



The Preposition "Eis" in Acts 2:38

It has long been known that denominationalists, welded to the theory of salvation by "faith alone," repudiate the connection between baptism and the forgiveness of sins. Some, formally sound on this issue, now are capitulating to sectarian error. Take a brief look at this issue with us.

By Wayne Jackson | Christian Courier



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For several generations God's people have conducted debates with our denominational neighbors as to the meaning of the word "for" (Greek, eis) in Acts 2:38. Peter commanded on that occasion:

"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for [unto ASV] the remission of your sins; and you shall receive

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the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The English term "for" is very flexible; it may indicate a goal that is yet not reached, e.g., "Go to the pharmacy **for** [to obtain] medicine." Or it may be used to refer to a circumstance that has transpired already, e.g., "He went to prison **for** [on account of] burglary."

Because of this flexibility with reference to "for," some have assumed that the Greek word *eis* has the same flexibility, and therefore baptism is not to **obtain** the forgiveness of one's sins; rather, it is engaged **because of** pardon received already (presumably at the point of faith). There are several things to be said in response to this ploy.

English Is Not Greek

Just because the English "for" has some elasticity, and thus may point to a precedent circumstance, such does not mean that the Greek preposition *eis* has similar properties.

The Greek term *eis* is found about 1,750 times in the New Testament. While it has a variety of meaning shades, it **always** is prospective (forward looking), and is **never** retrospective (backward looking) in its direction.

It is "an indicator of direction toward a goal, not as an indicator of location without direction" (Balz, 398). The preposition is used with the accusative case, meaning it points to the object of verbal action. Thus eis generally is translated by such terms as *in*, *into*, *unto*, *to*, *toward*, etc. It is a goal-oriented term.

Theology and Grammar Matters

Theologically speaking, the construction of the compound verbs — "repent and be baptized" — connected with the prepositional phrase — "for the forgiveness of sins" — demonstrates that the sense of eis cannot possibly be "because of," thus conveying the sense, "on account of the forgiveness of your sins." And why is that?

Because it would equally affirm that one is required to "repent" **because of** the forgiveness of his sins. Who in the world subscribes to the notion that one repents of sin because his transgressions are forgiven already? That makes no sense at all.

Comparative Passages Highlight the Truth

In Matthew 26:28 there is an identical construction of eis, conjoined with the terms "forgiveness of

sins," just as in Acts 2:38.

In the Matthew text, as he institutes the communion supper, Jesus said: "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins."

Even the renowned Baptist scholar, A. T. Robertson, who attempted to twist Acts 2:38 into conformity with his personal theological agenda, was forced to surrender his position when discussing Matthew 26:28. Of the controversial phrase he stated:

"The purpose of the shedding of his blood of the New Covenant was precisely to remove (forgive) sins" (210; emphasis added).

In his massive *Historical Grammar*, Robertson suggested that sometimes "grammar" has to give way to "theology" (389). Is that any way to treat the verbally inspired word of God? Yet that is how Robertson sought to dispose of Acts 2:38. For shame!

Conclusion

It is a sad day in the history of the church of Jesus Christ when men — formerly sound, gospel preachers — begin to deny, both by pen and via pulpit, that baptism is required "for the remission

of sins."

Sources

Balz, Horst and Gerhard Schneider. 1978. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 1. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids: MI.

Robertson, A. T. 1919. *Historical Grammar*. Hodder & Stoughton: London, England.

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The Use of the Preposition "Eis" in Matthew 12:41

In Acts 2:38 Peter contended that baptism is "for" (eis) the remission of sins. Since many religionists deny this biblical truth, they seek comfort in a supposed parallel that they imagine nullifies the force of eis in Acts 2:38. Some imagine they have found a solution to their theological problem in Matthew 12:41. But have they?

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In numerous articles we have called attention to the force of the preposition eis as used in Acts 2:38.

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto eis the remission

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of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

See our recent article, [The Preposition *Eis* in Acts 2:38](#). The Greek lexicons are of a united voice as to the meaning of *eis* in Acts 2:38.

