "leave a blessing ... even a ... drink offering." Numbers 28:7 says, "... cause the **strong wine** to be poured for a drink offering." Yes, the Lord used the "cup of blessings" and **strong wine** was a blessing for it was **used in the drink offering.** The blessing was not destroyed by its being fermented

and well-aged, but made better thereby. I have already shown from Hosea that the ***new wine will destroy the heart***, and I sure want you to consider that the Apostles in Acts 2 were accused of being drunk on ***new*** wine ... so you couldn't use that for it is the same that came from the clusters of Noah's vineyard (Isaiah 65:8). And Jesus said also that new wine would burst old bottles (wineskins). So, in the Bible ***new wine*** is described as less desirable than old and well-refined wine. Sure, I was speaking of "*shekar*" when I said Young's Concordance defined "strong wine" as that that "satiates or pleases." This could not have been ***new*** wine for it was well-refined and at its best. This strong wine was tithed to the Lord, and it had to be the best. Jesus says the old is better. "*Gennema*" means "offspring or produce." Watch, for you are the witness. You say unfermented wine (more scripturally ***new*** wine) is the fruit of the vine. I must agree. When this new offspring or product gets old and fermented you say it is no longer of the vine. Now, according to these definitions you have accepted, and this reasoning, when a baby gets grown or fully aged it cannot claim its childhood parents, but is the product of the course of his life. Though he be a great man, he cannot be the product of his parents. Now ***you*** are the judge.

Does age and refining have anything to do with wine being the fruit of the vine? It would be as well to argue that because men strain the pulp and seed from grape juice it must be the product of man. Jesus said a tree is known by ***its fruit***, and Numbersbers 6:4 bears this out ("vine of the wine"). All grape wine comes from the vine. I repeat, both old and new wine comes

from the vine. For the observation I gave as evident, I cite you to the Britannica or any standard encyclopedia. Why question this? Isn't this as good as any other man's think-so?

Did not Israel "wash his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of the grape" (Genesis 49:11)? You did not consider this??? ***Wine is the blood of the grape*** for he washed garments and clothes ***in the same thing***. Now "wine on the lees well-refined" is certainly the ***pure blood of the grape***. You have denied it. Please give Scripture!

I did not say the vine produced wine already fermented, or that cow's milk was clabbered when you milked it. Nor will I say the vineyard that Noah planted produced a grape juice in bottles, or that a cow will give strained and pasteurized milk. But I repeat, Noah drank of the wine that "came from the clusters of his vineyard, and was drunken." If not, I'd as soon believe that all the disciples did not drink of the cup at the last supper when Mark says, "they all drank of it." Noah's wine ***was not the product of Noah***, but of his ***vineyard***. The vine said, "shall I leave ***my wine*** that cheereth God and man?" (Judges 9:13). Will you now admit the truth?

The Scriptures teach that (grape) wine, being fully fermented, is the fruit of the vine of Matthew 26:29, or answers the specifications of the passage.

Jack Bledsoe

SECOND NEGATIVE

M. Lynwood Smith

Argument 1 - Because I quoted Proverbs 20:1, which condemns your type of wine as a “mocker,” you in like manner seek to find a Scripture which will place the same condemnation upon the unfermented juice of the grape. Your effort at this was Hosea 4:11, which says, “new wine takes away the heart.” Hence you conclude that because “new wine” is said to take away the heart here, it is condemned. Then if it is condemned here, it would be also in Isaiah 65:8 because the same term, “new wine,” is used in both places.

This is poor reasoning. We know there are two kinds of wines spoken of in the Bible. This must be admitted or we make the Bible contradictory. For proof we notice Leviticus 10:9 which says that wine must not be drunk in the Lord’s house. Then in Isaiah 62:9 we find where they were commanded to drink it in the courts of His holiness. Hence, we must conclude that two kinds of wines are under consideration. Now I say that the kind that is not fermented is the fruit of the vine, but that kind which Solomon called a “mocker” is not what the vine tree produced. There are also two kinds of “new wine” spoken of: a kind of “new wine” that will “take away the heart” (Hosea 4:11), and a kind that will make drunk (Acts 2:13). But I deny that this *new wine* is the fruit of the vine. Yet there is another kind that is called a “blessing” (Isaiah 65:8). That is the kind that is found in the cluster. I contend that this is the “fruit of the vine.” I

deny that these two different kinds of “new wines” are the same. In what way could the “new wine” of Isaiah 65:8 take “away the heart”??? Hence, according to the usage of the passage, there are different “new wines.”

