

Discipleship Questions

How many churches did Jesus promise to build?

How many churches did Jesus build?

Does Jesus's teaching about being the true Vine with many branches indicate the presence of different churches?

What did Jesus pray about in John 17:20-23?

How does the unity of Christ's followers impact unbelievers?

How is unity among those who follow Jesus possible?

What is apostasy and how did the New Testament authors warn about apostasy?

How are the many churches today connected with apostasy?

The Singularity Of The New Testament Church

There are tens of thousands of different kinds of churches today within what is commonly called "Christianity." These all claim to be or be part of Jesus's church (Jesus's collection of saved people). This state of division leads to great confusion. Some suggest that all (or at least many) of these groups are acceptable to God and part of His church. However, the Scriptures consistently teach the singular nature of Jesus's church. Rather than many different groups of saved people, Jesus only has one collection of saved people (sometimes called the "universal" church).

Matthew 16:13-19

The truth Peter confessed (that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ, the Son of the living God) would be the rock (foundation, Ephesians 2:19-22) Jesus would build His church upon. Notice, though, that Jesus only identified one church He would build ("My church"; not "My churches"). Therefore, either Jesus changed His mind and set up many different churches, failed in His mission of setting up only one church, or He succeeded in setting up only one church. I believe Jesus's promise in this passage is true and that He only built the one church He promised to build (Titus 1:2). Therefore, any other church besides this one has been built by someone else! Jesus only built this one church by purchasing people who are lost in sin through His blood whenever they believe and obey Him (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Acts 2:37-41)!

John 15:1-8

Jesus presents Himself in this text as the True Vine and His followers as individual branches that are expected to produce much fruit. Although the word “church” is not used, this text still presents the image of a singular collection of Jesus’s saved people (the church). However, some people will misuse this passage to mean that the many different kinds of churches today are just different branches on the Vine. According to this view, any church that believes in Jesus and some core teachings are all part of Jesus’s one church. They are just different expressions of this church. Yet, that is not what this passage teaches at all! The different branches on the Vine are not represented by different churches but by different people (v. 5)!

John 17:20-23

As Jesus prayed shortly before His death, He prayed for Himself (vv. 1-5), for His disciples at that time (vv. 6-19), and then for everyone who would come to believe on Him in the future (vv. 20-23). I believe these verses apply to us today (as people who have come to believe on Jesus through the word of those disciples in the Scriptures). Notice, then, that He prayed we all would be united as one. The nature of this unity is even described as being as Jesus and the Father are one! This is important because it impacts whether others believe in Jesus and know the love of God! Sadly, the tens of thousands of different kinds of churches within what is called “Christianity” today demonstrate there is great division rather than unity. Then, this division gets in the way of people believing in Jesus rather than helping. For, many perceive the great religious confusion that exists in the world today among those who profess faith in Jesus. Therefore, we must appreciate that Jesus only built one church and that He wants those who believe in Him to be united (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27)!

Ephesians 4:1-6

This passage records how God expects Christians to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Notice that God has provided a unified system, not one in which we must make unity where none exists! This unity is possible because of the seven “ones” revealed in this text – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. Particularly note that there is only

“one body” (one church, Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18) and “one faith” (one system of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice revealed in the pages of the gospel, Philippians 1:27; Jude 1:3). Therefore, Jesus did *not* create a system of many different belief systems for a variety of different kinds of churches. Rather, He created one belief system (revealed in Scripture) for His one church!

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

While Jesus only built one church universally that consists of all the saved people who have believed and obeyed the gospel to be redeemed by the blood of Jesus, the New Testament authors frequently warned about a coming apostasy (Acts 20:28-31; Romans 16:17-18; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:2-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:14-18; 1 John 2:18-19; 4:1-3; 2 John 1:7-11). The concept of “apostasy” is a falling away from the faith. Therefore, instead of the people who believed in Jesus all believing, practicing, and teaching the one faith of the gospel as revealed in the New Testament, some would believe, practice, and teach an apostate faith of different gospels. Though these would often still profess to follow Jesus, they were not truly part of the one church Jesus built! Today, the tens of thousands of churches that exist are the product of 2,000 years’ worth of apostasies that have taken and continue to take place. Yet, there is still only one true church built by Jesus!

Conclusion

The one “universal” church consists of all the saved of all time and every place. It has no collective assemblies, earthly organizational structure, or work. Furthermore, this one true church is not a denomination. Instead, the one true church consists of all people who truly believe and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is taught in the pages of the New Testament!

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