Robinson noted that the baptism/*eis* connection, as used in Acts 2:38, marked "the object and effect of the rite of baptism; chiefly with *eis* c. acc. to baptize or be baptized into anything" (1855, 118). J.H. Thayer said that the significance of *eis* in Acts 2:38 is "to obtain the forgiveness of sins" (1958, 94). Arndt and Gingrich affirmed that *eis* denoted "purpose, in order to . . . for forgiveness of sins, so that sins might be forgiven" (1967, 228). It is wholly unnecessary to continue piling up authorities with reference to this matter.

In years gone by, it was fashionable to contend that there are rare exceptions to the prospective thrust of *eis*. It was alleged that the preposition could signify "because of" (the direct opposite of the standard definition). A favorite text cited in support of this position was Matthew 12:41, where Christ said:

The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is

here.

The Lord declared that the people of Nineveh "repented at *eis* the preaching of Jonah." Here, then, was the common ploy with reference to this text. The folks of Nineveh, it was argued, did not repent "in order to" hear Jonah; rather, they repented "because of" Jonah's preaching. Thus, supposedly, this constituted an example of the "causal" (retroactive) use of *eis*. What should be said in response to this argument?

Analysis

The following factors absolutely must be taken into consideration.

Since *eis* is found some 1,750 times in the New Testament, and the standard meaning is well-recognized, one must proceed with extreme caution before announcing that he has found an "exception" to the rule. He must have an overwhelmingly compelling case before thrusting aside hundreds of precedents that suggest a norm. It is interesting that *The New American Commentary on Matthew*, authored by Craig Blomberg (and published by Broadman, a Baptist firm) makes no comment at all with reference to a causal use of *eis* in this text.

Before one can argue, therefore, that Matthew 12:41 contains this alleged exception, he must be absolutely positive there is no interpretation that can be placed upon the text in which *eis* carries its general, forward-looking thrust.

It is not an honest approach to the Scriptures to take an isolated text, and twist it into conformity with an interpretation that one seeks to defend due to a theological predisposition, e.g., the dogma of salvation by faith alone.

Professor Daniel Wallace is associated with the Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas. From a personal theological perspective, he does not believe that baptism is required as a condition for the remission of sins. This is important to keep in mind. Dr. Wallace is the author of the highly acclaimed work, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. Therein he has a discussion of the so-called causal use of *eis*. He contends that studies have shown that "the linguistic evidence for a causal *eis*" falls short of proof. He stingingly calls this misguided twisting of the preposition an "ingenious solution" that "lacks conviction" (1996, 370-371).

The celebrated Baptist scholar, H.B. Hackett, rendered the Greek phrase, *eis aphesin hamartion* in Acts 2:38, as "in order to the forgiveness of sins," and referenced Matthew 26:28 and Luke 3:3

as parallel texts (1879, 54).

The question now engaging our attention is this: is there any reasonable view of Matthew 12:41 that allows the careful student to assign *eis* its normal, forward-pointing meaning? The answer is yes; clearly there is.

Here are the facts of the case. The people of Nineveh were in rebellion against God. Because of his concern for the souls of these pagans, Jehovah dispatched his prophet, Jonah, to preach a message of repentance to them. That message was designed to bring them into a penitent state, a reformed life, which would be reflected in turning away from their sins. This is precisely what happened (Jonah 3:10).

By means of a common figure of speech called metonymy—a form of which states a cause, which, in actuality, stands for an effect. Here is an example. When Job said: "My arrow is incurable" (34:6), he referred to an affliction (allegedly rendered by God). The term "arrow," however, is a form of metonymy, the cause standing for the effect (Terry 1890, 160-161; cf. Dungan n.d., 271-276).

Similarly, as a result of Jonah's proclamation, the citizens of Nineveh turned, transforming minds and deeds into a reformed state of life demanded

by his message. The internationally recognized scholar, J.W. McGarvey, carefully explained the matter in his commentary on Matthew.

The preposition here rendered "at" is eis, which usually means "into." Some writers have contended that it here means "because of," or "in consequence of," a meaning quite foreign to the word. It is true, as a matter of fact, that the Ninevites repented in consequence of the preaching of Jonah; but had it been the purpose of the writer to express this thought, he would have used the preposition dia instead of eis. The thought of the passage is quite distinct from this. They repented into the preaching of Jonah. This is not idiomatic English, but it conveys the exact thought a Greek would derive from the original. The term "preaching" is put for the course of life required by the preaching, and it is asserted that they repented into this. Their repentance, in other words, brought them into the course of life required by the preaching, and it is asserted that they repented into this (1875, 113).