Argument 2 - You insist that if one contended for Isaiah 65:8 as proof that the unfermented juice of the grape was the fruit of the vine, he would have to have the “cluster” on the Lord’s table before he could have the “new wine” as it is found in the cluster. This I deny. I contend that one can have the new wine of Isaiah 65:8 without having the cluster. You notice that the blessing was in the “new wine” that was in the “cluster.” Isaiah said there was a blessing in the new wine when it is ***“as it is found in the cluster.”*** Now I say we may extract it from the cluster and allow it to stay unchanged (just as it is found in the cluster), and you still have the blessing. That’s why I contend that it should not be changed after it ***comes from the cluster.*** But you brethren are like Noah. You take it and change it, and it is no more ***as it is found in the cluster*** when you get through with it. When it was ***as it was in the cluster*** it was called a “blessing” (Isaiah 65:8), but when you change it by fermentation it then becomes known as a “mocker” (Proverbs 20:1). The text says, “Destroy it not,” but you brethren destroy the nature thereof; hence you destroy its ***blessing***, and instead, it becomes a ***mocker.***

Argument 3 - You keep bringing up Luke 5:39, which has to do with the “old wine is better.” Although this Scripture is dealing with wine, yet it does not apply to this case under consideration. We are not debating which kind of wine is best, but “is fully fer-

mented wine the fruit of the vine”? Now you prove that the “old wine” mentioned here is the fruit of the vine.

Argument 4 - Now in regards to the “strong wine” of Numbers 28:7, I have this to say. If you contend that this is fully fermented wine, you have to prove that it is the fruit of the vine. That is what you affirmed. In your former letter you stated, “So the Lord rightly used ‘strong wine’ in His supper.” This is not so plainly seen, nor so easily proved. Before saying he used “strong wine” you must prove strong wine is fruit of the vine because (1) the Savior used “fruit of the vine”; (2) you say He used strong wine; (3) therefore you must prove “strong wine” is the “fruit of the vine.” Otherwise you cannot affirm that fully fermented wine “answers the specifications of Matthew 26:29.”

Argument 5 - The argument you make on *gennema* was pitiful. Surely the boy is the “offspring” of his parents. He grows up to maturity, but is still the “offspring” of his parents. But please notice this Scripture which is a parallel to your position. In Genesis 19:26 when Lot’s wife “became a pillar of salt,” was she *then* the *gennema* of her parents???

Argument 6 - This was answered before, but has been brought up again. Just because in Numbers 6:4 the Scriptures say, “he shall eat nothing made of the vine tree (margin - wine of the vine), you contend that gives you **proof** that fully fermented wine is the fruit of the vine. There is not one vestige of proof for your claim in this passage. I admit that it is the wine tree but it is not the **fully fermented wine tree**. That is

what you affirmed. The vine produces wine (Isaiah 65:8), but not what you affirmed — **fully fermented wine**.

Argument 7 - Now we will notice Genesis 49:11, “And He (Shiloh, Christ) washed His garments in **wine** and His clothes in the **blood of grapes**.” You admit that the wine and blood of grapes here mean the same thing. Good! Then what one is, the other is. The way one was produced, the other was produced. Now how were they produced?? Where did they come from??? I contend they came from the “choice vine” that he was to bind His “Ass’s colt to.” What kind does the vine produce?

“I did not say that the vine produced wine already fermented” (Jack Bledsoe).

Well, what kind does the vine produce? The kind that is in the cluster (Isaiah 65:8). The kind that was treaded out of the grapes in the winevat (Jeremiah 48:33). We see in Isaiah 63:2-3 that Christ’s garments were stained like one who had been treading in the winevat. “I have trodden the winepress alone.” So then, the kind of wine that the choice vine produced was the wine that was treaded out of the grapes. Hence he stained His garments in “the blood of the grapes,” the wine that came from “the choice vine.” This truly pictured the time our Lord “treaded the winepress alone” in death. That day His garments were stained with blood, and he looked like the grape-treaders who treaded out the wine in the vintage seasons. No wonder the major prophet, Isaiah, could ask, “Wherefore art Thou red in thine apparel,

and Thy garments like Him that treadest in the wine-vat?"

