

“For The Remission Of Sins”

“But I HAVE been baptized for the remission of my sins.” Many Christians who have spoken with members of denominational churches have undoubtedly heard this statement when they speak of their “baptismal experience” or “testimony.” Most denominational members will declare to the bitter end that they have been baptized “for the remission of sins.” But just how accurate or scriptural is this statement? Unfortunately, this claim leads members of the Lord’s church to believe that these individuals’ conversions were just as legitimate and scriptural as their own. What is the truth of the matter?

Perhaps it is this point concerning baptism for the remission of sins which has led many denominational members to charge that Christians practice “church of Christ” baptism. That is, members of the Lord’s church will not accept anyone else into their fellowship unless they have been baptized “into the church of Christ” by a “church of Christ preacher.” Of course, any good student of the Bible can instantly recognize the fallacies in the preceding claim. To understand the controversy, one must examine what someone from a denomination means when they say they have been baptized “for the remission of sins.”

Much of the debate comes from the phrase in Acts 2:38 and specifically in reference to the word “for.” In the original language, the preposition “for” is the Greek word *eis*. This word occurs over 1,500 times in the New Testament, but is only translated as “for” 91 times. The following three examples will demonstrate the denominational mindset in the interpretation of Acts 2:38.

First, Spiros Zodhiates writes, “The preposition ‘for’ in the phrase ‘for the forgiveness of your sins’ in Greek is *eis*. It means ‘for the purpose of identifying you with the remission of sins.’” Mr. Zodhiates clearly wants repentance to be connected with the remission of sins in Acts 2:38, not baptism. As an illustration, he cites 1 Corinthians 10:2, where *eis* is translated as “into” and occurs in the phrase, “and were baptized into Moses.” He then draws the conclusion that these people were “baptized” only to be spiritually identified with the purposes and vision of Moses. Therefore, he concludes, “... baptism following repentance provides an external identification visible by others.”

Second, Charles Ryrie, in his comments on Acts 2:38, adds, “Water baptism is the outward sign of repentance and remission of sins.”

Forgiveness is through faith in Christ, not through the act of baptism." He further states, "'for' may here mean 'because of,' as in Matthew 12:41."

Third, A. T. Robertson is also convinced that "for" must be translated "because of" in Acts 2:38. He argues in this manner: You put a man in jail for murder. The "for" in that sentence means "because he already has" committed murder, not in order that he might commit murder. He further insists that the verse does not mean a man is baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sins, but because his sins have already been forgiven.

As one can readily see among Bible students of this persuasion, baptism is an outward token of what has occurred in the heart. To them, baptism is considered an "identification" often expressed as "an outward sign of an inward grace." This plainly implies that baptism is not essential to the salvation of man. These people, of course, say that once a person has been saved, they will naturally want to be baptized. Hence, one often hears of those who are baptized a week or a month after they are "saved."

The preceding three statements, which represent the majority of denominational scholarship, are based upon an incorrect rendering of the word *eis*. *Eis* is defined by Young as meaning, "with a view to." Furthermore, Thayer, in defining "baptism," states that *eis* means "to obtain the forgiveness of sins." Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich state that in Acts 2:38, *eis aphasin ton hamartion* "indicates the purpose of baptism." In answer to Ryrie and Robertson's claims, *eis* is never translated "because of" in the KJV. In addition, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich note that of all the occurrences of *eis* in the New Testament, only four could possibly be translated "because of," and these four are at best controversial. Clearly, these references indicate that the baptism produces the remission of sins, not the other way around!

Why is this issue so significant? Christians need to know this information for future studies with denominational friends and family members. It is always helpful to know why the Bible says what it does. Also, and more importantly, people baptized in denominational churches are visiting congregations of the Lord's church more frequently and claiming to have been baptized "for the remission of sins." These people may be accepted into fellowship in some sound churches.

But one must understand that their claim of baptism "for the remission of sins" is not the same as the Bible's command to be baptized "for the remission of sins." The more appropriate question for them is, "Where

you saved before you were baptized?" Christians will receive an answer in the affirmative all of the time! This answer indicates that the person was not baptized "for the remission of sins" and shows the need for further teaching and baptism according to the true purpose of God. Congregations must determine the validity of those who wish to identify and worship with them.

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