

Denominational Baptism

by Casey Head

The Bible teaches in Acts 2:38 that water baptism is “FOR the remission of sins,” but the denominational world says that it is “an outward sign of an inward grace.” While the distinction is clear, many are tempted to believe that both are acceptable. After all, in both cases, a sincere, spiritually-minded person is being immersed in water. Does it really matter WHY we’re baptized so long as we’re dunked in water? Yes, it does. A person cannot be baptized “as an outward sign of an inward grace” and still receive the benefit of Bible baptism, that is, salvation.

Water baptism is clearly a part of God’s plan of salvation. It is not something we do because we are already saved; it is something we do TO BE saved. Jesus says in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” and Peter told the Jews in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ FOR *the remission of sins*.” It is plainly stated in Romans 6:4 that baptism puts us in contact with the death of Christ, where His precious blood was shed. It says in Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” If these passages don’t convince you, then consider what Peter says in 1 Peter 3:21... “The like figure whereunto even baptism *doth also now save us*.” When you examine the New Testament with an honest and sincere heart, it is obvious that baptism is the final step in God’s plan of salvation. Why are we baptized? Not because we have already been saved. Not because we want to show the world that we have already become Christians. We are baptized in order to be saved!

What aspect of baptism saves us? Is it the water? No. The water does not possess saving power. In Acts 19:3-7, Paul found several disciples in Ephesus. While they had already been baptized by Apollos, they were not yet saved! When Paul corrected their false view of baptism, he baptized them again, this time in the name of the Lord Jesus. This account proves that the water itself does not possess saving power! These individuals had been dunked in water, but they were not saved. Water is simply the means specified by God in which we are immersed. That is all!

If the water doesn’t save us, then what about baptism DOES save us? It is our humble obedience to God’s command! The individuals in Acts 19 had to be “rebaptized” because they failed to correctly obey God’s command. Peter defined “Bible baptism” in Acts 2:38 when he told the Jews to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ FOR the remission of sins.” Baptism is to be done by Christ’s authority, and it is to be FOR the remission of our sins. In every verse pertaining to baptism, the reason is given- to wash away our sins and to save us!

Denominational baptism may involve immersion in water, but it is not done for the right reason. There is a huge difference between “outward sign of an inward grace” and “for the remission of sins.” In denominationalism, a person is not baptized unto salvation (Mk. 16:16). They are baptized because “they are already saved.” In denominationalism, a person is not baptized into the ONE body of Christ, the universal church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). They are baptized into their local denomination. Can’t you see the difference?

The point is- how can a person believe incorrectly and be baptized correctly? If a person believes that they are already saved and that baptism has nothing to do with the “remission of sins,” then are they baptized for the right reason...for a scriptural reason? No.

As seen in Acts 19, the water does not save us; it is simply the means chosen by God. What saves us is our humble obedience to God’s command. The command says “Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ FOR the remission of sins.” (Acts 2:38) If a person goes down into the water ignorant of what the Bible actually teaches about baptism, convicted in their heart that they are being baptized “as an outward sign of an inward grace,” then they will come up out of the water a wet sinner.