

What About All The Denominations?



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I think there are two serious questions that arise when considering the many denominations within the realm of apparent Christianity. They are as follows:

- I. Are all Christian denominations equally valid in the eyes of God?
- II. Are the denominations that deny Acts 2:38 as the singular plan of salvation helpful or harmful to the Christian cause?

Let's consider the first question.

I. Are all Christian denominations equally valid in the eyes of God?

In other words, can a person be saved in any denomination?

First, we all can attest to the fact that there are certainly good people in all denominations. We all know some of them. Most of us even know good people that are not religious, or that are of a different religious faith altogether. Rating our fellow man by a human standard of goodness, based on decency and morality, qualifies many people to be categorized by us as good, no matter what their religious affiliation, if any. We recognize human goodness in many places. And that's fine. It's even good to do so. People deserve all the dignity and respect due them.

But, on a deeper level— one predicated on the Scriptures— I would have to deny that all denominations are equally valid. I come to that conclusion primarily based on what they teach regarding the plan of salvation because I believe salvation to be the most important thing in the world. I can't imagine a single worthy comparison to it. And, if a church or denomination doesn't teach the Christ-prescribed and book-of-Acts-honored plan of salvation (Acts 2:38), nothing else I can think of matters at all in the end. That conclusion may be simplistic but I can find no way around it. A person's spiritual state when he leaves this world is still the most important aspect of his life. I imagine that one second after death, nothing will matter more to the deceased than that he gave due attention to the Bible's tenets of salvation and his consequent walk with God.

If a belief system denies Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation, it denies people the biblical application of the precious blood of Jesus for the remission of sins and the incomparable, necessary infilling of the Holy Ghost. To deny them this is to deny them

eternal life with Christ, notwithstanding their faith in Him. And the Bible certainly acknowledges that people of faith can be lost (Matthew 7:21-23; James 2:19). Therefore, I don't believe all denominations are equally valid in the eyes of God because validity is ultimately based on a proper understanding of God's Word, especially as it relates to salvation doctrine.

Regarding the second question:

II. Are the denominations that deny Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation helpful or harmful to the Christian cause?

I personally have thought much on this subject. I think this question is best answered by breaking it down into two individual questions:

A/ How are denominations that deny Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation helpful to the Christian cause?

B/ How are they harmful?

Let's look at the first.

A/ How are denominations that deny Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation helpful to the Christian cause?

My previous Catholicism

I will begin with my own pre-conversion religious experience. I was raised Catholic. How do I, as an Apostolic, look back on it? My answer has two parts to it.

1/ I am bound to say that I learned some valuable things as a Catholic.

- I learned the healthy fear of God.
- I learned the good habit of regular Church attendance.
- I learned respect for the house of God and for the ministry.
- I learned to praise and worship God, however inferior it may have been.
- Very importantly, I learned to pray. (My parents' examples before me in this area were most helpful, too.)
- I learned to regard the Bible as the Word of God.
- I learned about Jesus dying on the cross for me.
- I learned other valuable Bible knowledge.

All of these points were helpful but perhaps the last one about obtaining Bible knowledge was especially so. I recall when a faithful Apostolic witness, whom I had never met before (Don Crilley), told me about receiving the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. I was aware of the experience happening on the Day of Pentecost because I learned of it in Catechism class. I assumed as a school boy that that was the end of it. But Don floored me when he said it still takes place today. That is what piqued my curiosity and interest. Thankfully, I had a basis for understanding his witness due to previous religious education, limited as it was. If not for that, I may have been totally unable to relate to what he was saying or I may have been spooked by the whole thing and dismissed it out of hand.

2/ I was also angry at the Catholic church when I found the truth.

That's because I realized that I had trusted their belief system for my soul and that trust was not warranted from a biblical standpoint. They had misled me about salvation and that's no small matter. To fail to tell someone the truth about his soul is as serious as it gets. After our conversion, the woman, who is now my wife, and I confronted our priest as to this important discrepancy. He could give us no answer.

The positives and negatives that could be said about my Catholic experience, I think can be said generally about the denominations. In the following remarks, I will be referring to the denominations as those Christian faith systems that do not accept Acts 2:38 as the singular plan of salvation for the Church age. They comprise mainline Christianity.

The denominations are right on many things and, therefore, are helpful to the Christian cause.

1/ Denominations help promote the name and knowledge of Christ.

Paul gloried that Christ was preached at all (Philippians 1:18). Accordingly, I think we have reason to rejoice anytime Jesus is being taught in any measure. No one knows everything about Christ. We're all learners. Anything we can know about Him is better than nothing and anything we can learn more about Him is an improvement over what we formerly knew. To those who are just learning of Him, His attractive beauty may inspire lifelong interest and lead to a person finding the truth.

2/ Denominations tend to promote the Bible as the Word of God.

