



The Reflector

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The One Body of Christ and Many Churches of Christ

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One Body

The one body (church) of the New Testament (Ephesians 4:4; 1:22,23;) is not a brotherhood of churches, but a brotherhood of Christians. It has no *earthly* headquarters, *earthly* organization, *earthly* overseers, or *earthly* spokespersons. It is a spiritual kingdom within God's people (Luke 17:34). It only functions as each Christian operates under the headship of Christ. It never assembles as a group. It never works as a unit. Those making up this body have a common bond because of the spiritual blessings they share – a common authority, a common faith, a common newness of life, a common love, a common salvation – thus an interest in all the others that have these things around the world, most of whom they have never seen nor heard.

It is indestructible by reason of its nature. It is that kingdom that shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). It is indivisible by reason of definition. Since it is simply defined as the number of the saved (Acts 2:47), it cannot be split into separate numbers of saved people. The number of the saved can be *added* to through conversion, or it can be *subtracted* from through apostasies. The number can even be *multiplied* (Acts 6:1, 7), but it cannot *divide* into two bodies of saved people. When people leave the Lord they are no longer among that only number of saved people. Those who leave the church leave the Lord. Those who leave the Lord leave the church. It is like trying make two mountains without a valley between them. It impossible by reason of definition.

Many Churches

The many "churches of Christ" spoken of in the Bible are divinely ordained local organizations ideally composed only of people who are also in the

one body of the saved. These organizations are instructed to receive folks desiring to be one of them – if they can verify their discipleship (Acts 9:26). They are also taught to expel those unwilling to practice discipleship. Though they are operating under the instructions of God's word, those who must choose whom to receive (or retain) and to reject (or expel), sometimes make mistakes. The church at Corinth retained at least one that should have been expelled (1 Corinthians 5). Diotrephes led a church in expelling some that should have been retained (3 John 9-10). Hence, all those on local churches' membership lists are not always the same as on God's list of members of the one church ("the book of life") and vice versa. When we speak of the work, worship, and organization of "the church" we generally are speaking of the work, worship, and organization of each of these "churches of Christ."

The one church is not a confederation of local churches. Nor is it an institution after political and business models where there is a corporate entity with satellite branches (congregations). This concept of the church evolved after the death of the Apostles. This concept became the "church" of historians and thus the concept of many people. Hence, many of the noble efforts to correct "error" and "division" in "the church" have been aimed at bringing the "faith and practice" of the "federation" nearer to the Bible and bringing the local "branches" all back into line with the federation.

As one of God's saved number, one is to *individually* carry the gospel of Christ to the lost and to build the saved up in the faith as he worships and serves his Master in the present world. He is to also join himself to a local church (described above) to collectively carry the gospel to

the world and to mutually edify one another in the faith. He is also to regularly come together with them to worship and work together. Having a common authority with all other such groups (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17), to extent that they follow that authority they will be alike.

Unfortunately local churches, ordained of God but administered by humans, often fall short of the ideal. They sometimes divide. They sometimes die. This was true in the first century and is true in the twenty-first century. As I heard someone say, "Local churches are temporary." So true, but the universal church is permanent.

It just seems to me that a clear understanding of the difference between the one church of Christ and the many churches of Christ would go a long way in solving a lot of problems for brethren. ■

Wine in the Bible –How Fermentation Was Prevented

Ryan Hasty

Wine in the Bible is spoken of as a blessing in its unfermented state and as an intoxicant in its fermented state. Many do not realize that those living in biblical days were able to keep their wine from fermenting and in fact did so regularly. How did they accomplish this in an age without refrigerators? There were 3 primary methods:

First, they boiled their wine down to thick syrup. Boiling grape juice causes the water to evaporate leaving behind a concentrate with such a high level of sugar that fermentation was impossible. Syrup in this state could be preserved for years. Whenever they wanted to drink this unfermented wine, they would mix a small amount of this syrup with water much like we do with our Kool-Aid. Different ratios were used depending on the type of grape, the age of the syrup, the temperature of the water, and even the season.