This is a perfectly reasonable explanation of the passage, quite in harmony with the use of the preposition elsewhere in the New Testament. This is a far more responsible exercise of exegetical skills than that which has been proffered by some

biased scholars of a bygone era.

Sources

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"THE BOOK OF ACTS"

Baptism For The Remission Of Sins (2:38)

INTRODUCTION

1. In response to the first gospel sermon, many asked "What shall we do?" - **Ac 2:37**
 - a. They were told to repent and to be baptized - **Ac 2:38**
 - b. The reason? "...for the remission of sins" - **ibid.**
2. Some argue that "for" *eis* in **Acts 2:38** means "because of"...
 - a. The "causal" sense of *eis* (because of) as opposed to the "purpose" sense of *eis* (in order to)
 - b. That the Greek preposition *eis* is so understood elsewhere and should be here - cf. **Mt 12:41**
 - c. That people were to be baptized because their sins were already forgiven (presumably upon repentance) - cf. **A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures***
 - d. Though Robertson admits this is a conclusion drawn as an interpreter, not as a grammarian - **Robertson, A. T. (1919). *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, p. 592**
 - e. And Robertson may have been biased in his interpretation, for he was...
 - 1) Founder of Baptist World Alliance in 1900
 - 2) Professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
 - 3) Son-in-law of John Albert Broadus, co-founder of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

[What reasons might there be to conclude that *eis* means "in order to" or "for the purpose of" remission of sins, instead of "because of" as Robertson does? A good place to start is by comparing...]

I. TRANSLATIONS

A. WELL KNOWN TRANSLATIONS...

1. for the remission of sins (KJV, NKJV)
2. for the forgiveness of your sins (ESV, HCSB, ISV, LEB, NAB, NASB, NCV, NET, NIV, NLT, RSV, TNIV)

-- These skirt the issue, using *for* which can indicate either cause or purpose

B. LESSER KNOWN TRANSLATIONS...

1. so that your sins may be forgiven (New Revised Standard Version)
2. unto the remission of your sins (American Standard Version)
3. for the forgiveness of and release from your sins; (Amplified Bible)
4. so that your sins will be forgiven (Contemporary English Version, God's Word Translation, Good News Translation)
5. so that you may have your sins forgiven (JB Phillips New Testament)
6. so your sins are forgiven (The Message)
7. Then your sins will be forgiven (New International Readers Version)
8. and your sins will be forgiven (New Life Version)
9. Your wrong ways will be forgiven you (Worldwide English NT)
10. into remission of your sins (Wycliffe Bible)
11. to remission of sins (Young's Literal Translation)

-- These all translate *eis* as indicating purpose (so that, unto, then, etc.)

[Out of 27 translations, **not one** translates *eis* as causal (because of), whereas 13 translate *eis* indicating purpose (so that, unto, into, etc.)! The reason for this becomes clearer when we consider Greek...]

II. LEXICONS

A. THAYER...

1. Citing **Ac 2:38** - *eis aphasin hamartion*, to obtain the forgiveness of sins - **Thayer, J. H.** (1889).
2. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti*. New York: Harper & Brothers, p. 94

B. ARNDT, DANKER, & BAUER...

1. to denote purpose in order to - for forgiveness of sins, so that sins might be forgiven **Mt 26:28**; cp. **Mk 1:4**; **Lk 3:3**; **Ac 2:38** - **Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W.** (2000)
2. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed.)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 290

C. BALZ & SCHNEIDER...

1. to/for to indicate purpose... for the forgiveness of sins (**Ac 2:38**) - **Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G.** (1990-).
2. *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, Vol 1, p.399

D. KITTEL, BROMILEY & FRIEDRICH...

1. John baptizes, and Jesus sheds His blood, for the forgiveness of sins (**Mk 1:4**; **Lk 3:3**; **Mt 26:28**; cf. **Ac 2:38**) - **G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.** (1964-)
2. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, Vol. 2, p. 429

