

REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM

(by Foy E. Wallace, Jr.)

The battleground of the design of baptism has been Acts 2:38. Yet if Acts 2:38 were not in the New Testament the divine design of baptism is amply set forth in many other passages. On the other hand, if there were no other verse in the Bible on the design or purpose of baptism Acts 2:38, free of perversion, clearly sets it forth. Indeed, we would be willing to stake the issue on the single passage. It is of distinct value, a value that should be emphasized, in any controversy over the place of baptism in the gospel plan. It is the most conspicuous passage in the New Testament on the subject of baptism and the text should be freed of the withering influence of sophistry.

In deference to readers who may not be able to quote the passage, it reads: "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 Spirit."

A View of the Text

The passage presents an inseparable connection between repentance, baptism and remission. The preposition "for," being *eis*, means necessary to; in order to. It makes remission of sins depend on baptism in the same sense in which it depends on repentance. An application of the simple rules of grammar will make this fact clear. For instance, transposing the sentence it reads: "Every one of you repent and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." Here two things--repentance and baptism--are related to a third, the remission of sins. The two things are connected with the one thing by the particle *eis*. The one particle *eis* cannot express two relations. Whatever relation repentance bears to the remission of sins, baptism bears that same relation. Is repentance essential to remission of sins? So is baptism.

An Answer to a Question

The words of Acts 2:38 were spoken in answer to a question. The question was: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" The answer was: "Every one of you repent and be baptized." Now, when were they forgiven? Not when Peter began preaching; not when they were convicted; and not when they cried, what shall we do. The question itself implies the necessity for an answer. And the answer itself implies its essentiality. But the answer to the question was: Repent and be baptized. That alone would make it essential, with no design expressed--it was the answer to their question.

The object of the question was what to do. For what--if not to be forgiven? Then did Peter tell them something to do because of it? A strange answer to a question, indeed! And a strange question, searching for something they already had, but did not know it! Yes, as an answer to their question, the command to repent and be baptized, if no design had been expressed, would still link repentance and baptism together as essential to the object of the question asked. The object of that question being forgiveness, the answer to it makes repentance and baptism together essential to forgiveness.

The Answer Analyzed

The copulative conjunction "and" couples two verbs. Repent is one verb; be baptized is the other verb. They are joined together by the Holy Spirit--and what the Holy Spirit joins together who will dare to separate?

The phrase "for the remission of sins" modifies both verbs, sustaining equal relation to both. Repent and be baptized for what? For precisely the same thing. Eliminate one verb, make it a sentence with a simple predicate instead of a compound one, and read it: "Repent every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Or, eliminating the verb repent, and retaining the verb be baptized, read it again: "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." There is no good sense in the passage if remission of sins is not the purpose of both repentance and baptism. In fact, in Acts 2:38, repentance by itself is not for anything; and baptism by itself is not for anything; but repentance and baptism are, together, for the remission of sins.

The Greek Preposition Eis

It is often urged that the clause "be baptized for the remission of sins" is susceptible to different interpretations. But let it be remembered that it is not baptism for the remission of sins in Acts 2:38, but repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, and two interpretations cannot be made of that.

The preposition eis never meant "because of" nor "on account of" and was never so used in all of the New Testament. Baptists sometimes use such examples as, "He was arrested for (on account of) stealing;" and "He was paid for (because of) his labor." In such instances the English word "for," which comes from the Greek word dia and which means "on account of," is used. The sentences, for that reason, are not parallel. Informed Baptist preachers know it, and if honest will not resort to the dodge--yea, the deceit, Compare the uses of eis in some other, passages.

1. Acts 3:19: "Be converted that (eis). Your sins may be blotted out"--"That" is the preposition eis, and it means in order to the blotting out of sins.
2. Romans 10:10: "Believeth unto (eis) righteousness"--in order to righteousness.
3. Acts 11:18: "Repentance unto (eis) life" in order to life.
4. 2 Cor. 7:10: "Repentance unto (eis) salvation"-in order to salvation.
5. Matt. 26:28: "This is my blood shed for (eis) the remission of sins." Does Matthew 26:28 mean that his blood was shed because of or in order to the remission of sins? Let some Baptist preacher tell you.
6. Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized ... for (eis) the remission of sins." The preposition eis in Acts 2:38 means in order to. The word "eis" never meant "on account of" and was never so used anywhere in all of the New Testament. Baptism is, therefore, in order to remission of sins.

