



Churches and Choices

By Randall F. Matheny

Seekers of truth are faced with a multitude of churches, most of which admit to being denominations: distinct organizations that are kept unique by creed, confession and doctrine. The separation between denominations remains unbreachable as long as contradictions in doctrine exist, and contradictions in doctrine will exist as long as the authority of Jesus Christ, revealed in the Holy Spirit inspired New Covenant, is not accepted as absolute and binding upon all mankind. Was there ever a time in history where it could be shown that a church free of doctrinal, creedal and confessional divisions existed? And if it can be shown that such a church did exist, can it exist today? If it does exist today, should not everyone who confesses Christ as Lord desire to be a member of it?

The one who accepts Matthew 16:18 as fact will have no trouble with the preceding questions, the answers to which are revealed in the Acts of the Apostles 2:41-47. Peter preached a crucified and risen Jesus (vv. 22-36), to whom all authority for salvation is acceded. Further, we learn that there is none other who can save (Acts 4:12 and no other authority

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"...speaking the truth in love" Ephesians 4:15

to which one might appeal for salvation from the damning effects of sin (Rom. 6:23). It is Jesus who must be believed (Jn. 8:24), confessed (Mat. 1:32-33; Rom. 10:9), and obeyed (Jn. 14:15; 15:14; Heb. 5:8-9). It is Jesus who is the singular head of a singular body, which is His church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13). It is Jesus in whom all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3), through whom we have access to the Father (Jn. 14:6), and by whom all will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10). It is by the authority of Jesus Christ that a repentant believer may be baptized unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). (Incidentally, the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary that all the sinners present that day understand that immersion by the authority of Christ is unto the remission of sins.) The inspired declaration is that allegiance, expressed by confession, must be given to Christ (Mat. 10:32-39). The idea that allegiance can be given to any sect or denomination that arose centuries after the Lord established His church on His terms is alien to the Bible (1 Cor. 1:10-13). To this day the inspired words of the Son of God remain steadfast and exclusively authoritative (Mat. 24:35). To say otherwise is to say that there is a law greater than Christ's, and this is expressly rejected by a

multitude of scripture (Mat. 15:8-9, 13; Mk. 6:9; 1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-10; Col. 2:6-10; 2 Jn. 7-11; Jude 3). The only other option to the allowed by God is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23; 8:2), an eternal separation from God (1 Thes. 1:8-9; 2 Thes. 2:8-12).

On the Pentecost of Acts 2, three thousand people made the only right decision (Acts 2:41), and the Lord added them to the body of those being saved (2:47). As far as the Bible is concerned that is all there is: Those who have been baptized into the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4), and those who remain lost in a world of sin. Jesus shed His precious blood to purchase His church (Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25), which is His body, the only one that we can read about in the Bible. This is the church to which the saints of the first century belonged, for there were no others. It was not a matter of joining the church of their choice, but upon obedience to the gospel, being added to the church of Christ's choice. Who would affirm that the crucified Lord must also be divided as sectarianism is today? The scriptures affirm but one church from foundation (Mat. 16:18) unto deliverance (1 Cor. 15:24), and but only one way to become a part of it (Acts 2:37-47; 1 Cor. 12:13). It stands to reason that if the one who accepts the authority

of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Covenant hears the same message that those who became Christians in the first century heard, and is obedient to the same doctrine to which they were obedient, that he will be forgiven in the same manner and be added to the same church, which can and does exist today. "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). The decision should not be that difficult.

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Dressing To Please God

By Randall F. Matheny

With the coming of Summer also comes the annual effort to "beat the heat." Over the years a few inventions have surfaced, some enduring and some short lived, such as personal fans (manual and electric), "breathable" fabrics, ventilated clothing, and so on. Many folks, though, resort to the custom of removing as much clothing as possible, often times not very short of being illegal. The Christian is faced with the same challenges as other people: What is appropriate and what is not? It is quite clear that the worldly minded individual does not care what the Lord thinks, and often does not care what others think as long as they believe themselves appealing to those they are trying to influence. However, the Christians have another consideration, for they must be pleasing unto God. Following are a few tests that we can take to help insure that we are inoffensive to God and man.

Take the "alternate place" test: Would what you wear at the beach or the pool be appropriate in an alternate place such as the grocery store or a church picnic? If not, why not? According to a survey done a few years ago some people dress more modestly in their bedrooms than they do at the beach. Take the "alternate person" test: Would you be comfortable being seen by faithful Christians, or perhaps the preacher? If not, why not? Take the "alternate identity" test: Would you have any problem confessing that you are a blood bought child of God, or admitting that you are a Christian and taking up an opportunity to teach a lost soul while in a particular manner of dress? If not, why not? Finally, take the "What would Jesus do?" test: The answer to this one is simple. "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." (Jn. 8:29). Asking the following question would solve many problems: "Would my manner of dress please God?" Of course all of these things assume that we care what pleases God. If we do not, then none of these tests will matter. If we are willing to accept the consequences in terms of a damaged reputation, which hampers our ability to serve the Lord, and put our own souls at risk, then so be it (1 Pet. 4:1-5). There is little that can be said.

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Tidbits

"It's not what you are that holds you back, it's what you think you are not." -- **Denis Waitley**

"Confidence is: Going after Moby Dick in a rowboat, and taking the tarter sauce with you. A Bullfighter who goes in the ring with mustard on his sword." -- **Zig Ziglar**

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