

Who baptizes into Christ?

Marion Owens
& Al Maxey & Ray Downen...

Note: The article and letters and rebuttal which follow are in reference to publications by AL MAXEY in which he seems to take the position that the baptism which brings us into Christ's church and which saves us from sin is performed by the Holy Spirit. When? It's at the instant that a sinner realizes that Jesus is the risen Lord and deserves to be obeyed, according to our brother. Repenting and being baptized in water may follow, he says, but does not cause or affect this baptism by the Holy Spirit. It is a separate action.

This teaching is found in an Al Maxey Reflections article #353 as early as June 26, 2008, accessible on the internet at <<http://www.zianet.com/maxey/reflx353.htm>>. His most recent book, in January 2012, expands on what Marion and Ray see as, at best, wrong understanding.

BAPTISM AND CONVERSION

by Marion Owens, September, 2011

As a long-time reader of Al Maxey's "Reflections," I am almost always in agreement with him, especially regarding some of the legalistic views which have dominated certain segments of the "Churches of Christ." However, I strongly *disagree* with his repeated contention, which reflects the basics of classic Baptist doctrine, that baptism in water by disciples of Jesus is not part of the conversion process. This essay is being written to support the belief that *baptism is an integral part of the conversion process*.

The evidence that baptism is part of the process by which one becomes saved is remarkably abundant and clear. Even if all we had were Jesus' words, "**Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,**" (Mark 16:16 as it appears in some manuscripts) that should be enough to convince us—but that is only the beginning! [Ray re-

2 marks that the baptism in this passage is surely the baptism commanded by Jesus, that is, water baptism.]

Peter, an apostle who was present when Jesus spoke those words, understood that baptism was part of the process by which one is saved. That's why he told a crowd of cut-to-the-heart believing Jews to **“Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins”** (Acts 2:38). There was certainly nothing in Peter's words to indicate that their sins were *already* forgiven and that baptism was just some type of symbolic acceptance of that forgiveness!

When was Saul of Tarsus saved?

By all of Al's descriptions of the conversion process, Saul would have been thoroughly saved by the time Ananias got to him (Acts 9:1-19). But Ananias ordered him to **“Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away.”** Is it not obvious that Ananias thought when one becomes saved his sins **are then washed away?** So if Saul was saved and therefore his sins were washed away *before* baptism, why would Ananias have him to wash away the sins *again*? It is clear that Ananias did *not* think that Saul was already saved, but that indeed he still needed to have sins washed away. And Luke does not suggest Ananias was wrong.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul referred to their having been **“baptized into Christ...”** (Galatians 3:27). But if they were saved *before* baptism then they were *already* in Christ prior to the baptism commanded by Jesus to be performed by people. Some have tried to get around the obvious meaning of this passage by trying to place some far-fetched complicated definition on the term “baptized” here. Paul was writing to theologically unsophisticated Christians. The only fair interpretation of his words must be in the context of their understanding of baptism. It was simple: when as repentant believers they were immersed in water they moved from a position of being “out of Christ” to a position of being “in Christ”—from being unsaved to being saved—from being burdened with their sins to having their sins “washed away.” The passages are all beautifully harmonious.

There is more evidence. We understand that when one becomes saved he begins a new life in Christ. Al now teaches that this may occur prior to water baptism. Is that what Paul believed?

What did Paul believe and teach?

In Romans 6:3,4 Paul compared the new life of Christ at his resurrection *to our new life as we are raised from baptism*. To argue that our new life in Christ began *before* baptism is like arguing that Jesus' new life began *before* his resurrection. Some of Al's arguments reflect a rather strange way of reasoning. He delights in using the illustration of one's nose breaking the surface of water in baptism. He challenges people to state the *exact instant* at which the person becomes saved. From the fact that one cannot state authoritatively the exact moment when one becomes saved, Al triumphantly declares that therefore baptism is *not* the point at which one is saved.

Very faulty reasoning! Consider the following: in II Kings 5 we find the story of a leper named Naaman who was told to dip seven times in the Jordan River, after which he would be healed. Here is a question for Al: at what *exact moment* was Naaman healed? Was it when his nose broke the surface of the water after the seventh dip? Was it when his entire body emerged? If you do not know the exact moment of the healing, *does that mean that he was not healed at all through the dipping?* In both cases the answer is the same: who knows—and who cares? If God says to do something it is foolish for us to try to pin him down to the exact instant when He considers the transaction completed. Why would anyone want to engage in such nonsense? This may make good debating. It fails to make good sense.