Believe-Repent-Baptized

The Bible order of gospel conditions is: Believe, repent, be baptized. But we believe eis salvation unto, or into, salvation. So Baptists are wont to say that since we believe eis (into) and one believes before he is baptized, one is, therefore, saved before he is baptized. But what is the Baptist order? Here it is: Repent, believe, baptized. And what about the word eis? Here it is: Repent eis; Believe eis; Baptized eis. So if "believe eis" puts salvation before baptism--then "repent eis," in the Baptist order, would put salvation before faith because they tell us repentance comes before faith! The facts, shorn of sophistry, are simply that the word "eis," which is the word "for" in Acts 2:38, means in order to, in view of, toward etc., and the context shows when it is the final act of entering into; therefore, the translators knew when to render the word unto and when to render it into. But one thing is very certain, it never meant because of, or on account of, being always prospective and never retrospective, and was never so rendered. Thayer's Greek lexicon defines the Word "eis" as follows: "A preposition governing the accusative, and denoting entrance into, or direction and limit; into, to, towards, for, among"--and that, together with the Bible use of it, ought to settle it.

Two Answers Compared The third chapter of Acts records the second sermon of Peter in Jerusalem, With the same object in view he said to these Jews: Repent and be converted (turn again) that your sins may be blotted out so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). This answer compares with Acts 2:38 as follows:

1. Acts 2:38: Repent-be baptized-remission of sins -gift of Holy Spirit.
2. Acts 3:19: Repent-be converted-sins blotted out- seasons of refreshing.

No man can study this comparison honestly without seeing that "be baptized" is just as much connected with "remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 as "be converted" is connected with "sins blotted out" in Acts 3:19. And it definitely proves that baptism is the converting, or the turning act. Repentance is not the turning act for Peter said, Repent and turn. But "turn," or "be converted," occupies exactly the same place in Acts 3:19 that "be baptized" occupies in Acts 2:38. Then baptism is the turning act. It is in order to the remission of sins. To oppose plain passages of scripture is but a waste of ingenuity.

Some Objections Considered

It is after the opponents of truth on baptism are routed by these plain scripture facts that they resort to the effort to nullify the word of God with certain supposed conditions and contingencies. But it can be shown that every contingency introduced to eliminate baptism will under similar circumstances eliminate faith in Christ.

It is argued that if baptism is essential to salvation it puts salvation in the hands of the administrator. But there is nothing that does not depend upon a contingency of some sort. True, one cannot be baptized without an administrator, or without water, or without a contingency of extrinsic help from another. But apply the same objection to the knowledge of Christ that men must possess to be saved. What about remote countries where such knowledge depends on the missionary? Is belief essential to salvation? Then since Paul said, "how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Does not the same contingency carry the same weight in the matter of belief, or, the knowledge of Christ, as in the case of baptism? If allowances are made for such, and yet the essentiality of faith is preserved, then why not apply the same principles to the command of baptism?

Another instance is in the oft-heard sigh that such a doctrine damns some person's father or mother, and, hence cannot be true. But every one since Adam and Eve has had a father and mother, so by contingencies every condition of the gospel can be eliminated and we will have universal salvation. A Chinaman or a Jew hears this same preacher who makes this objection against baptism, preach that faith in Christ is essential to salvation. He will say: That doctrine damns my father and mother who did not believe in Christ. How will the preacher dispose of the contingency? Ask him. There is no account of any conversion without the third party. The great commission itself required the third party. Read the book of Acts.

It is said that we would condemn those who cannot be baptized. Apply the same argument to faith. Countless millions have died without the knowledge of Christ. He who tries to prove that baptism is not essential by one who cannot be baptized is a failure as a teacher. At best it would

only exempt infants, idiots and those who cannot do it. To weak minds such contingencies are objections against a divine command, but thoughtful persons can see at a glance that what such reasoning will eliminate all conditions of salvation with the same stroke.

As to those cases often urged about certain ones dying without baptism, there are three points involved: (1) the physical impossibility (2) the moral impossibility (3) the willful neglect. All such are without the law, outside of its provisions and promises. Clemency belongs only to the Judge, and it is not within our power to grant it. The case has gone to the Judgment.

Finally, it is urged that to make baptism necessary to salvation contradicts numerous passages on faith. The objection rests on the assumption that these numerous passages on faith suspend salvation on faith only the thing not one of them says. It will drive the objector back to the doctrine of salvation by grace only, that the sinner is helpless, his salvation depending on no act of his own, in which case he would be no more to blame for his damnation than a dead man is for not rising from the dead. It would mean that naked Omnipotence saves or damns!

All such objections to God's commands originate in and proceed from hearts that lack faith. And it is just the sort of preaching that is being done by preachers who berate baptism that encourages people to disregard the word of God and die in disobedience.

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