Virtually every denomination exposes its members to the Bible. That is right and good. Some people who join denominations never had a Bible before, or never read it. Coming to embrace it as the Word of God is a tremendous step that has great

potential. The Bible is very useful in this life. There are many life lessons that tend to good and healthful living. And people exposed to the Word of God are thereby exposed to the truth it contains about salvation and can, therefore, find Acts 2:38. Or, their desire for God and His truth may lead them to be open to additional truth by an Apostolic witness.

The doctrines of the Bible are numerous and it is always helpful to learn any of them. Any practice of the Bible's teaching is beneficial to that person and to the world. God honors and blesses all regard for His Word. Obedience to any portion of it brings good in that measure. Therefore, we're thankful for every person, church, or organization promoting knowledge of the Word of God.

3/ The denominations can be expert in many areas of biblical knowledge.

They are great, for instance, in apologetics. They are scholars in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. Their timelines of biblical history and harmony of the Gospel, in addition to many other things, are all very helpful. They are eminent in every area of biblical knowledge— except the plan of salvation (2Corinthians 2:14).

4/ Denominations can lead a person in Christ as far as they correctly teach and preach God's Word.

Many people come to believe in Jesus in their church services. People can have a truly repentant experience with Christ in a denominational church, no less than Paul did on the Damascus Road before Ananias was sent to him (Acts 9). God can and does work in denominational churches to the extent that they preach the truth.

5/ Denominations can enhance social and domestic relations.

Teaching biblical principles relating to family and society brings stability to homes, communities, and the country and serves this world well in this present time.

6/ Denominations also provide many humanitarian services.

Feeding the poor and providing relief in disaster are just a couple of examples.

B/ How are denominations that deny Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation harmful?

1/ They give a false sense of spiritual security.

They teach people a wrong basis for claiming salvation, which amounts to a horrible deception, for to believe one is saved when he isn't is the worst kind of deception there

is. Denominations that deny Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation do just that, similar to my previous Catholic experience that I mentioned.

2/ They fail to teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

The denominations do not believe some of the most important doctrines of the Bible, specifically, baptism in Jesus' name and the necessity of receiving the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. They, therefore, deny people remission of sins and regeneration, which is precisely why Jesus went to the cross. This is a fundamental loss to biblical Christianity. It's like a house without a foundation. And, as in such a case, many people are not prone to notice it for the abundance of other things that fill their view. In many ways, churches that don't preach salvation doctrine correctly still resemble those that do. That resemblance can be confusing to untrained eyes. It's like looking at two houses, one having a foundation and the other not. The difference is undetectable without closer inspection.

3/ They actively resist Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation and stand in the way of people coming to it.

This is the most serious fault of the denominations. It's the charge Jesus made against the religious leaders of His day (Matthew 23:13). Preachers are largely accountable for what people believe. That's what makes their profession so frighteningly responsible (James 3:1-2). They are often the biggest detriment to people receiving Acts 2:38. For example, no true candidate for baptism would oppose being baptized in Jesus' name. The sheer sentimentality toward the perfect and loving Savior Who died for us would incline people to accept His name in baptism. But if the person baptizing them uses the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and then indoctrinates them accordingly, it will be almost impossible to convince them otherwise. Doctrine is strong, even false doctrine, when embraced as if it were true.

Epilogue

No one should remain in a church that does not teach the full truth about salvation (Acts 2:38).

Until we all come to the unity of the faith, no one should remain in a church that does not teach the full truth about salvation. If you have the beautiful revelation that Acts 2:38 is the plan of salvation, you should be thankful for it and worship God among those of like precious faith. Some people deceive themselves into thinking that their attendance in a church that wrongly teaches salvation doctrine will provide a "light" that will bring the others to the truth. I've never witnessed that occur. Instead, I've seen real spiritual detriment come to those who do not come out of such darkness and

walk in light. Jesus said while you have the light, walk in the light (John 12:35-36). You will never be more poised to serve and bring glory to God than being in the Church of His redeemed.

End time revival can be sweeping.

We have shown many fine things about the denominations and we have pointed out their serious deficiencies. The good things they have going for them could prepare them for great effectiveness in these last days if they have a desire for truth and will be open to the light of Scripture regarding salvation. Salvation doctrine is paramount among the great doctrines of the Bible. Like nothing else, it glorifies the worthy name of Jesus and honors the work He did on Calvary. And when God opens the eyes of the denominational preachers to this precious truth of Acts 2:38, it will only take a little adjustment for them to be on board with the fullness of the Gospel message and minister effectively in it. End time revival could sweep across our nation and world like never before in the history of the Church. Their white-hot zeal for new-found biblical revelation could even make them more effective than us, who have loved it for years. Whole congregations and denominations could be easily swept into the saving truth of the name of Jesus. This has to be the devil's biggest fear. Let's pray for it to happen.