E. ROBERTSON...

1. Unto the remission of your sins [*eis aphesin tn hamartin hmn*] ...In themselves the words can express aim or purpose...One will decide the use here according as he believes that baptism is essential to the remission of sins or not. My view is decidedly against the idea that Peter, Paul, or any one in the New Testament taught baptism as essential to the remission of sins or the means of securing such remission. So I understand Peter to be urging baptism on each of them who had already turned (repented) and for it to be done in the name of Jesus Christ on the basis of the forgiveness of sins which they had already received. - **Robertson, A.** (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor
2. *baptistheto eis aphesin ton hamartion (Ac. 2:38)*...only the context and the tenor of N. T. teaching can determine whether 'into,' 'unto' or merely 'in' or 'on' ('upon') is the right translation, a task for the interpreter, not for the grammarian. - **Robertson, A. T.** (1919). *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. P. 592
3. As noted earlier, Robertson may have let his religious affiliation influence his scholarship

F. MANTEY...

1. J. R. Mantey, Professor of New Testament, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary
2. Mantey contended for the "causal" sense of *eis* in **Ac 2:38**, though he classified that use of the preposition as a "remote meaning." - **From an article by Wayne Jackson**
3. His discussion clearly indicated, however, that he yielded to that view because of his conviction that, if baptism was "for the purpose of the remission of sins," then salvation would be of works, and not by faith (a false conclusion, please see below ~ MAC) **H.E. Dana & J.R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament**, New York: Macmillan, 1955, 103-04). - **ibid.**
4. However, Daniel Wallace (associate professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary) wrote that in a discussion between J. R. Mantey and Ralph Marcus: "Marcus ably demonstrated that the linguistic evidence for a causal *eis* fell short of proof." - **Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), p. 370

[Baptists frequently appeal to Robertson and Mantey as authorities on this matter. Both were Baptists who may have let their theology trump their scholarship. Beside lexicographers, consider a few...]

III. COMMENTARIES

A. LONGNECKER ON ACTS 2:38..

1. Peter calls on his hearers to "repent" (metano word implies a complete change of heart and the confession of sin. With this he couples the call to "be baptized" (baptisth thus linking both repentance and baptism with the forgiveness of sins.
2. Gaebelein, F. E., Tenney, M. C., & **Longenecker, R. N.** (1981). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House

B. STOTT ON ACTS 2:38...

1. Peter replied that they must repent, completely changing their mind about Jesus and their attitude to him, and be baptized in his name...Then they would receive two free gifts of God--the forgiveness of their sins (even of the sin of rejecting God's Christ) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (to regenerate, indwell, unite and transform them).
2. **Stott, J. R. W.** (1994). *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the church & the world. The Bible Speaks Today*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

C. LARKIN ON ACTS 2:38...

1. By repentance and baptism we show that we have met the conditions for receiving forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit.
2. **Larkin, W. J., Jr.** (1995). *Vol. 5: Acts. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. Downers, IL: InterVarsity Press

D. NEWMAN & NIDA ON ACTS 2:38...

1. So that your sins will be forgiven (literally "into a forgiveness of your sins") in the Greek may express either purpose or result; but the large majority of translators understand it as indicating purpose.
2. The phrase modifies both main verbs: turn away from your sins and be baptized. The clause your sins will be forgiven may be restructured in an active form as "God will forgive your sins."
3. **Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A.** (1972). *A handbook on the Acts of the Apostles. UBS Handbook Series*. New York: United Bible Societies

E. MEYER ON ACTS 2:38...

1. *eis* denotes the object of the baptism, which is the remission of the guilt contracted in the state before metanoia. Comp. **Ac 22:16; 1Co 6:11**
2. **Meyer, H. A. W.** (1877). *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles, Volume 1* (W. P. Dickson, Ed.) (P. J. Gloag, Trans.). Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

[Note that these are not so-called "Church of Christ" scholars. Even so, some contend (as did Robertson and Mantey) that if baptism was "for the purpose of the remission of sins," then salvation would be of works, and not by faith. This is a false conclusion! For consider what has been said by these...]

