

## Which One?

Gary McDade

Perhaps you've heard that a marriage ceremony is described as a union between two people where the two become one and then spend the rest of their lives trying to figure out "which one?" Imagine that a person becomes a Christian and in doing so has learned that the Lord adds all the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). Then the new Christian looks around and surveys the religious landscape today and sees literally thousands of churches—dozens of which find representation in his local community. Reading his Bible he learns that the body of Christ is the church, and as the Lord had only one body even so He has only one church,<sup>1</sup> he asks, "Which one?"

Did all these churches come from God or from man? If they came from God, you'll be able to read about His approval of them in the Bible because the Bible is the final word from God (Revelation 22:18-19). If they came from man, they cannot be trusted because God said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

As the book of Genesis is the beginning of the universe, the world, and mankind, just so the book of Acts is the beginning of the church. The church had been in the mind of God before the world ever began as Ephesians 3:9-11 shows, but its beginning point as an existing reality is found in Acts chapter 2. Did the thousands of churches in the world today start then? In order to find out let us notice the traits of those first Christians. One strong trait was "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32). They were not just bunched together; they were "of one heart and of one soul."

Why this was so was because the church belonged to Jesus (Matthew 16:16-18), and His will for it was that all who were in it would be united. For this He prayed in John 17:20-23, "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 hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." (Did you notice in this reading that five times He used the singular numeral "one"? "One" means "one"—not thousands or even dozens—"one.")

Where this premise of the example of the traits of early Christians in the book of Acts and their concept of one body, one church is really tested is in Acts chapter 15. You have to read the whole chapter to get it, but the summary is there was a movement to have two churches: one for the Jews and one for the gentiles. (They never got along; see John 4:9). The apostles and elders came together to discuss this matter, and after much discussion, even "disputing," the outcome was that God "put no difference between us [Jews] and them [gentiles], purifying their hearts by faith" (v. 9). Now, think about this for a minute. If God didn't want two churches—one for the Jews and one for the gentiles—who could think He wants dozens or thousands of churches today?

The church of Christ is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-32). Abraham had three wives (Genesis 16:3; 25:1) and many concubines (Genesis 25:6), David had many wives (1Chronicles

3:1-9) and many concubines (v. 9), Solomon topped them by having 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3), but Jesus Christ said, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain [two] shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain [two], but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:4-6). Christ has only one bride. Since His bride is His church, He, therefore, has only one church.

So, we see that all these churches did not come from God because He wants all His followers to be united and because Jesus has only one bride, one church. The Bible shows that men would “depart from the faith” (1 Timothy 4:1-3) and set up their own churches (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). Jesus Himself taught the emptiness of following men over God in Matthew 15:8-9, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” And, the apostle Paul straightforwardly charged—and his writings are “the commandments of the Lord”—that there are to be no divisions among those who are Christians (1 Corinthians 14:37), “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” (1 Corinthians 1:10, emphasis added).

In conclusion, when it comes to a discussion of the church, the question, “Which one?” is answered by the Bible because the Lord provided us with only one option. It is the one that bears His name (Romans 16:16) to which He adds all the saved (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23). Truly, the question is not “which one?” because there is only one!

---

<sup>1</sup>Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4.