

Denominational Baptism

By David Phillips

In the New Testament we do not read of “other churches,” nor do we read of people being baptized into something other than Christ. Those who believe simply obeyed as they were commanded and continued to learned the doctrine of the apostles (Acts 2:41-42). There may have been the exception of some who sought to add things to the gospel, but within the first few years that the church was established this was not much of an issue.

Yet, as we all can so clearly see, different churches have been established since that time and there are many people being baptized into those churches for various reasons. Because of this those who preach the gospel of the Bible are left in an interesting situation: we preach baptism unto salvation to the lost, but what about people who have already been baptized as member of a denomination? Has God given us any instruction in the New Testament on this matter? Yes He did. He left us with the information that we need in order to make the necessary conclusions. Let us therefore search the scriptures in order to find an answer to the question, “What about denominational baptism?”

Faith, Baptism and Salvation in the Church

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews the writer shows us the essential role that faith plays in our salvation. “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him...*” (Heb. 11:6). Without faith we would not believe in God and if we did not believe in God then we would not believe in salvation through His Son. Simply put, “*How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed*” (Rom. 10:14)? So it is, if we want to please God and if we want salvation in His Son then we must have faith, as it is also written, “*...for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*” (Heb. 11:6).

In light of this truth all must ask, what must I believe? Jesus tells us very plainly Mark 1:15, “*Repent and believe in the gospel.*” After He rose from the dead He sent His disciples into the world with this same message saying “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*” (Mark 16:15-16). So it is that when we have faith in the gospel we can be saved. This gospel includes what Jesus accomplished: that is, He suffered and died and was raised on the third day to be seated at the right hand of God. It includes what He offers: that is, salvation in His name to all who believe and obey His commandments. It also includes who He is: that is, Jesus the Christ the Son of God.

When a person has this faith we are told that we can have our sins washed away in the waters of baptism: “*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). We read of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 who had this faith and asked, “*See, here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?*” to which Philip answered, “*If you believe with all your heart, you may.*” And what did the eunuch say he believed? “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (Acts 8:31-39).

And so, we see that faith as well as baptism is essential to our salvation. But let it also be clearly understood that just as essential as faith is to our salvation, so is faith in the right gospel. There are many gospels being preached in the world and many people teaching that it does not matter which one we believe in, as long as we believe we are being saved. However, we are only given “*one faith*” (Eph. 4:5), THE FAITH. So you see, “*the faith*” (Rom. 16:26) is not something that can change from person to person, or from church to church. It is the determined system of truth which Jesus delivered to us once for all according to His one true gospel and only when we put our faith in that gospel can we be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins. Remember that Philip first asked the Eunuch, “*If you believe with all your heart you may.*” We are also told in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 that many will have faith, but some will put their faith in a lie and that these will not be saved. We must strive to avoid this.

In our baptism we must understand that the power to be saved is not in ourselves, nor is it in the water, but it lies wholly with God. How then are we saved by being immersed in water? Paul shows us in Col. 2:12 where he says we are "...buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." When we hear and believe the one true gospel and are baptized on account of our faith in that gospel it says we are "raised with Him through faith in the working of God..."

It is God who saves us on account of our faith. And not only do we receive the salvation of our souls, but we are also added by God to the church at our baptism, as it is written in Acts 2:41, 47. "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." The church is the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15) and Christians are children of God (1 John 3:1). One cannot be a child of God without also being a member of His household, can he? Even so, when we are baptized we become members of the Lord's household, the one true church. God does all of this for us when we believe in the gospel, repent of our sins and are baptized in the name of the Lord.

The Different Gospel

Yet, some people are left with an uneasy feeling and the question, what about those who have a different faith or preach a different gospel than the one in the Bible? After all, there are many faiths and gospels in the world. As we have noted before, there are some who teach that it doesn't matter what exactly our faith is, as long as we believe we are being saved. But God not only denies this teaching, He condemns those who teach it as well as those who believe it. He has made it very clear in 2 John 9 that anyone who has a different doctrine than that of Christ does not have God. In 2 Thess. 2:11-12 Paul says that those who are deceived because they did not receive the love of the truth are condemned. "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Finally, we are told with no uncertain words in Galatians 1:6-9, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

Let us clearly understand: Those who have a different faith are not saved, those who have a different gospel are not saved, and those who are not of the one true church are not saved.

Denominational Baptism

Let us now apply these unchangeable truths to the point of our discussion. Can a person be saved by denominational baptism?

The church of the living God is not a denomination. A denomination is an organization that is "denominated" or "divided" into smaller groups or congregations. Every denomination in existence has an earthly head that is not Christ (Eph. 5:23). The very organization of their "church" is different that what we read of in the Bible. They are not a part of that one true church.

Each denomination has its own faith. Jesus showed us in the parable of the sower that when the word of God is planted in the heart that the fruit that pleases God will grow from that heart (Mark 4:2-9; 13-20). We may say that when the word of God is planted on good soil a Christian is grown. In the denominations many seeds are planted, but from those seeds Christians are not grown, but Catholics, or Baptists, or Jehovah's Witnesses, or Pentecostals, or Presbyterians. There was only one faith that was delivered in the New Testament; the denominations have different faiths that were established centuries later.

Each denomination has its own gospel. Some teach that Jesus is not the Son of God, which is blasphemous heresy! Some teach that we do not have to be baptized to be saved, which is no different than Satan telling Eve that she would not die if she ate the fruit. Some teach that all denominations are acceptable because they are just different roads going to the same place. But Jesus shows us that there is only one road to the kingdom, and that road is narrow (Luke 13:22-30). Some teach that when we are baptized we are not baptized for salvation,

but are baptized into a congregation, so that when we move we must be baptized again into another congregation.

Therefore let us ask again, can one be saved in a church that is not the church of Christ? Can one be saved having a faith that is not the one true faith that was delivered by Christ? Can one be saved in a gospel that God says makes the person accursed who teaches or believes it? God has shown us through the scriptures that not one soul can be saved by these things! Yet, this is exactly what some people claim to be saved in when they are baptized as a member of a denomination.

Conclusion

What is the necessary conclusion that we must come to? That no matter the reason for which a person is baptized in a denomination, if we want salvation in Jesus Christ we must have heard the one true gospel and have believed it. We must have faith in that gospel when we are baptized for the forgiveness of our sins and we must be baptized into the one true church. Denominational baptism baptizes one into a denomination. The baptism of John baptized one into John ([Acts 19:2-5](#) – or made a person his disciple). If the disciples of John needed to be re-baptized into Christ, how much greater need do those who have been baptized into error have of being re-baptized into Christ? Have you obeyed the one true gospel? If not, now is the time. The Lord is coming!