IV. THEOLOGIANS**A. AUGUSTINE...**

1. Referring to the efficacy of baptism, he wrote that "the salvation of man is effected in baptism"; also, that a person "is baptized for the express purpose of being with Christ." - as quoted by **Jack W. Cottrell**, *Baptism And The Remission of Sins, College Press*, 1990, p. 30
2. In regards to the necessity of baptism, he refers to the "apostolic tradition, by which the Churches of Christ maintain it to be an inherent principle, that without baptism...it

is impossible for any man to attain to salvation and everlasting life." - *ibid.*, p. 30

B. THOMAS AQUINAS...

1. "...Men are bound to that without which they cannot obtain salvation. Now it is manifest that no one can obtain salvation but through Christ..."
2. "But for this end is baptism conferred on a man, that being regenerated thereby, he may be incorporated in Christ."
3. "Consequently it is manifest that all are bound to be baptized:and that without baptism there is no salvation for men." - *ibid.*, p. 31

C. MARTIN LUTHER...

1. In answer to the question, "What gifts or benefits does Baptism bestow?", Luther replied in his Small Catechism, "It effects forgiveness of sins." - *ibid.*, p. 32
2. He also wrote concerning the sinner: "Through Baptism he is bathed in the blood of Christ and is cleansed from sins." - *ibid.*, p. 32
3. Again, he wrote: "To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save." - *ibid.*, p. 34
4. In his commentary on **Ro 6:3**, he wrote: "Baptism has been instituted that it should lead us to the blessings (of this death) and through such death to eternal life. Therefore it is necessary that we should be baptized into Jesus Christ and His death." - *Commentary On Romans*, Kregel Publications, p. 101
5. In his commentary on **Ga 3:27**, he wrote: "This is diligently to be noted, because of the fond and fantastical spirits, who go about to deface the majesty of baptism, and speak wickedly of it. Paul, contrariwise, commendeth it, and setteth it forth with honourable titles, calling it, 'the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost'. And here also he saith, that 'all ye that are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.' Wherefore baptism is a thing of great force and efficacy." - *Commentary On Galatians*, Kregel Publications, p.222
6. In response to those who would call this a kind of works-salvation, he said "Yes, it is true that our works are of no use for salvation. Baptism, however, is not our work but God's." - as quoted by **Jack W. Cottrell**, *Baptism And The Remission of Sins*, College Press, 1990, p. 33

D. BEASLEY-MURRAY...

1. G.R. Beasley-Murray, Principal of Spurgeon's College in London, later Senior Professor at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY, wrote a modern classic, *Baptism In The New Testament*.
2. He gives chapters which thoroughly discuss baptism in the Gospels, in Acts, Paul's writings, and other apostolic writings
3. In his introduction, Beasley-Murray wrote:
 - a. "This book is intended to offer a Baptist contribution to the discussions on baptism that are taking place throughout the Christian world."
 - b. "But the indefinite article should be observed; the impression must not be given that my interpretations are characteristic of Baptist thought generally."

- c. At most it can be claimed that they represent a trend gaining momentum among Baptists in Europe."
 - d. "I have striven to interpret the evidence of the New Testament as a Christian scholar, rather than as a member of a particular Christian Confession." - **G. R. Beasley-Murray**, *Baptism In The New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962, pp. v-vi.
4. From his chapter on baptism in Acts, Beasley-Murray wrote:
- a. "Consequently, baptism is regarded in Acts as the occasion and means of receiving the blessings conferred by the Lord of the Kingdom. Admittedly, this way of reading the evidence is not characteristic of our thinking, but the intention of the author is tolerably clear." - **ibid.** p. 102
 - b. "Whatever the relationship between baptism and the gift of the Spirit elsewhere in Acts, there appears to be no doubt as to the intention of **Acts 2:38**; the penitent believer baptized in the name of Jesus Christ may expect to receive at once the Holy Spirit, even as he is assured of the immediate forgiveness of his sins." - **ibid.**, p. 108
5. Some concluding statements were:
- a. "In light of the foregoing exposition of the New Testament representations of baptism, the idea that baptism is a purely symbolic rite must be pronounced not alone unsatisfactory but out of harmony with the New Testament itself. Admittedly, such a judgment runs counter to the popular tradition of the Denomination to which the writer belongs..."
 - b. "The extent and nature of the grace which the New Testament writers declare to be present in baptism is astonishing for any who come to the study freshly with an open mind."
 - c. "...the 'grace' available to man in baptism is said by the New Testament writers to include the following elements:
 - 1) forgiveness of sin, **Ac 2.38** and cleansing from sins, **Ac 22.16, 1Co 6.11**;
 - 2) union with Christ, **Ga 3.27**, and particularly union with Him in his death and resurrection, **Ro. 6.3ff, Col 2.11f**, with all that implies of release from sin's power, as well as guilt, and the sharing of the risen life of the Redeemer, **Ro 6.1-11**;
 - 3) participation in Christ's sonship, **Ga 3.26f**;
 - 4) consecration to God, **1Co 6.11**, hence membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, **1Co 12.13, Ga 3.27-29**;
 - 5) possession of the Spirit, **Ac 2.38, 1Co 6.11, 12.13**, and therefore the new life in the Spirit, i.e., regeneration, **Tit 3.5, Jn 3.5**;
 - 6) grace to live according to the will of God, **Ro 6.1ff, Col 3.1ff**;
 - 7) deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world, **Col 1.13**;
 - 8) the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, **Jn 3.5**, and the pledge of the resurrection of the body, **Ep 1.3f, 4.30**.
- **ibid.**, pp. 263-264

