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Peter tells how sinners can be saved by JESUS

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It's Through a NEW BIRTH of water and spirit

Jesus told Nicodemus that those who wanted to enter His kingdom must do so by way of a new birth. This was a new birth of water and their spirit – a spiritual rebirth which climaxed in baptism into Christ. That rebirth was more fully explained by Peter when seeking sinners asked him (Acts 2:37), “What must we do?” They realized they were lost in sin. They sought redemption. Peter explained simply what sinners must do in order to be saved.

If we believe that Jesus is Lord, then in order to enter His Way we must turn away from sin, **turning to Jesus as our Lord**, and **we must be immersed in water** in response to His command that this is to be done. Peter did not call this saving process a new birth, but since he's answering the question which pertains to entering the Kingdom of Christ, we may know that he's simply restating what Jesus had privately told Nicodemus several months earlier on this subject (John 3:5).

Birth Is Preceded by a Begetting

Human birth requires a begetting to precede and cause the actual birth. It appears there are equally two steps in the new birth of water and spirit. The begetting for spiritual rebirth is said by the apostle Peter to be through “the word of Christ” (1 Peter 1:22-25). Sinners who learn about Jesus and His offer of salvation are urged to then turn away from sin and to follow Jesus as Lord. Our new birth comes through our obedience to that gospel call. We turn to Jesus and accept baptism into Him because that's what the Word teaches is how to enter the Way. Obeying is not just believing. Jesus speaks of the new life which is possible through His death and resurrection. In each gospel account we read of gospel seed which is “planted” in the soil of a human heart. The seed in most cases pro-

2 duces spiritual life which leads to eternal life. Some who hear the gospel do not believe or obey it. Jesus informs that all who reject gospel truth (“the word”) will be eternally sorry (Mark 4:13-20).

Paul reports that as a result of his having preached the gospel in Corinth, converts to that gospel could consider him as their spiritual father (1 Corinthians 4:15 and 3:6). The gospel of Christ as it was heard, believed, and obeyed in repentance had begotten them for eternal life. Through the shared story of Jesus and His love, the “seed” of the gospel is planted and fertilized. James writes, “*Submit to God and **accept the word** that He plants in your hearts, **which is able to save you***” (James 1:21). Paul repeats this theme by mentioning to Galatian Christians that God had given to them His Spirit *because* they had heard and believed (and therefore obeyed) the gospel (Galatians 3:5).

In faith that the gospel story is true, believers who repent and are baptized are spiritually reborn and made members of Christ’s church. We receive remission of sins and the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God (Acts 2:38). Paul explains, “*It is through FAITH that all of you are God’s sons in union with Christ Jesus. You were BAPTIZED INTO union with Christ*” (Galatians 3:26,27). The indwelling Spirit is promised to all who meekly receive and therefore obey (James 1:18,21) **the implanted word which is Christ’s gospel.**

In the new birth we are reborn of water and spirit and receive God’s Spirit within. Chapters 6-8 of Romans, and 1 Corinthians 12:13 (properly interpreted) help us understand how we are reborn in a united spirit and are promised that God then will live within us. It’s for unity with Jesus that we are reborn! And for unity with all who share our love for Him. The apostle Paul urges that all who are “in Christ” should realize the unity into which we were baptized. Our baptisms were identical. No one gets baptized better than anyone else did. And these identical baptisms bring us all into the one body of Christ. We should recognize and respect our unity in Him. The baptism of which Paul spoke in Galatians 3:27 and in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and in Romans 6 are each the same baptism which Jesus commanded that men should perform whenever a new believer repented of sin and sought salvation in Christ. Baptism is part of

the new birth which brings us into Christ and into His body. **3**
It's the "one baptism" of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 4:5. If our loyalty is to Jesus Christ, through new birth we became part of the "one body" which is Christ's church. **Jesus prayed for us to realize and actualize and rejoice in our unity in Him.**

The New Birth is of WATER and spirit!

