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What a blessing our church received as we feasted on God's word and enjoyed the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in the Lord! God's people from all over the country joined with us to worship and praise Him. We are already looking forward to next year, Lord willing!

BAPTISM FOR REMISSION BELIEVERS WITH SINS ALREADY REMITTED ARE COMMANDED TO BE BAPTIZED

By: Rosco Brong

"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.

For more than a thousand years before Alexander Campbell mismated the Baptist doctrine of believer's immersion with the Catholic doctrine of so-called baptismal regeneration, most of the heretics of Christendom were perverting this text and a few others in supposed support of the delusion that remission of sins may be obtained through the waters of baptism.

The Problem

Were it not for this widespread heresy of long standing, comparatively few readers would misunderstand our text, or other texts that have been given a perverted interpretation by advocates of baptismal regeneration; and any such misunderstanding would be quickly cleared up as the reader examined the text in light of context. **But when readers bring preconceived heresies to their reading, it is harder for them to see the simple truth.**

Surely it is obvious enough to any open mind that if this text teaches the Catholic - Campbellite doctrine that baptism is a condition precedent to the remission of sins, then the Bible is in hopeless contradiction with itself and we have no reliable textbook from which to derive Christian doctrine. **If the Bible is a book of contradictions, we have no reasonable ground for any Christian faith.** This is the problem raised by the contradictory doctrines of various Christian or so-called Christian sects: Are they really Biblical contradictions, or merely contradictions of interpretation? Either reading involves interpretation by the translators and requires further interpretation in English.

First, then, it is debatable whether this phrase modifies only the verb "repent," only the verb "be baptized," or

both -- not to mention one or two other possible syntactical interpretations. I merely note the difficulty: **we need not worry about it; we can get the truth clearly enough from other texts.**

As to the preposition "for" or "unto" (Greek **eis**), again the meaning is ambiguous. "For" can mean "in order to," as when a man works "for" pay that he expects to receive later; but it can also mean "because of," as when he receives pay "for" work already done. Likewise "unto" may have either a past or future reference, relating either an addition to something already had or an attainment to something else.

Properly translating in contextual agreement with New Testament language and teaching, Acts 2:38 may be read as follows: ***"And Peter said to them, Repent ye, and each of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ because of remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit."***

Why "Because Of"?

"Because of" is not the most usual translation of the Greek preposition **eis**. Many prepositions, Greek and English, are used to express various relationships. For example, look up the words "to," "in," "on," and "for" in a large English dictionary. This has been an instructive exercise even for some college students.

Young's concordance lists a dozen different translations of **eis** in the King James version, then adds "etc." The good **English bishops, whose creed teaches baptismal regeneration, avoided the translation "because of,"** but it fits excellently in several passages.

Three times in Matthew 10:41,42 "eis" is rendered "in" - "in the name." Obviously this means **"because of the name;"** in fact, it is so explained in Mark 9:41, though there the preposition used is "en."

Ninevites *"repented at (eis) the preaching of Jonahs"* Matthew 12:41; that is, of course, **because of** the preach-

ing of Jonahs.

"Wherefore didst thou doubt?" asked Jesus in Matthew 14:31. "Wherefore," meaning "why," is the King James rendering of two Greek words, **eis ti**, which could be translated literally, **"Because of what?"**

So it is evident that **"because of"** is a legitimate translation of "eis" if it can be justified from context, and the New Testament context makes this the best possible translation in Acts 2:38.

John's Baptism

From John 1:40-42 and Acts 1:20-22, it is clear that Peter was thoroughly familiar with the baptism and doctrine of John the Baptist. There is no reason to imagine that the apostle would suddenly announce a new and revolutionary doctrine of baptism, and especially in such ambiguous language.

John's baptism manifestly was not announced as a means of obtaining remission of sins. On the contrary, John demanded that candidates for his baptism whose sincerity he doubted bring forth *"fruits worthy of repentance,"* (Luke 3:8). He baptized *"in water unto (eis) repentance"* (Matthew 3:11); that is, **because of** repentance already exercised and proved by worthy fruits, as appears in the preceding verses.