Was Cornelius saved before he was baptized in water?

One of the more obvious mistakes Al is making here relates to Cornelius. He insists that Cornelius was saved before baptism. His "proof" is that the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius' household before they were baptized (Acts 10:44-48). But if the angel of God told the truth they were *not* saved by the baptism in the Spirit!

Why do I say so? Consider these facts:

↓ (1) According to Acts 11:11-14, the angel told Cornelius that Peter would bring to him a “**message** through which you and all your household will be saved.” A message is not an experience.

(2) Please note that Luke, writing very carefully we suppose, wrote in verse 4 that Peter explained to them **PRECISELY** what happened. In verse 15 Peter said, “As I *began* to speak the Holy Spirit came on them....”

(3) If the Holy Spirit came on the people as Peter *began* to speak, he obviously had not yet delivered his message—*the one through which they were to be saved!*

When were they saved?

So when did the Holy Spirit fall on these people? Was it after they heard the “message through which” they would be saved? Or was it *before* they heard the message? This leaves us with a choice: we can believe the angel of God who said that the people would be saved through Peter’s message, or we can believe our brother who says they were saved *before* the message was given. With all due respect to Al, I have to go with the angel who was sent from God to start the process by which these first Gentiles were added to the body of Christ.

Acts 11 provides an explanation of why the Holy Spirit fell on these people, and it has nothing to do with whether they were saved by the baptism in the Spirit. It was to convince the Jerusalem leaders when they heard of it, just as it had convinced Peter and his companions, that it was God’s will to preach the gospel to and baptize Gentiles as well as Jews into Christ. The best that those of Al’s persuasion can do with this is to try to think up some definition of “saved” other than the obvious one, and some do exactly that.

Another of Al’s arguments echoes challenges used by Baptists for generations. They discuss a scenario in which a penitent believer is about to be baptized, but he suddenly dies before he gets to the water (there are different variations of the story, but the point is the same). Then comes the indignant accusation that we would consider that person damned to an eternity in a burning hell when he couldn’t help himself, and a loving God would *never* do such a thing. Unfortunately,

some of our brethren have fallen for this trap and expressed the view that the person *would* be lost.

WRONG ANSWER—and a very foolish one at that. First of all, the Lord has made it clear that He is the only one in charge of making final judgments, and humans have no business dabbling in such matters. Secondly, our God is the ultimate in fairness and justice. He has absolute authority to make any exceptions to his rules that he deems appropriate; he is master of his rules. The rules are not master of the One who made the rules.

But here is the REAL question: Does the fact that God might make exceptions to a rule *give us the right to ignore or invalidate that rule?* ABSOLUTELY NOT! If God declares that it is through baptism that sins are washed away, as he did through the words spoken in the case of Saul of Tarsus [and often elsewhere, reminds Ray], who are we to deny this fact because we can come up with a situation where it did not work out for a person to be baptized? We must stick with God's rules and let him work out the situations that are problematic!

What's the instant of salvation?

In e-mail communications with Al he has elaborated to me somewhat on his views. If one does not receive salvation at baptism, when *does* he receive it? I asked about when Saul of Tarsus was saved? Al expressed the belief that one cannot say exactly *when* one is saved. God knows, but the person cannot be sure. As he put it, "I think we too often get bogged down over 'timing,' especially when our God is not bound by such restraints. **God regards us as saved when one's heart is genuinely given over to him in loving faith. I imagine HE is aware of that happening before we are.**"

I find this view rather amazing! Al taunts those who believe baptism is part of the conversion with the challenge to prove the *exact instant* when one's sins are forgiven, and then admits that he does not know himself when that occurs. No one can really say, then, when he became saved, when he became a Christian. Only God knows, and it may have happened before the person realized it! Wow!

6 This view raises some real questions and has some puzzling implications. First, how much “loving faith” must one have to be saved? (Please note that the Bible says *nothing* about the development of “loving faith” being the point at which one becomes saved.) Ordinarily faith develops gradually and, in fact, continues to grow through the years. How can one know when that faith has developed to the point of being “salvation-worthy”? Since only God knows this, one can only *guess* whether or not he has been saved! How unsettling!