Prov 9:1-5 – *"Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table; she has sent out her maidens, she calls from the tops of the heights of the city: 'Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!' To him who lacks understanding she says, 'Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed.'"*

The above verse refers to the mixing of wine as

"wisdom" whereas Prov 20:1 refers to a person intoxicated by wine as not being wise. The contrast is clear. Boiling grape juice to prevent it from fermenting and then mixing with water to enjoy as a beverage is incumbent of wisdom and was a blessing from God.

Aristotle – "The wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was contained and to dissolve the scrapings in water."

Horace – "There is no wine sweeter to drink than that of Lesbos; it was like nectar . . . and would not produce intoxication."

Second, those living in biblical times had developed methods to filter wine and remove its strength. While pressing out the grape, they would use a bag called a "sacco" that captured the fermentable substances, allowed the juice from the pulp to flow through, and then collected it in a vase below the bag. Several historians mention this method as in use during biblical times as well as the fact that one of primary reasons they did this is because unfermented wine tastes better.

Pliny The Younger – "The most useful wine has all its force or strength broken by the filter."

Plutarch – "Wine is rendered feeble in strength when it is frequently filtered. The strength or spirit thus being excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and passions, and is much more pleasant to drink."

This is the testimony of two non-Christian Gentiles confirming that filtration causes wine to taste better because its strength is removed. But they are merely confirming what we already know. Beverages like grape juice begin fermenting when they are going bad, not when they are getting better. Alcoholic beverages are an "acquired taste" purely for the effects produced in the body by the alcohol and not because it tastes good.

Third, they were able to refrigerate and seal wine. Grape juice kept at 45° or less cannot ferment. If it is kept cool long enough, the gluten settles at the bottom and the juice can be skimmed off of the top where it can never ferment even if warmed. We know from archeology that they stored this kind of wine in caves, under water, and in the ground where it was cooler. So even without refrigerators, they still had the means to keep wine cool. They also kept their containers air tight by corking the bottle and then sealing it with pitch.

The Jews also poured olive oil on top to seal the juice from the air. In the 1960s, a sunken ship was discovered at the bottom of the Mediterranean that had containers of wine dating back to the Roman Empire. The containers were sealed so well that water from the sea had not penetrated them.

With multiple ways of preventing fermentation, this is further proof that wine of biblical times was not necessarily alcoholic, but could easily be preserved and enjoyed as a refreshing alternative to water and a blessing from God that provided joy and not intoxication. ■

Have You Ever Been Mad at God?

J. R. Bronger

“I have been mad at God many times. I would go outside and shake my fist at God and let him know how angry I was. It just isn’t fair.”

These words were blasted out like the heat from a furnace from one whose life is hard and growing harder. All one has to do is sit through the funeral of a child; look into the dying eyes of a loved one, or try to comfort a woman whose husband of 30 years leaves her for a younger and prettier woman and you will often see those who are “mad at God.”

I must acknowledge that life is unfair. This unfairness is seen on nearly every page of the Book of Job. It was hard for Job to swallow and it is as hard for us today as it was for him. Job and his friends try to understand Job’s tragedies but they can’t. They all agree that God should reward those who do good and punish the evil doers. Based on this premise, the friends conclude Job must be an evil doer—but Job is confident that he has not committed some secret sin. This is so unfair. “Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, so that I am a burden to myself?” (Job 7:20). It almost appears that Job feels that God is not doing so well at running the world, and I think this is why the Book of Job seems so modern and relevant, because we too often struggle to understand life’s unfairness.

Why do the innocent suffer? Why, for example is a child molested and killed by some drug-crazed psychopath? But then the drug dealer who supplied him lives in a multimillion dollar mansion and sends his children to private schools with security guards. This is unfair!

Faithful Christians who die in the prime of their lives but atheist entertainers flaunt their disdain for God and live to ripe old ages. It certainly isn’t fair that liars, cheaters and unscrupulous businessmen are able to amass riches while godly men lose their jobs and perhaps their homes. Believe me I would love to be able to say to the parents of a beautiful six-year old girl stricken with a malignant brain tumor “Don’t worry, the world is fair, you just pray and your daughter will recover.” But I can’t—because life is unfair, and when we are beaten to our knees because of it we tend to become angry with God.