But perhaps in 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul was saying the baptism was performed by God's Spirit rather than in a spirit of unity. Many think so. It's not that way. In Philippians 1:27, this same phrase "in/by one spirit" is used to modify "standing firmly for truth." Is it the Spirit who is to stand firmly for truth, or is it *us who claim to belong to Jesus* who are to stand firm? It's US who are to stand for truth and US who share a unifying baptism into Christ which brings us into His one body. The phrase is also used in 1 Corinthians 12:3, referring to confessing faith in Jesus as the Christ. It's US who come to believe in Jesus and then are urged to say so on every occasion. Those who deny Jesus surely are not helped in that denial by God's Spirit. We who love Him and are born again do have the presence of His Spirit to help us stand fast for Jesus.

God acts in creating new life within as we hear the Word of truth, and as we turn away from sin, and as we are baptized into Christ and into His body. It's the **baptism which follows faith and repentance** that brings us fully into new life in Christ. In the Bible, Galatians 5, 2nd Peter, and Romans 12 tell us more about the effect of allowing God to rule in our hearts. Jesus speaks of this power as us remaining attached to "the vine." **He is the vine.**

Fruit produced by "the spirit"

If we do "abide in the vine" where the power of Jesus is present, the fruit produced in our lives will be "fruit of the spirit" as contrasted to fruit of "the flesh" which leads some to produce terrible fruit. See the listings in Galatians 5 to contrast bad and good fruit. Paul is contrasting what wicked men choose over what we who seek godliness and goodness will see resulting from our good choices.

Good spiritual fruit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control. Shouldn't these be what we want in our life? Peter also urges us to

4 seek and to produce such fruit by adding to our faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly love and love (2nd Peter 1:3-9). Many passages contrast the results of our allowing fleshly appetites to lead us astray or else our spiritual desires, strengthened by God's Spirit, to be our guide and helper.

Is the fruit *given* to us by God's Spirit? None of these passages suggest that God will miraculously bestow any of these characteristics on anyone. It's our choice. What we seek, we will find. What we go after, we're apt to receive. Peter calls for **us** to do the adding. He doesn't say God will add these things while we sit idle or spend our time praying for Him to do the work of making us over. Yet John writes, "But you have had the Holy Spirit poured out on you by Christ, and so all of you know the truth," and "As long as His Spirit remains in you, you do not need anyone to teach you, for His Spirit teaches you about everything."

If John meant that every person hosting Christ's Spirit (remember that everyone who is in Christ is given the Holy Spirit as a result of their new birth) would fully and perfectly understand Christian doctrine, how can we account for the dissension over doctrine from the first century even until now? Do only those possess the Spirit who understand all truth just as I do? Is knowledge of the Bible a special gift of the Spirit? We can see this is *not* the case.

Seeking and Finding Unity

The unity God desires for His church will not be brought about by a miraculous gift of knowledge which enables all Christians to entirely agree on apostolic doctrine. It hasn't been that way. It won't be that way. We should not today expect miraculous wisdom and knowledge to be sent to us in place of our personally reading and studying the Bible. *Jude warns that God's message was "once for all delivered."* And the writer of Hebrews admonishes us about our need to be attentive to the message of Jesus, for there'll not be a new and different one sent to us by the Father of Jesus.

James invites us to seek God's help when we want to know truth (James 1:5). Paul prayed for Ephesian Christians, so they could see the revealed truth, that God would give them a "spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1:17,18). And he wrote, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlight-

ened.” We are the losers if we today rely only on human means when we seek knowledge. God hears and answers prayer. We should faithfully, earnestly pray for His guidance and help whenever we face any decision or determination.

But it is wrong to pray and then make no effort to meet the need we recognized. Just as lazy Christians are not miraculously made diligent workers, patient, loving, and unselfish (against their will and inclinations), neither are we blessed with knowledge of God’s Word when we refuse or neglect to read and study it. The same laws of language and logic apply to the Bible as to any other written work. God can and will help us learn. We should not be hesitant to ask for His help. But He doesn’t give us a substitute for the Word which was once for all delivered to the saints. What the Spirit provides Christians today is a motive and state of heart in which we can make determinations of doctrine. He does not give any of us new and different instructions. Truth doesn’t change.