Consider the scene on Pentecost. When the convicted crowd asked Peter what they should do, (Peter apparently was not familiar with Al’s ideas) he said nothing about believing or having faith. (He seems to have concluded that they *did* believe; otherwise they would not have reacted as they did. It seems likely that their faith was much more of a “fearful” faith than a “loving” faith.) **He told them to repent and be baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sins.**

Some 3,000 were baptized that day and added to the church using *exactly* the formula that Jesus prescribed. Do you suppose that any of them wondered if they had achieved the level of “loving faith” that Al would consider necessary to receive salvation? Do you suppose they all considered themselves to have fulfilled the Lord’s requirements and were indeed saved? Could they tell anyone the *exact* day and hour when they were saved (without a discussion of noses and water surface)? Wouldn’t they have supposed it was when they had done what was required?

Finally, consider the following: The real issue in all this can be summed up in one question: **Is the baptism commanded by Jesus a part of the process by which a sinner becomes saved and added to God’s church or is baptism as Al now teaches something that occurs any time after one has been saved?**

Certainly God knows the answer and surely he would see to it that the Holy Spirit recorded these in the scriptures in the right order. So what are the facts? There are *seven* passages which include *both* baptism and salvation (or the equivalent of being saved): Mark 16:15,16, Acts 2:37,38, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:3,4, Colossians 2:12, Galatians 3:27, and I Peter 3:21. Guess how many of the passages have these in the order which Al advocates (salvation, and *then* baptism)? Answer:

ZERO. *Every single passage has baptism before salvation!* It never ceases to amaze me that so many people would choose to ignore the scriptural order and substitute another set of ideas!

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A letter from Ray Downen.

And here's a letter sent in December, 2011 by Ray Downen to AL MAXEY and others concerning his teaching about a baptism by the Holy Spirit: He feels apparently that only his enemies disagree with his new theories. But neither Marion nor I are enemies of Al Maxey.

Subject: Al Maxey is a beloved brother—in error.

AL MAXEY exclaims, "The more effectively God uses us in our respective ministries, the more determined *our enemies* become in their efforts to silence us at any cost" And I explain: **We** are not your enemies. I am your friend and brother. You do much that is outstandingly good. I admire the good you do and teach. I freely say so. But now you're also emphasizing *false* doctrine that in no way at all could be true. **As a true friend I am determined to oppose your error in any possible way.**

Jesus commanded that MEN should baptize every new convert (Matthew 28:18-20). Al, you say He really meant that the Spirit would do the baptizing. But that is not at all what He said **or ever in any way implied.** Your doctrine has believers saved prior to the new birth of water and spirit which Jesus says is essential for entrance into His Kingdom. I explain this at length in my book, RAISED INTO NEW LIFE, Part 1. It can be purchased from amazon.com or it can be read at my web site: <<http://missionoutreach.org/Raysed1.html>>.

You posit that the Spirit COMES before He is sent by Jesus to those who obey the gospel, as is promised in Acts 2:38 in the Bible. I realize you can quote many other false teachers who share your idea about a baptism by the Holy Spirit. I read them and weep. For they do NOT "rightly divide" the inspired Word. They ignore Acts 2:38 as you now apparently are willing also to do.

8 I see no way your brothers and friends can silence your false teaching except by convincing you to return to teaching Bible truth. So I'll continue praising the good you do even while I speak as loudly as possible in opposition to the false doctrine now mixed in with the good. I'll share this word with as many who might consider it as I possibly can.— Ray Downen.

Ray remarks:

My friend & brother Al Maxey has kindly responded to notes I've sent out in which I describe what I hear him now teaching about a second baptism he thinks occurs in every Christian's experience. He affirms that my understanding is not accurate, that my description of what he is teaching is misrepresenting him. He doesn't want to call the baptizing a baptism. He avoids the use of that verb for what he feels Paul says is done by the Holy Spirit to bring a sinner into the body. Note that **what the apostle wrote** does not claim the baptizing was done by the Spirit. And everywhere else the verb is used in reference to conversion it's translated as "baptizing."