Before continuing, I want to ask the reader to pause and consider this question: “Have you ever been angry with God?” Has God made you mad? Has there been such unbearable trauma in your life that you just could not restrain yourself from lashing out at God?

There are those who when faced such a crisis of faith turn away from God. Anger turns to hatred and they want nothing more to do with God. They conclude that because God is fair (just, and righteous) then life should be fair. Therefore, when life is unfair they conclude that God is unfair and they bail on Him. They feel betrayed by God: “This is so unfair.”

Then there are those who seem to have great spiritual resilience; they are able to face the difficulties and unfairness of life with an unshakable faith. Like Paul they voice, “. . . the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day . . .” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

I believe there is reason some become angry with God during life’s disasters while others are drawn into a deeper relationship with God during these difficult days. Once a man, whose wife was dying with cancer and who, himself, had recently been involved in an automobile accident that left him nearly blind and suffering from migraines to the point he was no longer able to work as a psychotherapist, was asked about his disappointments with God. “Have these tragedies soured you on God?”

Was he angry with God? Had the misfortunes of his life embittered him? Was he disappointed

with God? After thinking for a few minutes he answered “I don’t feel any disappointment with God.” Then he explains; “The reason is this. I learned, first through my wife’s illness and then especially through the accident, not to confuse God with life. I’m no stoic. I am upset about what happened to me as anyone could be. I feel free to curse the unfairness of life and to vent all my grief and anger . . . (but) I don’t blame God for what happened.”

What he was expressing is something all believers need to learn. We tend to think that life should be fair because God is fair—but life is not God. He went on to say: “God’s existence, even his love for me, does not depend on my good health.”

Do not fall into the trap of thinking that because God is fair life will be. Life is not God! Our faith in God must transcend life. If we can develop a relationship with God apart from life’s circumstances (unfairness) then we will hang on when the physical breaks down.

If we conclude that life must be fair because God is, then when life deals us a tremendous blow, we become angry and leave God, then all we really had was “contract faith,” not genuine faith (2 Timothy 1:5). Contract faith is “I’ll follow God if life is fair, but when it’s not I will seek support elsewhere.”

Genuine faith, however, is anchored in Christ despite the brazen unfairness of life. “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

The greatest illustration of life’s unfairness is in Calvary. The sinless died for sinners—the innocent was beaten, spat upon, cursed and mocked, and there was nothing fair in that. Consider Paul’s profound observation: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we

shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation,” (Romans 5:6-11).

Every Christian savors the benefits of the death of our precious savior—but there was nothing fair about His death. As Pilate said: “I find no fault in Him.”

So, the next time you feel a tinge of anger, or disappointment with God, take your eyes off the unfairness of life and focus on Calvary. ■

“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” (Hebrews 12:11 NASB)

The unpardonable sin to many in our time is for preachers to make folks feel bad about themselves and their situations. One purpose of the Holy Spirit’s word, delivered to the apostles, is to “reprove (convict) the world of sin.” (John 16:8). When one is convicted of his sins he is uncomfortable with himself until he does something about his sins - like repent of it. But he cannot truly repent of it until he is made to feel godly sorrow over his sin (2 Cor. 7:10). If we spent less time trying to take the pain out of discipline, the sorrow out of repentance and the sting out of reproof and preached the word with conviction as it is written we might even be more effective.

No, not every effort at preaching has to be to convict. There needs to be encouragement and instruction for the converted. But, we need to get over this obsession with sugar coating preaching so as to avoid making folks feel so bad about sin in their lives. We kind of doubt that those on Pentecost were feeling very good about themselves when they were pricked in their hearts after being told they had taken the Lord of Glory and by wicked hands crucified him. After Peter accused them of that sin and proved it on them, they wanted to know what to do to get relief. Then they were told to “repent and be baptized.” (Acts 2:37-38). Nor do I suspect that brother Simon felt really great about himself upon being told by brother Peter that “I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23), but the rebuke brought positive results. EB