Learning and Knowing Truth

Why does it ever seem possible for us to change a teaching or decision we thought came to us directly from God? We have to realize that possibly our understanding which we now see may not agree with revelations which came to us from some other source than the One who inspired men to write Bible books. In order to learn truth, Christians should study the Bible as well as praying for guidance. We also should realize that not all who quote scripture prove truth by their quotation. When the devil was tempting Jesus, each temptation was accompanied by a quotation from the Bible. Yet Jesus refuted and refused each misused scripture.

Bible quotations can be used to mislead. Sly scholars, or fervent and faithful saints, may twist truth by misunderstanding or misapplying Bible passages. Those who hope to recognize truth need to keep their wits about them and “handle aright the word of truth.” Should we call on God to do for us what we could have done for ourselves? Through study and prayer, I can understand the Bible. I need to read it for myself and consider what has been revealed. Even trusted teachers may sometimes be wrong.

Apples grow on apple trees. Oranges don’t grow there, or bananas. God has arranged that each tree and plant should produce

6 its own fruit rather than some other kind. As a normal result of walking with Jesus in new life, ***every true Christian will produce good spiritual fruit.*** By God’s provident power, and by my selfless surrender, the spirit of love, joy, peace, etc. will gradually displace my human self-centered spirit (the “flesh”) with its evil fruit. Drinking from the vine to Whom we are attached will drive out Satan’s seductive spirit.

The process of maturing in Christ is called “growing” in Him. A healthy, well-fed child grows to the limits set by God. Growth just happens. That’s God’s plan. Babies in Christ also will grow as they feed on “the vine.” To become like Christ is to be filled with His Spirit, and this should be the goal of each of us who have turned to Jesus seeking light and life. We want to be like Jesus. The more we know about Him and His life on earth, the more apt we are to be successful in our goal of becoming like Him.

Usual and Unusual Spiritual Gifts

Special spiritual gifts are mentioned only a few times in Acts, and then in Paul’s letters to the Corinthian Christians. They were unusual. Most Christians had none of the “special” gifts of the Spirit. Yet some in our day want to make special spiritual gifts the center of their preaching and practice. We need to put our emphasis where Jesus wants it. We have no proof He wants emphasis on us rather than on Him.

As for Spirit baptism, it was sent upon the apostles to make them special. But God wants us to realize that OUR baptisms should unite us all as equal parts of His church. We are not apostles. We have no clergy set apart from others in the body. We have pastor/teachers selected from among us, and evangelists, and specially-empowered servants. But we have no popes or cardinals or presidents or other dignitaries who hold offices which make them superior to others in the church of the Lord. Every elder is a bishop. Both terms as used in the Bible refer to the same people.

There is no baptism in or by the Spirit for Christians. Nor has there ever been one. The Spirit is given to every sinner who in faith repents of sin and is immersed into Christ, but this is not a baptism in the Spirit. It is not a baptism by the Spirit. God’s Spirit is His gift to those who because of faith in Jesus and repentance from sin are

then buried with Jesus in immersion in water from which we are raised into new life (Romans 6).

We who are in Christ were each *baptized into* Him and into His one body. In water. We are called to maintain the unity of the body of which we are a part. Even when we see matters differently, as we surely will, we are to LOVE one another. It's by our shared love that others will recognize that we are in Christ. If we were begotten by the Word of God, if we were reborn of water and the spirit, if we now seek to be filled with and possessed by Christ, we are sure to be lovers rather than fighters. In his Corinthian discussion of works of the spirit, Paul makes love central. When all else fails, love lasts. Love lets us win.