Mark tells us that John preached *"the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,"* (1:4). This means that the baptism was the result of repentance. If we relate *"for (eis) the remission of sins"* to the word "repentance," then "for" may mean "in order to;" **if we relate the phrase to the word "baptism," then "for" must mean "because of" to harmonize with context.**

No honest reader, surely, will accuse the first Baptist of being a ritualist. Peter had learned of John through Andrew to follow Jesus (John 1:35-42), and we can be sure that they have the same doctrine of baptism.

Christ's Baptism

John's baptism was Christ's baptism. This truth is so important that it is recorded in all four gospels. (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22; John 1:29-34). To say that John's baptism was not Christian baptism is to say that Christ did not have Christian baptism. How ridiculous can you get?

When Christ received baptism from John the Baptist, He demonstrated once for all that baptism is not in order to the remission of sins, since Christ had no sins to be remitted. But *"thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness,"* (Matthew 3:15). That is, **baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ;** and in that death, burial and resurrection, all righteousness is fulfilled.

Apostolic Agreement

Moreover, the apostles continued the practice of baptism according to the original order, for we read, *"Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John"* [though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples], (John 4:1,2). That is, it was through the ministry of His disciples that He *"made and baptized more disciples than John."* Notice: **they made disciples first, and then they baptized them. This is always the Scriptural order.**

"Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect," I Corinthians 1:12-17. We see how completely the apostle Paul subordinated the ordinance of baptism to the preaching of the gospel.

Though baptism symbolizes the gospel, it is in itself no part of the gospel, as appears in the words, *"Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel."*

Paul likewise identified his baptism with that of John the Baptist when he found at Ephesus a dozen disciples who claimed, no doubt sincerely, that they had John's baptism, but who had never

heard John's message. Of course, a **mere form of baptism, administered by unauthorized persons who lack the Scriptural message conveyed in true baptism, is of no value.** When Paul informed these imperfectly taught disciples of John's true message, they proved their faith by being baptized *"in the name,"* that is, by the authority, *"of the Lord Jesus."* (See Acts 19:1-7).

Let Peter Interpret

If there are readers who might imagine that Peter's doctrine of baptism could have been different from that of John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul, it would seem to be worth while to find out whether Peter himself stated his doctrine any more clearly on other occasions.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." Acts 3:19, with no mention of baptism. But **if he had considered baptism to be necessary to salvation, his language here would have been criminally misleading.**

Again, to the household of Cornelius, Peter declared concerning Christ: *"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,"* Acts 10:43. Either Peter was a true apostle or he was not; and if he told the truth to Cornelius, then his language in Acts 2:38 must not be misinterpreted so as to contradict his plain statement here.

With no reference to baptism, Peter affirms explicitly that the new birth is by virtue of *"...the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,"* and that it is *"...not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God..."* I Peter 1:3, 23.

Peter's only mention of baptism in his two epistles is in I Peter 3:21, and there he is careful to declare that **baptism is NOT a "...putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer"** [or, asking] *"of a good conscience toward God..."*

Common honesty demands that we let Peter interpret himself, and thus it becomes perfectly clear that in **Acts 2:38, he was commanding each of his hearers who repented, and no others, to be baptized because of remission of sins - remission already obtained through repentance** (which in a Scriptural sense includes faith). That this was

his meaning, and that he was so understood, is obvious also in verse 41, *"...they that gladly received his word were baptized."*

Christ's Commission

Alexander Campbell felt free to "restore" a "primitive Christianity" far removed from the faith once for all delivered to the saints - far removed from true New Testament Christianity. But true Christians must recognize Christ and Christ alone as our Lord, *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..."* Hebrews 12:2.

Never did the Lord Jesus condition His salvation upon the outward act of baptism. His commission to His church was first to make disciples, then to baptize them, and finally to teach them to observe all His commandments. Matthew 28:18-20, *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

In Mark 16:16, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* He assumes that true believers will generally be baptized, but **according to Jesus the damning failure of sinners is not failure to be baptized, but failure to believe the gospel.** So He taught always.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," John 3:18.