[These theologians believed strongly in justification by grace through faith, yet did not find that it precluded the role of baptism in receiving the remission of sins. Clearly, there are strong reasons to consider *eis* in **Ac 2:38** to indicate purpose ("in order to"). But in anticipation of some objections, allow me to share some...]

V. RELATED OBSERVATIONS

A. BAPTISM DOES NOT SAVE BECAUSE IT MERITS SALVATION...

1. Nearly everyone I talk to who takes issue with baptism being necessary, or having any part of the gospel plan of salvation, initially misunderstands this point
 - a. They assume that if baptism is necessary, one is saved by meritorious works
 - b. They assume that if one is baptized for the remission of sins, one has earned their salvation
2. But again they need to listen carefully to **Martin Luther**...
 - a. In response to those who would call this a kind of works- salvation, he said "Yes, it is true that our works are of no use for salvation."
 - b. Baptism, however, is not our work but God's." - as quoted by **Jack W. Cottrell**, *Baptism And The Remission of Sins*, College Press, 1990, p. 33

B. BAPTISM SAVES BECAUSE GOD IS AT WORK...

1. Note that Peter clearly says that "baptism doth also now save us" (KJV) - **1Pe 3:21**
2. But as observed by **Luther**, it is God who saves us in baptism:
 - a. He is the one at work in baptism - **Col 2:11-13** (cf. "the working of God")
 - b. Other than possessing faith in Christ and God, **MAN IS PASSIVE** in baptism
 - 1) In fact, baptism is a more passive act than "saying the sinner's prayer"!
 - 2) Like a patient submitting to the skill of a physician to remove cancer
 - 3) So we, seeking the removal of the cancer of sin, submit to the Great Physician to cut away our sins by the blood of Christ, which He does in baptism
 - c. It is God who makes us alive together with Christ, having forgiven all trespasses - **Col 2:13**
3. As stated in **ISBE**: "Baptism does not produce salutary effects ~ex~opere~operato~, i.e. by the mere external performance of the baptismal action. No instrument with which Divine grace works does. Even the preaching of the gospel is void of saving results if not 'mixed with faith' (**He 4.2, AV**)."
- a. It is not the "act" of immersion that saves, though salvation occurs at that time
 - b. It is God who saves in baptism, by virtue of grace, when one believes in Christ!
 - c. But because God commands baptism, and saves us in baptism, it is proper to say...
 - 1) With Peter: "baptism doth also now save us" - **1Pe 3:21**
 - 2) With Jesus: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved..." - **Mk 16:16**
Before we close, let's return to our text and notice carefully...]

C. THE CONTEXT OF ACTS 2:38...

1. The Jews' question

- a. They wanted to know what to do to remove their guilt - **Ac 2:36-37**
- b. Any instruction by Peter would be understood by them in this light, and must so be understood by us today