WE MUST NOT LOVE FALSE TEACHING

Now I offer for your thought a totally different idea on this subject from a brother who has adopted Baptist thought and on this subject now claims incorrectly to be teaching Bible truth. His teaching is contrary to truth. Al Maxey in his Reflections article #515 for 1/3/2012 concerning Acts 2:38 wrote:

“On the surface, in English, it seems that by what he said as recorded in Acts 2:38 Peter meant that the purpose of baptism was to effect the remission of sins, which explains why baptismal remissionists so readily appeal to this verse” [E. Calvin Beisner, "Does Acts 2:38 Teach Baptismal Remission?," *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2].

RAY: We who teach Bible truth make no such claim. Al is creating a straw man so he can knock it down. What the apostle clearly says is not at all what Al suggests. What WE find in what IS said is not what Al by quoting others claims that we teach. The clear instruction by the apostle was that believing sinners needed to both repent AND be baptized for the remission of sins and to receive the gift of the Spirit. **WE do not claim that baptism is a sacrament.** We don't cite the passage to prove anything at all about baptism **alone.** Al's quoted remarks and his own statements quoted next are off base entirely. Al continues:

Yes, “on the surface, in English,” the words of Peter do indeed *seem* to promote such a view, but deeper study and reflec-

8 tion show the matter to be a bit more complex than some would have us believe. In reality, “Acts 2:38 assuredly confronts the interpreter with weighty problems,’ says Professor Stonehouse, and the extent and diversity of the theological exegesis of the verse show how right he is” [Dr. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, p. 75]. Dr. A. T. Robertson, one of Christendom’s greatest New Testament Greek scholars, agreed, saying that this verse “is the subject of endless controversy as men look at it from the standpoint of sacramental or of evangelical theology” [*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, e-Sword]. “Peter’s answer to the people’s anguished cry presents interpreters with a set of complex theological problems that are often looked upon only as grist for differing theological mills” [*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 283].

Unfortunately, this is absolutely correct. Disciples of Christ have fussed, fought, feuded and fragmented over Acts 2:38 for centuries! Vastly differing theologies have each embraced this passage as the validation of their view, resulting only in greater confusion than clarity. Much of this is a result of a failure to fully perceive both the grammar and structure of the passage as it appears in the Greek text, preferring instead to build a theology around the wording in English as handed down from the old *King James Version*. [RAY: Note that I never use the KJV, nor are the versions I prefer based on the KJV.]

Additionally, by lifting a passage from its overall context, one can easily do damage to the original intent of the author, thus *abusing* the verse to further a tradition, rather than *using* it to further Truth. “Rarely is doctrine ever made from a single verse” [Matt Slick, “Baptism and Acts 2:38,” *Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry*]. One must examine carefully and prayerfully ALL of what the Bible says with respect to a topic, not just lift a handful of passages out of context to prove a personal or party perception or preference. Sadly, I fear we have done too much of the latter with respect to Acts 2:38.

RAY: What “we” have done is to teach what the apostles taught and practiced. “We” have not depended on the meaning of a single word or a single verse, as is alleged. It’s particularly helpful to note how conversions occurred in the apostolic age, which Al seems to ignore as he continues. If we do want to understand what Peter said in Acts 2:38, we do well to not seek light on what HE said by reading later comments not directly concerning answering the question he was addressing.

The reality of God’s inspired revelation, and this is perceived *throughout*, is that we are saved by grace through faith, not by virtue of anything we have done or ever could do; rather, it is a gift of God because of His great love and mercy. If this is true, and I believe with all my heart that it is, then we must repent of proclaiming a performance-based and knowledge-based salvation!! [RAY: Peter, when asked, made a quite different answer to what Al now suggests!]

