

What is Wrong with Denominational Baptism?

By Mike Willis

Having previously read that baptism is essential to salvation and that not all which is called “baptism” in contemporary terminology is Bible baptism, every person ought to consider whether or not his baptism is pleasing to God. Acts 19:1-6 records the case of a group of twelve men being rebaptized because their first baptism did not please God.

Consequently, there is scriptural precedent for requesting that every individual reconsider whether or not his personal baptism pleased God. To my knowledge, *baptism involves the proper action, design, and subject before it can be considered valid by Bible standards.*

The Proper Subject. The proper subject of Bible baptism is the penitent believer (Acts 2:38; Mk. 16:16). (For further information on this point, read “The Subjects of Bible Baptism” by Harry Ozment.) No person who does not believe in Jesus Christ, either because he cannot or will not, is a proper subject of baptism. Jesus is not interested in simply seeing people baptized; if he were, a person could easily expedite the obedience to His will with a loaded shotgun. However, a person who was baptized in that fashion would not be pleasing to God. The only proper subject of Bible baptism is the penitent believer.

This being so, one of the things frequently wrong with denominational baptism is that its subjects are those who are not proper subjects of baptism, namely infants. The official position of many church groups demonstrates this point:

“The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church”
(Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1940 edition, p. 44).

“Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized” (The Westminster Confession of Faith, Article 6.142).

Infants cannot believe in Jesus nor repent of their sins and, therefore, are not proper subjects of Bible baptism. Any person who was baptized as an infant and is depending upon that baptism to please God needs to know right now that God will not accept it. It is not Bible baptism.

The Proper Action. Bible baptism is an immersion in water. No reputable Greek lexicon can be cited which will disagree with the position that the Greek word baptizo, from which our English word for “baptize” is transliterated and translated, means “to immerse.” The material element of Bible baptism is water (Acts 8:36). From these Bible facts, we draw the Bible conclusion and make the charge that denominational baptism is frequently wrong because it involves the wrong action (sprinkling or pouring instead of immersion) as the quotations show:

“Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person” (The Westminster Confession of Faith, Article, 6.141).

“Let every adult Person, and the Parents of every Child to be baptized, have the choice of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion” (Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1940 edition, p. 602).

I know of no biblical evidence which would intimate that sprinkling or pouring will serve as an acceptable substitute for immersion in water. Denominational baptism, which is generally sprinkling or pouring, is not pleasing to God. (Frequently, denominational baptism involves both the wrong subject and the wrong action.)

The Right Purpose. The third and final aspect of Bible baptism is its design. Jimmy Tuten's article on this subject proved beyond shadow of reasonable doubt that baptism is essential to salvation (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). These quotations, from only a -sampling of the many denominations which believe the same doctrine, demonstrate that not all persons are baptized in order to be saved and are, therefore, baptized for the wrong purpose:

“Baptism is not essential to salvation” (Edward T. Hiscox, *The Standard Manual For Baptist Churches*, p. 20).

“Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort” (*Discipline of the Methodist Church*, 1940 edition, p. 42).

“Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance (baptism-MW), yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it.” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Article 6.143).

Everyone would admit that one's purpose for being baptized is important. The person who might be baptized to please his wife or to receive some gift would not be properly baptized, even though he might have been immersed in water, because he was baptized for the wrong reason. Either one's purpose must be right or it does not have to be right in order for his baptism to be valid. If it must be right for the baptism to be valid, then any reason other than the right purposes for baptism would invalidate the baptism. If it does not have to be right for the baptism to be valid, then any and every non-biblical reason for being baptized will be perfectly and equally acceptable to God. I think that all of us would conclude that one's purpose must be the biblical purposes for being baptized. Therefore, a person who was baptized either to show to the world that he had already been saved or as an outward sign of an inward act has not been baptized for the right reason and, therefore, his baptism did not please God.

Inasmuch as one's obedience to the gospel puts one into the body of Christ, the individual must have some idea of what the church is. Just as Philip taught the Samaritans about the kingdom of God before baptizing them (Acts 8:12), so also each person being baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) needs to have some knowledge of the body of Christ. He needs to realize that he is being added to the saved of all ages, that he is a part of the kingdom established by Christ on the day of Pentecost, and that, in that kingdom, he must worship and serve God throughout the rest of his life. Unless a person has some knowledge of these purposes of baptism, he cannot be scripturally baptized.

Conclusion

A person cannot be taught wrong and baptized right; he cannot be baptized wrong -and worship right; he cannot worship wrong and live right; he cannot live wrong and die right. Therefore, unless one's baptism is right, he has no hope for salvation in Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (Jn. 14:6). Any person whose baptism is not Bible baptism is seeking to approach God in some other way. Jesus said no person could do that. A baptism that involves the wrong action, wrong subject, and/or wrong design is worthless. Any person having been baptized after this fashion, like the twelve men of Acts 19, needs to reconsider his baptism and be baptized as the Bible directs. As a penitent believer in Christ, he needs to be immersed in water for the remission of his sins in order to become part of the redeemed of all the ages.