

Does It Really Matter?

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We are ensconced in a world where “religion” is at best difficult to define, if not downright ambiguous. All kinds of “churches” practice all kinds of what they call “religion,” all of it done ostensibly with the Bible as the source, when, in fact, many of the “churches” in existence today don’t know much about the Bible, nor do they even consult it, except to find a word or two that makes what they are teaching or doing appear to have a Bible legitimacy.

That prompts a question: Does it really matter what you believe? Does it make any difference, for instance, what you believe about the plan of salvation, about the necessity of baptism, about the organization and work of the church, or are these merely old New Testament methods—methods that are antiquated, outdated and inapplicable in our age?

What does the Bible say? Does it treat these questions and are the answers applicable to our age?

First of all, the Bible is a complete and total revelation. It lacks nothing. Paul says (II Tim. 3:16-17) it is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness,” and that it “thoroughly furnishes us to ever good work.” There is no religious question it doesn’t deal with, no question concerning who man is, why he is here, what he is to do while he is here, and where he is going when he dies that it doesn’t treat. It is, in point of fact, the only document in existence which explains the elemental questions of life. The Apostle further states of the revealed word that, “we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16). Peter says He has “given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3). Additionally, the Bible warns us against changes, alterations, or man-made doctrines. “Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God” (II Jno. 9). Paul warns against those who would “change “ the gospel. Hear him: “But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached , let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:9). What could be clearer? The word of God is complete, accurate, and will tolerate no changes. Those who would dare to do so incur not only the disfavor but the punitive powers of God.

What does the Bible say about God’s plan for man’s salvation? Does it say, “just accept Jesus into your heart and you’ll be saved”? If so, where does it say that? What does the Bible say? The plan of God—the one the of which the Bible speaks—calls for a total change in man, a change of all that comprises his essential nature. The change of his intellect is made by faith, which comes from hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17), the change of his will by repentance (Acts 2:38), a pledge of new allegiance by confession (Rom. 10:10), and a change in both his relationship and his conscience by baptism (I Cor. 12:13; I Pet. 3:21). To leave off any part of this plan is to tamper with the conversion process approved by and commanded by God.

What does the Bible say about the church? Are there actually many churches of which He approves, regardless of their teaching conflicting and diverse doctrines? What does the Bible say? The Bible says the church is comprised of saved people, those that have been obedient to the plan of salvation to which we just referred. In Acts 2:38, we are told that “God added to the church such as were being saved.” What does that mean? It means that the saved people are the church of Christ, and since He has only one group of saved people, it means there is one church of Christ. There is no national organization, no earthly corporate headquarters, “he is the head of the body, the church, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Col. 1:8). That’s what the Bible says.

What does the Bible say about baptism? Is baptism merely an outward sign of an inner salvation? Can one be saved without it? And can it be administered in any way one chooses? What does the Bible say about baptism? First of all, the Bible affirms that baptism is necessary for salvation: “...the like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us..” (I Pet. 3:21). In Acts 22:16, Saul was told by the preacher, “why tarrriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins.” If it saves—and that’s what it says; and if it washes away sins—and that’s what it says—can one be saved without it? Furthermore, baptism is a burial in water (Acts 8:39-40); and in Rom. 6:4—we are told that “therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, we should also walk in newness of life,” and “if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection...” (Rom. 6:5).

What does the Bible say? That should be the question we ask about any religious matter. Not what does the church say, not what does the creed say, not what does the preacher say, but what does the Bible say?