Redemption is not to be found in getting religious rituals right; it is found in the redemptive act of our Redeemer!! Salvation is a GIFT, and it is received by FAITH. [RAY: Peter says the gift is given to those who not only believe, but also **obey** the gospel.] Yes, genuine faith will *show* itself in our daily lives in countless loving manifestations, but none of these evidentiary acts, in and of themselves, constitute the precise point of salvation (as some sacramentalists assert). Thus, passages like Acts 2:38 must be understood in view of the truth that “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

RAY: It’s grace, not faith, that is God’s “gift” in Ephesians 2:8. Remember that “faith comes by hearing.” I hope Al did not intend to imply that faith is given by God. Note that instruction in Acts 2:38 is directed, not to God, but to seeking sinners. Sinners are told what to do. What God will do is stated as well. We believe and accept both as stated. Passages which deal with conversion include specific examples in Acts of actual conversions. Why does this lengthy article by Al Maxey ignore those inspired examples? It’s because the examples do not conform to what he now wants to believe. The 3,000 who heard what Peter said chose to believe and act upon what is recorded in Acts 2:38. Why are some so determined to not believe and therefore not act in accordance with the apostolic teaching in Acts 2:38? Al continues:

With that foundational truth in mind, how are we to understand what Peter told the people in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost following our Lord’s death, burial, resurrection and ascension? Peter’s message in his sermon was essentially: Jesus is the Messiah ... and you killed Him ... Repent of this, and embrace Him! Dr. F. F. Bruce correctly points out that in Acts 2:38 “the call to repentance is Peter’s basic and primary demand” [*Commentary on the Book of Acts*, p. 75]. When we

10 teach *baptism* as the primary demand of this verse we have missed Peter's point.

RAY: The straw man is attacked. "We" do not teach baptism as the primary demand. What the verse calls for sinners to do is REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED, based on faith in Jesus as Lord. Al continues:

Peter's purpose was to *turn the hearts* of his hearers to faith in Jesus as their Redeemer, who, by virtue of His shed blood, would cleanse them of their sins! [RAY: What Peter answered when asked what sinners must do is still true even if Al doesn't agree. He now moves on to a different text, apparently attempting to disprove Acts 2:38 by what Luke records in Acts 3. But Peter's answer to the same question would be the same! "Repent AND be baptized."]

This basic emphasis is especially seen in Peter's sermon in Solomon's Colonnade where he says nothing about baptism, but instead declares to the people, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19). [RAY: Note that Al quotes next what he himself doesn't choose to affirm is true.] "This shows that for Luke at least, and probably also for Peter, while baptism with water was the expected symbol for conversion, it was not an indispensable criterion for salvation" [*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 284]. Peter's clear emphasis is *repentance*, which "is not a mere feeling; it has not the uncertainty of moods and sentiments. It is not a simple change in the weather of the soul. It is a distinct alteration of the focus of the intelligence; it carries with it a movement of the will; in short, it is a revolution in the very ground of the man's being" [*The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 18, p. 66].

The "Baptismal Remissionists," however, insist that the word "for" in Acts 2:38 proves otherwise! Yes, the people were to *repent*, but forgiveness of sins came at the point of *baptism*, they declare. [RAY: It's Luke quoting Peter who makes the claim. Of course we see, as every reader should see, that the promise of receiving both remission and the gift FOLLOWS our obedience in repenting **and** being baptized! Why would anyone believe otherwise? But Al can go on and on and on to explain his change of understanding and practice.]

After all, Peter said to [RAY: repent AND] be baptized "FOR the forgiveness of your sins." Thus, sins are forgiven AT baptism! Right?! Again, "on the surface, in English," this wording

does seem to promote such a view ... *until* one begins to look a bit deeper and to ask some vital questions. For example, what do the rest of the NT writings have to say about forgiveness of sins and how such forgiveness is acquired? [RAY: *What other scriptures did or could the 3,000 examine that day? It's a foolish suggestion that we must examine other texts unknown to his hearers in order to understand as they did!*]

Paul makes the case, in Romans 4, that Abraham's transgressions were forgiven and his sins covered *by faith*, and that it was a gift of God's grace *prior* to his circumcision. Was circumcision an outward rite to which this man was required by God to submit? Yes, it was. But, as Paul notes, his forgiveness and justification were *not* due to this outward act, but rather based upon his *faith*. Paul goes farther here and informs us that this principle is true for us under this new covenant. Forgiveness, justification, salvation are not based on our acts of faith, but upon faith itself.

