

THE TRUE MEANING OF BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS

(“In Order to” or “because of” – Which Meaning is Implied?)

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(Taken from “*The Gospel Trumpet*”, Nov. 15, 1884)

The language of Peter on the day of Pentecost has been a puzzle to some minds. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Acts. 2:38.

What does it mean? What baptism is here spoken of? Evidently, literal water baptism, for the gift of the Holy Ghost is spoken of as following faith and baptism. But if baptism here alluded to the Spirit, there would be no need at all of the promise that followed it, namely, of the gift of the Spirit: for it is evident to all, that baptism in the Spirit includes, and directly implies, the gift of the Spirit.

It is also a fact that the entire ministry of Christ and the Apostles corroborates and confirms the idea of water baptism in the above language. “Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John” (John 4:1). This shows that all who became disciples, believers, Christians, under the personal ministrations of Christ, were by His orders baptized in water. His final commission, that extends “even to the end of the world,” correctly rendered, reads “Make disciples in all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). First, become a disciple, then receive baptism by the hands of the minister of the Lord Jesus.

In accordance with the commission of Christ, and the words of Peter at Pentecost, Peter commanded the Gentile converts at the house of Cornelius to be baptized in water, when the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them furnished a positive evidence that they were accepted of God (Acts 10: 45,47). When Lydia and her household believed they were baptized, likewise the jailer and his family (Acts 16:15,33). So we see the whole history of the Acts of the Apostles agrees with a literal interpretation of the baptism of Acts 2:38.

Now some who have been saved, and know by experience that salvation is by faith, find difficulty in harmonizing this text with the Scriptures generally. “**Be baptized for the remission of sins.**” How shall we understand this? The word “for” is an abbreviation equivalent to “in order to” or “because of.” Should you contract with a man to build a house, for which you agree to pay \$500 before the work is begun, and you should say, “I now give you the \$500 **for** the erection of the house,” you would mean “**in order to**” the erection of the house. But suppose the contract be such that the building be erected first, and when finished and accepted, you say, “I give you the \$500 **for** building the house;” then you use the word in the sense of “**because of.**” **Thus, you see the word “for” in the same expression may mean either “because of” or “in order to,” just as the connection will indicate.**

Therefore, when Peter spoke of baptism for the remission of sins, whether he meant in order to obtain the remission of sins, or whether it was to be done because of the remission of sins, previously received, the Scriptures generally, and the facts of experience must determine. **And an appeal to this standard proves the fact that baptism in water is NOT a condition of pardon, but a public declaration of that faith which has brought pardon** (*see comments at end). It does not go before as a means of obtaining a good conscience, but it follows as the response, or “answer of a good conscience.”

Having examined the force of the English word “for,” and noticed the relation of pardon and the ordinance, let us now examine the text in the Greek. “For remission” is from “eis aphasin.” Now this little preposition “eis” literally means “into.” With the Greek New Testament and the Greek English Concordance before us, we can tell you just what its force is. We find it translated, “into” 590 times, “to” quite a number of times, “at, upon, in, among, etc.,” occasionally. Besides, we find this peculiar use of the word, namely, it denotes an act of the mind going back to something as a cause, or ground of an action. **And according to the whole tenor of the New Testament, this is just its force in Acts 2:38.**

A parallel text is found in Matt. 3:11, “I indeed baptize you with (in) water unto repentance.” The Greek is:

“Ego men baptizo humas en hudati eis metanoian.”
“I indeed immerse you in water into repentance.”

This is just as we find it in the Emphatic Diaglott, only we do not accept the word “reformation” instead of “repentance.” Observe that the preposition “eis,” in this passage, sustains the same relation to repentance that it does to the remission in Acts 2:38. Therefore, if “eis aphasin,” in the latter place, denotes *in order to remission*, then “eis metanoian” in Matt. 3:11 means *in order to repentance*. But is that not contrary to the facts in the case? Did John baptize people in order to make them repent, or to enable them to repent? No, he demanded repentance first. Yea, he even commanded them to “bring forth fruits meet for repentance,” before he would baptize them. All that did not believe and repent he did not baptize. So he baptized people *because* they had repented, and showed it by their fruits. Now **if “eis metanoian” means because of repentance, then “eis aphasin” means because of remission.** That is, the act of baptism is to lead the mind back into the pardon of your sins, as the ground, or occasion of that rite.

Now turn to Luke 22:19: “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.” The original of the last clause is as follows:

“touto poieite eis ten emen anamnesin.”
“this do you into the my remembrance.”

Do this into remembrance of me *because of* my death. Here is a clear case where “eis” denotes the act of the mind going back to something as the cause for an action. They were to partake of the bread and wine *because of* the death of Christ, *not in order to* the death of Christ. So, Peter commands baptism “eis” (because of) the remission of sins, and not in order to it. The preposition “eis” has the same force in 1 Cor. 11:25. The first words of Acts 2:25 are as follows in the Greek:

“David gar legei eis auton”
“David for says concerning him”

That is, David says because of him – here “eis” may very properly be rendered in the sense of because of. In Ephesians 5:32, we find this preposition occurs twice. I speak “eis” (concerning, or because of Christ) and “eis” (concerning, or because of the church).

We will give but two more instances of that use of the word, “eis.” They are Matt. 12:41 and Luke 11:32, in both of which we read, “The men of Ninevah shall rise in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas.” The original is thus, “they repented *eis* the preaching of Jonas.” Now did they repent *in order to* the preaching of Jonas or *because of* the preaching of Jonas? Here any one can see that the little word “eis” has the meaning of because of. It refers back to the ground or cause of an action. Now as John baptized the believers *eis* (because of) their repentance, and the Ninevites repented *eis* (because of) the preaching of Jonas: so Peter commanded those that believed on the day of Pentecost to be baptized *eis* (because of) the remission of sins. *Because of* being a peculiar meaning of the preposition “eis” corresponds with the Word of God, which teaches salvation by faith, and baptism, the duty of the saved, “the answer of a good conscience,” after we are justified, or having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Hence, as we showed in our last, **baptism being the declaration of salvation, is in force as long as the work of salvation is going on.**

(*For proof, examine Luke 7:36-50, Matt. 9:2-7, John 8:3-11, Luke 19:1-10, Luke 23:42-43. We do not take people to the cemetery and bury them “in order to” kill them, but we take and bury them “because” they have died. Likewise, the gospel focus is not to baptize people “in order to” kill sin, but rather to baptize them “because of” their death to sin. We must first “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” – Matthew 3:8. Scripture abundantly proves that the quickening of the soul from the state of spiritual death to spiritual life takes place by the hearing of faith, prior to the act of water baptism. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is passed* (present tense) from death unto life.” John 5:24. The freeing from condemnation and passing from death to life is an *inward work* of the Holy Spirit, wrought in the heart of a penitent believer *at the time of hearing and believing*. As it is written, “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:10. This spiritual resurrection from death to life, from sin to righteousness, brings “salvation,” and is the “ground” or “cause” for which we receive

baptism. To be baptized in water is to bear witness that one *has died* to sin and *is raised* with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-6), by His soul-quickenng Word and Spirit, through the hearing of faith. “Since to bury by immersion presupposes we are dead; Then repent and get salvation e’er into the stream you’re led.” – Comments added by Harlan Sorrell.)