Argument 8 - Now I will give attention to Judges 9:13, "Should I leave *my wine*, which cheers God and man?" Now you say because this says, "my wine," that *fully fermented* wine is the fruit of the vine. But when we see what kind of wine this was, *then* will we know whereof he spoke. Who was speaking in this passage? The Vine! Then whose wine was "my wine"? It was the vine's wine. What kind of wine is the vine's wine? It is the wine that is found in the cluster (Isaiah 65:8). Also, in Amos 5:11 we find that the vineyard produces wine. What kind does it produce?

"I did not say the vine produced wine already fermented" (Jack Bledsoe).

Hence, the kind of wine that the vine called "my wine" must have been the kind that was *in its cluster*, and that was *not fully fermented* as you have affirmed.

Hence there is no Scripture left for you to depend on that this most deadly drink is the fruit of the grape tree which God said "was good."

"Wine is a Mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

M. Lynwood Smith

REBUTTAL

Jack Bledsoe

“Wine is a mocker” and “new wine (will) destroy the heart,” therefore it is a mocker too. The new wine Hosea named is the same that is pressed out of the cluster (Isaiah 65:8). Not “as it is found” in the grape, but has *only* been **pressed out** quite recently, and the opposition can’t use it. So he must either use it in the cluster as it is found, or try to make it new again by heating and sealing airtight. Trying to fix grape juice as it is in the grape, is like putting an egg back in the shell. His only proof text has failed him. He fixes his own grape juice and yet can’t use the wine he says Noah made. Isaiah 65:8 has truly mocked him. He did not admit that the new wine comes forth out of the cluster before use, and Isaiah 65:8 **leaves** the new wine where it is found, “in the cluster,” not **out of** the cluster where he can use it. He now says there are two kinds of new wine, but according to my prediction, Isaiah 65:8 is his only text. Not a passage in the Bible names new wine that he would use except this, and it says, “as it is found in the cluster.” It is grapes until it is out of the cluster. It is produced in the cluster and not in bottles by heating and sealing airtight. All bottles (wineskins) in the Scriptures had a vent. Job said his belly was as a bottle without a vent.

The “old wine” is “fully aged.” It comes from the same vine, “the tree it is known by its fruit.” After the wine has been pressed out of the cluster and is old and fermented, the vine can still claim its offspring just like the parent can claim the son when he has

grown old. The vine said, "shall I leave *my wine* that cheereth God and man." It does not cheer God and man while it is *in the vine*. It is still *of the vine* as long as it will cheer God and man.

You did not answer. Webster says "wine" means fermented grape juice and is only loosely applied to both. It can *only* mean unfermented when qualified (Webster's Unabridged).

Christ was changed -- made perfect -- when he suffered and rose, yet He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Wine is changed when fermented, but it is still "of the vine," "the fruit of the vine," for the vine is the "wine vine" of Numbers 6:4.

Lot's wife was corruptible, and was changed to a pillar of salt. But she was still of her father and mother for their bodies were mortal and corruptible too. Her end, a pillar of salt, did not change her parents in the least.

Isaiah 25:6, "Wines on the lees well refined," is the pure blood of the grape for Judah prophetically "washed His garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes" (Genesis 49:11). You denied this but gave no proof.

Joel 2:14, "a blessing ... a drink offering." Numbers 28:7, "Strong wine ... for a drink offering." You say the blessing was destroyed, but surely you are mistaken for the drink offering was a blessing, and it was the strong wine. You have ignored this. You can see that this was the fruit of the vine for the tithes were of the vineyards. You did not say whether you accepted Waters' and others' "think-sos" as proof. I will guess you do unless you care to state otherwise. Is this why you

cannot see the truth of my proposition??

“The Scriptures teach that (grape) wine, being fully fermented, is the fruit of the vine of Matthew 26:29, or answers the specifications of the passage.”

Jack Bledsoe