The various acts (of which baptism is one) are merely evidentiary in nature: they *show* faith (James 2). They are *essential* (no one is denying that fact), but they themselves are not *redemptive* (as some claim). Thus, baptism does not remit sins, but evidences one's faith in and acceptance of the One who does!! [RAY: Hooray! Peter was wrong. Al proved it!?!]

However, we are still faced with that little word "for" in Acts 2:38. Because of that word, some will vehemently assert that everything I have just said is "false teaching," and thus "Al Maxey is a heretic who denies baptism." [RAY: The denial we hear is that sinners need to repent AND be baptized. Yes, Al's teaching is false and heretical.] Nothing could be farther from the truth. Water baptism is an act commanded by our Lord. Thus, we must comply. I have baptized many people during the years of my ministry, and I anticipate baptizing a great many more. I preach and teach the importance of water baptism, and I practice it. [RAY: Al no longer baptizes for the remission of sins and to enter the Lord's church. As do all Baptists, he claims salvation precedes the completion of the new birth.]

What has changed for me, however, is my previous perception that water baptism is *the* specific act *by* which, and *the* precise point in time *at* which, one is forgiven, justified, redeemed, saved, etc. I will no longer proclaim baptism as a *sacrament* [RAY: Good! Baptism is indeed not a sacrament.], but rather as a required manifestation of one's faith. Forgiveness comes to those who turn from sin and in faith turn to the Lord.

12 Such persons then *demonstrate* that inner faith and repentance by a number of visible acts that will occur throughout their lives (one of which is baptism). But, can one justify this view that forgiveness comes to those who by faith have turned to the Lord, or does the word “for” suggest it is *baptism* that brings the blessing? [RAY: We know that it’s both repentance and baptism which do the work to bring believers into Christ.]

I believe one can make a strong case, from the structure and grammar of the Greek, for the former. And furthermore, if such an understanding of the text is at least a legitimate one textually and exegetically, then that fact would forever remove Acts 2:38 as a proof-text for baptismal remissionists. “A Bible verse *proves* a doctrine only if that doctrine is the only interpretation the grammar and word definitions permit. If there are other plausible interpretations, the verse might be used as evidence in a cumulative case for the doctrine, but its evidential value rises or falls in inverse proportion to the plausibility of the other options” (E. Calvin Beisner, “Does Acts 2:38 Teach Baptismal Remission?,” *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2). So, let’s take off our sectarian spectacles and seek to view this passage with fresh spiritual sight. [RAY: Al respects Baptist scholars, and wants us also to do so. I don’t.]

First, we need to realize that the word “for” in Acts 2:38 is *not* the actual word used in the Greek text (more about that word later). Nevertheless, even the English word “for” has quite a wide variety of meaning and usage. In *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, for example, there are **eleven** definitions of the preposition “for” given, and baptismal remissionists have assumed that only *one* of those definitions can apply in this passage: that it denotes purpose, and signifies “in order to obtain.” Although other legitimate definitions of “for” make equal sense, they are nevertheless discarded. Why? Because they don’t support their theology! For example: “for” may also mean motive, thus signifying “because of.” Would this definition of “for” in Acts 2:38 make sense? Would it be consistent with NT teaching? Of course it would. [RAY: Just ask any Baptist scholar!] So, *why* is one chosen dogmatically over the other? I think we all know the answer to that. Is this other usage of “for” found in the NT writings? Yes, it is. In Matt. 3:11, just to give one instance, we find John the Baptist saying, “I baptize you with water **for** repentance.” Okay, are they baptized “in order to obtain” repentance? That doesn’t make sense.

But, being baptized “because of” their repentance makes sense (and, by the way, this is the Greek preposition “**eis**” here, just as it is in Acts 2:38). When words have a variety of meaning and usage, we must allow the context in which the word appears, as well as the overall teaching of Scripture, to dictate which usage best fits. And where *several* may fit, one dare NOT become dogmatic over his interpretive choice. “The plausibility of these alternative understandings of ‘for’ reduces the evidential value of Acts 2:38 for the doctrine of baptismal remission of sins” [E. Calvin Beisner, “Does Acts 2:38 Teach Baptismal Remission?,” *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2]. [RAY: There are MANY Baptist scholars!]

