

The Singularity of the Church of Christ

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Denominational churches have existed for centuries. Because of their long historical background it is likely that many people believe that denominations have been here since the beginning and that God is even responsible for their existence. It is commonly accepted, by those in and out of the church, that God is completely satisfied with denominational divisions. The consensus among most is that it makes no difference what denomination you are a member of, all believers will eventually be saved and live eternally in heaven. Nothing could be farther from scriptural truth. Seldom do people stop to ask, “Is the concept of denominationalism found anywhere in the Bible?” Or, “Does God even sanction them?” People need to study their Bibles much more to find the answers to these important and pertinent questions. After all, each person is going to held responsible for what he believes and practices (John 12:48-50; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The Bible is capable of settling all disputes; it alone must be the final word on all religious issues. God’s word is right and will always be right even when men (that includes very knowledgeable men—2 Timothy 3:7) are wrong (Rom. 3:4). Man must accept the truth of the Bible even if it opposes what he currently believes. So often men open the Bible with a biased mind, desiring to find passages that agree with the denominational doctrine they already hold. This approach will simply not do since it is the truth of the Bible that will set men free; not “so-called” truth invented by men (John 8:32; 17:17).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and has been given for the following purposes:

1. to teach man all things that pertain to life and godliness,
2. to correct man when he is wrong,
3. to reprove him with the knowledge from above and
4. to instruct him in righteousness behavior (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3).

For the scriptures to accomplish this, man must be willing to accept what the Holy Scriptures decree.

Where in scripture does the Bible teach that the Lord established many churches divided over doctrine, wearing different names, practicing varied styles of worship, and having dissimilar arrangements in organization? Turn to that passage and point it out. Where in the Bible can we find that one may believe and obey a denominational creed and get to heaven? Such an inquiry is pertinent since we live in a world with well over twenty-two hundred (2,200) denominations (and the number is still growing). The truth of the matter is, denominations cannot be found anywhere in the Word of God. If there can, then please show us the passage. Only one church is set forth in the scriptures. Every soul must be in that one church in order to be saved. The prayer of this writer is that you will study and consider the following scriptures with a ready mind and an open Bible (Acts 17:11).

There is only one church because Jesus built only one. Jesus said to His disciples, “And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall

not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Count the number of churches Jesus promised to build in the passage. Notice the precise and plain singular noun “church” and the definitive singular pronoun “it.” The Lord could not have made His intent any more clear. Denominationalism cannot be a reasonable conclusion based upon this passage. As a matter of fact, never did He express a denominational concept in connection with His church. Only by perverting the scriptures could anyone surmise that Jesus was building a dozen or more denominations divided over doctrines and religious practices. Man must be careful not to put words into the Savior’s mouth.

There is only one church because Jesus bought only one. Paul expressed this in Acts 20:28 as he spoke to the elders of the church in the city of Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Paul expressly said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.” He did not purchase numerous churches. No, He purchased only one. “The flock” means only one flock. “The church of God,” means only one church. Paul is in perfect harmony with Jesus. Those that teach denominationalism is acceptable are not in harmony with Jesus or Paul.

The elders were not told to feed “a” church of God. This could possibly indicate one among many in the city of Ephesus. They were told to feed “the” church of God which signified only one church was in mind. The Lord did not make a mistake when He inspired each of these words to be written. Man makes a mistake by trying to alter what God has already said in His holy Word.

As we look at this passage we see also that the one church that Jesus bought and built is authorized to have elders appointed to feed and oversee the church. The record shows that Paul ordained elders in every congregation of the Lord’s church: “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23). Every local congregation in the first century was organized the same, elders were put in place to shepherd the flock. Jesus did not purchase the denominations with their popes, reverends, councils, synods, boards, and manmade hierarchies. None of these are found in the Bible. If they are not in the Bible then it must be the case that they have come from men. Jesus said, “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7). No true follower wants to worship God in vain.

There is only one church because Jesus is the head of only one. The book of Ephesians has much to say about the singularity of the church. In it inspiration says, “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). Once again “the church” clearly means one. Also notice from this passage that the “the church” is also “the body.” Throughout the book of Ephesians the terms “church” and “body” are used interchangeably to refer to the same institution. Body or church is what Jesus is going to save according to Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.” Christ is the head and Savior of only one church (Colossians 1:18).

