

Is Only One Church Right?

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Probably no charge creates more prejudice against a group of people than the charge that they think there is only one church that is right. This fact clearly indicates that most Americans consider all churches right. Is it possible that only one church is right?

At least three other questions must be answered before this one can be answered intelligently.

1. Is there such a thing as right and wrong? Many who complain so bitterly about such a claim do not believe that anything is absolutely right or wrong. If there is no right and wrong, then obviously any claim to be the only right church would be ridiculous. However, if there is a God and if He created us, then He is the standard of right and wrong (Romans 3:4). His word is truth (John 17:17).

2. Is there a right and wrong in religion? Some who accept the concept of right and wrong in the realm of morals exclude it from religion. They seem to think that God is so loving and good that He will accept anything man may do and dedicate to Him. But Jesus warned of false teachers who would come in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). He stated that worship was made vain by teaching the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9). Paul informed the Galatians that anyone who preached any other gospel than what he had preached would be accursed (Galatians 1:8), and Peter predicted that there would be false teachers among us (2 Peter 2:1). So religious teachings can be false and religious practice can be wrong. Jesus also said, "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted" (Matthew 15:13). This is equal to saying that churches not planted by the Lord will be rejected.

3. Has God designated any exclusives in religion? Consider Ephesians 4:4-6. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The "one" in these verses obviously means "one and only one."

These verses do not allow for our modern broad-mindedness. Such broad-mindedness, however, is not really new; it existed in the first century among the Ephesians to whom this was written. Paul became the focus of a riot because he insisted "that there are no gods made with hands" (Acts 19:26). To put it another way, he preached there was "one and only one" God. The Ephesians were tolerant of many gods, but intolerant of anyone who said there was only one. Most of us would agree that there is one and only one God. But the same verses say, "there is one body." What is this one body? The same writer says in Ephesians 1:22-23 that God has given Christ "to be head of all things to the church which is His body." So if there is one body and that body is the church, this is saying there is one church. If one God means only one God, then one

body means one body or only one church.

What is the one church? Without doubt, the one body (church) referred to in Ephesians 4:4-6, was the church that Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:18). It was to be founded on the fact that He was the Christ, the Son of God. That church began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when Jesus was first publicly proclaimed to be the Christ, based upon the facts of His resurrection from the dead. Those who believed asked, "What shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"...Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:37-38, 41, 47).

Please note that all who were saved were added to the church. It includes all who were saved, for the Lord added all who were saved to it. But if it included all who were saved it was not a denomination, for a denomination by definition is only one part of a whole. Neither was it a combination of all denominations, nor even an association of local churches known as "churches of Christ." The one body was made up of individual members, not of local churches. It was the one true church to which all who were saved were added. It was that one body described in Ephesians.

How can this church be identified? Jesus said that the gates of Hades would not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:18). It must be in existence today. If it is, it has Jesus Christ as its only Lord and the gospel as its only faith. It is entered by the one baptism, it still includes all who are saved, and it is not one of many. It is the body of Christ (Colossians 1:18), Christ's church (Matthew 16:18), the church of God (Galatians 1:13), the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15). It is the one and only church that is right.