The English word “for,” however, is just a translation of the Greek preposition “**eis**,” but, like the former, the latter also has a wide variety of meaning and usage, including the two mentioned above. “The illustrations of both usages are numerous in the NT and the *Koine* generally” (Dr. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, e-Sword). Therefore, there are times when the Greek preposition *eis* (which appears some 1774 times in the NT writings) refers to purpose, and there are times when it refers to motive (and times when it refers to something else entirely). Again, one must allow the context, as well as comparative study of NT teaching on the topic in question, to guide one’s understanding of the preposition in any given passage. Yes, baptism *for/eis* (purpose) the remission of sin is a valid rendering of the phrase, but is it a valid teaching in light of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. I do not believe it is. [RAY: If Peter had only known he wouldn’t have spoken so carelessly, no doubt!]

On the other hand, baptism *for/eis* (motive) the remission of sin, which is also a valid understanding of the phrase (and is the view taken by such Greek scholars as A. T. Robertson and J. R. Mantey, just to name a couple), IS consistent with the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. We are washed clean of our sins by the precious blood of the Lamb, and we reflect the reality of that spiritual washing in the symbolic rite of baptism, which is a testimony and affirmation not only to ourselves, but also to others (much like our partaking of the elements of the Lord’s Supper, by which we participate emblematically with the reality itself). Thus, we are baptized *because of* our forgiveness, not in order to *obtain* forgiveness. The latter elevates a sacrament; the former elevates the Savior!! [RAY: Here, Al’s Baptist opinion is clearly stated.]

14 Baptism in water is “the visible seal of that remission” of our sins (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, e-Sword). [RAY: How did this correct statement get in with all the incorrect ones?] “Water baptism is the external symbol by which those who believed the gospel, repented of their sins, and acknowledged Jesus as their Lord publicly bore witness to their new life” (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 284). Most Christians recognize that “there is nothing in baptism itself that can wash away sin. That can be done only by the pardoning mercy of God through the atonement of Christ” (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*, e-Sword). [RAY: Or by sinners obeying the gospel, say the apostles, by new believers repenting and being baptized.]

The renowned NT Greek scholar, Dr. A. T. Robertson, in his classic work “Word Pictures in the New Testament,” declared, “My view is decidedly against the idea that Peter, Paul, or anyone 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.” Dr. F. F. Bruce agrees, characterizing “baptism as the visible token of repentance” (*Commentary on the Book of Acts*, p. 77). [RAY: Good Baptists heard from.]

But, is there anything else in the text of Acts 2:38, either grammatically or structurally, that might perhaps bring additional light, and which might help us in our understanding of Peter's intent? Well, as it so happens, *yes there is*. There is a very significant break in the passage structurally that is not carried over into the English. “There is a change of number from plural to singular and of person from second to third. This change marks a break in the thought here that the English translation does not preserve” (Dr. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, e-Sword). “In Peter's command, the verb *repent* is second-person plural. The verb *be baptized* is third-person singular. In the phrase *for the forgiveness of your sins*, the word *your* is second-person plural again. Imagine the implications of *ignoring* this switch from second-person plural to third-person singular and back again!!” (E. Calvin Beisner, “Does Acts 2:38 Teach Baptismal Remission?,” *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2). This interpretation views “*for/eis*” as signifying *purpose* more than *motive*, but it links it with repentance rather than baptism. In other words,

Peter is telling the people that they need to turn away from their present course and turn toward the Lord *in order that* they might receive the forgiveness of their sins. Each one doing so was then to be baptized in the name of Jesus the Christ, the very one they had previously rejected, but were now declaring to be Lord and Savior. That act of faith (baptism) would affirm their faith and bear witness to their new allegiance! It is not the turning itself that forgives sins, but rather the One to whom they turn: Jesus!! HE washes clean those who in fullness of faith turn to Him. Such persons then evidence that faith throughout the remainder of their lives (one of the first evidentiary acts being baptism).