2. Peter's answer

- a. He gave two commands: 1) repent and 2) be baptized - **Ac 2:38**
- b. That the first imperative (repent) was second person plural, and the second imperative (be baptized) was third person plural, and the phrase (for the remission of sins) reverts back to second person plural, is a distinction without a difference
 - 1) "The phrase (for the remission of sins, MAC) modifies both main verbs: turn away from your sins and be baptized." - **Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A.** (1972). *A handbook on the Acts of the Apostles. UBS Handbook Series.* New York: United Bible Societies
 - 2) "In my view, the phrase *eis aphesin hamartion* in **Acts 2:38** applies in sense to both of the preceding verbs." - **Bruce Metzger**, editor of the *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, a companion volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.). London; New York: United Bible Societies, and teacher at Princeton Theological Seminary - **Correspondence with David Padfield**
 - 3) "Since the expression *eis aphesin hamartion* is a prepositional phrase with no verbal endings or singular or plural endings, I certainly agree that grammatically it can go with both repentance and baptism. In fact, I would think that it does go with both of them." - **Arthur L. Farstad**, chairman of the New King James Executive Review Committee and general editor of the NKJV New Testament - **ibid.**
 - 4) "Whenever two verbs are connected by *kai* (and) and then followed by a modifier (such as a prepositional phrase, as in **Acts 2:38**), it is grammatically possible that modifier modifies both the verbs, or only the latter one...It does not matter that, here in **Acts 2:38**, one of the verbs is second person plural...and the other is third person singular...They are both imperative, and the fact that they are joined by *kai* ('and') is sufficient evidence that the author may have regarded them as a single unit to which his modifier applied." - **John R. Werner**, International Consultant in Translation to the Wycliffe Bible Translators. Also a consultant to Friberg and Friberg with the Analytical Greek New Testament, and from 1962 to 1972 professor of Greek at Trinity Christian College - **ibid.**
- c. Since the conjunction *kai* "and" joins the two commands together, what is said of one command applies to the other
 - 1) If they were to be baptized "because of" remission of sins...
 - 2) ...then they were also to repent "because of" the remission of sins!

- d. This would present two problems
 - 1) Where else are people told to repent "because" their sins are already forgiven?
 - 2) Peter would have failed to tell them what to do to remove their guilt!
- 3. Luke's summary
 - a. Peter told them what to do repeatedly, and they responded - **Ac 2:40-41**
 - b. "Be saved (save yourselves, ESV, NLT, NET) from this perverse generation"
 - c. "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized" -- **They saved themselves by being baptized, and thus the immediate context confirms baptism was "in order to" the remission of sins, not "because of"!**

CONCLUSION

1. Allow me to share these words that I believe summarizes both the issue and the solution to properly understanding "baptism for the remission of sins":

A number of commentators seek to diminish the force of the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" at this point, apparently seeking to safeguard the doctrine of salvation by grace. They take the preposition "for" (order to." Peter, they say, meant be aptized because of the forgiveness of sins, implying that such forgiveness had already been granted by the time baptism was administered.

This position disregards the very common use of *eis* in the New Testament to mean "for the purpose of, in order to." In **Matthew 26:28** where this exact phrase appears, Jesus says his blood is poured out" for (*eis*) the forgiveness of sins. It would be absurd to argue that the phrase means "because of" and that Jesus' blood was poured out because sins had already been forgiven.

Beyond this, the command to be baptized is only one of the imperatives Peter gave. "Be baptized" is joined to "repent" with "and." Whatever Peter says about the forgiveness of sins follows from both imperatives. Just as repentance is needed "for the purpose of" the forgiveness of sins, so is baptism.

This position need not rob the plan of salvation of its basis in the grace of God.

Both imperatives expect action to be taken on the part of the sinner. Yet Peter considered neither to be a work which merits salvation, but merely the response of faith dictated by the prophesy he had already cited--"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (**Acts 2:21**).

- **Gaertner, D.** (1995). *Acts. The College Press NIV Commentary*. Joplin, MO: College Press.

2. Salvation is truly by grace through faith, and not of works done to earn or merit salvation...
 - a. It is not by faith alone, because we need the grace of God, the blood of Christ, along with the washing of renewal and regeneration of the Holy Spirit - cf. **Tit 3:4-7**
 - b. So when the penitent believer submits to the command of Christ to be baptized, they can rest assured at that moment the blood of Christ washes away all their sin! - cf. **Ac 22:16**

And so we say with Peter to all who are convicted of their sins, who seek forgiveness by asking "What shall we do?":

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." ~ Ac 2:38-29

Hopefully they will "save themselves" by gladly accepting the word of Christ's apostle, by being baptized this very day...! - **Ac 2:40-41**

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