In Ephesians 4:4 we are told there is one body. Notice the seven ones in Ephesians 4:4-6. There is not only one body, but also one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one Father. Most denominational people will accept three of the ones in this passage. They will accept one Spirit (Holy Spirit), one Lord (Jesus Christ) and one God and Father. But at the same time

they will reject the other four. Instead of one church (body), man says there are many bodies (churches). He also says that there are many hopes, many faiths and many baptisms.

Ephesians 2:16 teaches that men (both Jew and Gentile) will be reconciled to God in one body. Ephesians 2:20 tells us that there is only one household of God. This household is, "...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). Now the church is being described as a building with a chief cornerstone. "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit" (Ephesians 2:21-22). There is only one spiritual temple in which the Deity abides.

There is only one church because Jesus gave only one Gospel. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). One Gospel means that there is only one message to be taught and hence only one plan of salvation. There are not many ways to be saved—only one. The Lord said, "...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me" (John 14:6). The only way to heaven is the way Jesus authored (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Jesus spoke the words that would save when He said, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, he shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Salvation requires belief. He also said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Salvation requires repentance. Jesus also spoke the following, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32). Salvation includes confessing with your mouth belief in Christ Jesus (Romans 10:9-10). The final act of obedience that brings about the remission of sins is baptism in water. Jesus said, "...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). My friend, this is the way of salvation explained in your Bible.

This is the one way to be saved. It is from heaven not men. There are not a dozen deviations of this plan. It is a matter of historical record that man is given to modifying, altering, and changing the unchangeable word of God. Whenever man changes God's word, it is seen as a perverted Gospel, powerless to save. Read what Paul said to the Galatians:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9).

Man is not satisfied with God's plan so he changes it. Though people still do it, changing the Gospel is forbidden. There is only one church and one Gospel. Obedience to one Gospel is the only thing that will produce the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20-22).

There is only one church because Jesus authorizes only one faith. Ephesians 4:5 plainly says: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” In reading Acts 6:7 you will find that people were obedient to only one faith, “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” The Bible teaches one faith, not many. This is consistent with all of the other passages we have already mentioned.

The Heavenly intent was to produce unity among believers, not division. Notice the words of Jesus as He prayed to His Father:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:20-22).

Jesus never prayed for division and neither did he condone it. He prayed for all believers in His prayer. It would be unfair to say that all of the denominational bodies represent the unity for which Jesus earnestly prayed. That is totally untrue.

There is only one church because there is only one doctrine we can teach. Another very significant passage that helps to destroy the concept of denominationalism is 1 Corinthians 1:10. It says, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Denominationalism violates every facet of this passage. It says, “It is not necessary to speak the same thing; we can have divisions among us; we do not have to be perfectly joined together either in the same mind or in the same judgment.” 1 Corinthians 1:10 is a death nail to denominationalism. Religious division does not have God’s approval. Unity is the only concept taught in the Bible and acceptable to God.

Conclusion

Let us briefly summarize what we have discussed. How many churches are there? Let’s answer it this way:

1. How many churches did Jesus build? **One** (Matthew 16:18)
2. How many churches is Jesus the head? **One** (Colossians 1:18)
3. How many church is Jesus going to save? **One** (Ephesians 5:23)
4. How many churches did Jesus die for? **One** (Ephesians 5:25)
5. How many churches did Jesus purchase? **One** (Acts 20:28)
6. How many churches in the beginning? **One** (Acts 2:47)
7. How many faiths in the New Testament? **One** (Ephesians 4:5)
8. How many Gospels can we preach? **One** (Romans 1:16)
9. How many interpretations are there? **One** (1 Corinthians 1:10)
10. How many groups of disciples does God want? **One** (John 17:21)
11. How many brotherhoods do we find in scripture? **One** (1 Peter 2:17)

One church is wise. Families are religiously divided because of denominationalism and its conflicting and confusing doctrines. God did not produce the confusion, which results from the teaching of over two thousand denominations. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).