Dr. Beisner wrote, “In short, the most precise English translation of the relevant clauses, arranging them to reflect the switches in person and number of the verbs, would be, ‘You (plural) repent for the forgiveness of your (plural) sins, and let each one (singular) of you be baptized (singular).’ When I showed this translation to the late Dr. Julius Mantey, one of the foremost Greek grammarians of the twentieth century and the co-author of ‘*A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*,’ he approved and even signed his name next to it in the margin of my Greek New Testament” [*ibid*].

Let me repeat this principle of biblical hermeneutics: “A Bible verse *proves* a doctrine only if that doctrine is the only interpretation the grammar and word definitions permit. If there are other plausible interpretations, the verse might be used as evidence in a cumulative case for the doctrine, but its evidential value rises or falls in inverse proportion to the plausibility of the other options” [*ibid*].

There are clearly a number of ways to understand Acts 2:38, each of which are grammatically legitimate, which fact demands we not become dogmatic with respect to our interpretations. I have my personal convictions as to what Peter sought to convey to the people of Jerusalem that day, and I believe they are textually and contextually and conceptually sound. However, I don't pretend to be infallible in my insights (and I doubt seriously any of you are either), thus I pray we can continue to love and accept one another as brethren to the glory of our God, even when we honestly differ.

RAY: It is not reasonable to suppose that any sincere believer in the inspiration of apostolic writings could fail to see that the church

16 led by the apostles practiced an immersion in water as the baptism Jesus commanded, and therefore the one which brought sinners into the body of Christ which is His church. Not a one of them thought baptism was performed by the Holy Spirit except to the apostles who were empowered by that act. I share the writings above of Al Maxey only to demonstrate how wrong some we love can sometimes be.

Other brief Bible studies like this one are
also available from Mission Outreach:

I invite your attention to longer studies on becoming a Christian. One title is *“Three Times Peter used the KEYS of the Kingdom”* (Viewpoint **HS-Jo1**). An interesting study is *“About Entering Christ’s Way”* (Viewpoint **FA-Co2**). *“Were You BURIED With Christ?”* by Gaylon Embrey is **CB-Ho1**. Another title is *“RAISED INTO NEW LIFE with Christ”* by Ray Downen (Viewpoint **PB-Zo1** 206 pages, available from amazon.com). **And CD-Fo1**, by Boyce Mouton, is *“We Are Invited to Enter Into COVENANT With God.”* “PROPER Bible Understanding” is **PB-Po1**, with *“Rules for Right Reading”* being **PB-Io1**.

On the internet at the missionoutreach.org web site you can read a study particularly about the new birth of water and spirit. It’s accessed by clicking on the link “Raised1” on the site’s home page. It can be purchased from amazon.com on the internet by selecting the book, RAISED INTO NEW LIFE, Part 1. Also available at the site is a study I’ve titled, “Does Baptism alone save from sin? Who baptizes into Christ?” Authors include Marion Evans, Al Maxey, and Ray Downen. It speaks to a recent acceptance by some of an unscriptural baptism by the Holy Spirit which they think has replaced the baptism Jesus calls for us to practice whenever a new convert seeks salvation in Jesus. It’s accessed by clicking on “Baptism by the Holy Spirit?” You can order copies of it from Mission Outreach by referring to Viewpoint CD-Io2.

On 1/19/12 as I was writing these last two paragraphs I was listening to a recorded speech by RONALD REAGAN. He was a great man and an outstanding president of the U.S.A. The link is
<<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/mp3clips/politicalspeeches/ronaldreaganreligiousbroadcasters4363443949.mp3>>. I greatly admire Ronald Reagan. I believe Newt Gingrich is the candidate most likely to serve us as did President Reagan. And I recommend true-to-the-Bible teaching every time we seek truth.