I surely do not want to misrepresent Al Maxey—or anyone, even in the slightest. But I read what I read, and I do understand language. And I clearly hear my friend saying that it's the Spirit who baptizes sinners, just as his book title affirms and as he has affirmed on his web site publicly since June 2008. And this is absolutely and entirely foreign to apostolic teaching as I read the New Testament. **Please attend to what Al writes in explanation of his teaching.** That Al is sincerely seeking to teach only truth can't be denied. We want to keep it in mind as we evaluate what he is teaching.

On Mon, Jan 2, 2012 at 10:29 PM, Al Maxey <maxey@zianet.com> sent an e-mail to protest and explain that he is not teaching a "baptizing" by the Spirit since he is renamed what the translators refer to as baptizing. He calls it a "plunging" when the word is "baptizing." Al writes:

Ray, I have tried and tried and tried to get you to see that I am NOT teaching a Holy Spirit baptism (at least NOT in the sense that you SAY I am). However, I can't seem to get through to you on that, Ray.

Anyway, to answer the questions asked by you and Marion: Yes, I believe Peter was speaking of water baptism in Acts 2:38 (I think I made that clear in today's latest issue of Reflections). Yes, the 3,000 baptised, in my opinion, knew he meant water baptism. I have never denied water baptism *as an essential act of faith*. I state it over and over and over etc.

[RAY: Do apostles call baptism an "act of faith"? Indeed they do not. The command is NOT to the convert to somehow baptize himself/herself. That would make it an act of faithful obedience. It's we who tell others about Jesus who are commanded to baptize them. So what's this about baptism being "an act of faith" by the one accepting baptism?]

AL: Let me try one more time, Ray—the Greek word "baptizo" has a wide range of meaning, and it is often used by the Greeks to refer to more than just a religious rite of immersion in water. In 1 Cor. 12:13 the ONLY thing I am trying to get across, Ray, is that when the saved are added to the Lord, and numbered together with the One Body, **it is the Spirit who is said to accomplish this.**

[RAY: **That is not what the text says.** Jesus commands that PEOPLE should perform the baptism which saves and brings the sinner into the body of Christ. Would Paul have disputed with Jesus as to who performs baptism into the body? Why would anyone think so? Knowing that there is ONE baptism in the Christian way, would Paul have here spoken of a second? And I repeat that the word used by Paul is everywhere translated into English as "baptizes" rather than "plunges." We should understand that Paul was not speaking of anything done by the Holy Spirit in this phrase in 1 Corinthians 12:13 in connection with being brought into the church through baptism.]

AL: He "plunges" (I'm sorry, Ray, but this is the word Paul used) us into an intimate relationship with our Lord, and, by extension, with one another.

[RAY: The word is everywhere else in apostolic writing transliterated as "baptizes." *It's not clear to me why Al wants to think Paul had a different meaning here than everywhere else.*]

AL: I am not preaching some ritualistic Holy Spirit "baptism." I am just using the word Paul used to indicate that our union with the

10 Lord and His people is accomplished by the Spirit, not by any act of any man or religious council. This teaching in no way removes water baptism, nor repentance, nor faith, etc., as essential responses of man. Paul is just telling us that it is not MAN who “inserts” us into relationship with the Lord and His people, it is the SPIRIT. I don’t know why you can’t grasp this, brother. Instead, you continue to misrepresent my teaching ... and most likely you will continue to do so.

AL continues: For some strange reason you seem unable to grasp the concept I have stated above (and which Paul also stated to the Corinthian brethren). Have a great evening, Ray, and a very Happy New Year. I hope to see you in Tulsa. – AL.

RAY: The Greek original phrase in question, in 1 Corinthians 12:13 simply calls for us to be lovingly united because we all (every born-again sinner) were baptized in the same spirit of humble repentance. To read it for the meaning **the apostle put there** removes any thought of needing to redefine baptism as if here the word was being used in a totally different meaning from its obvious meaning in the many other places where the word is used. The phrase is “in one spirit we were all baptized.” God’s Spirit is clearly mentioned also later in the verse. New Christians are made to “drink of” the Spirit.

As in Acts 2:38, the Spirit of God is put into us who humbly obey the gospel by repenting and accepting water baptism. But still it’s by order of JESUS that people do the baptizing. He didn’t commission the Spirit to do any plunging or dipping as sinners turn to Him seeking salvation. Jesus gifts us with His Spirit as we are being reborn. New birth of water and spirit is marvelous. It’s glorious. Remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit come to each person who obeys the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Here’s a later note
from Marion Owens*

Al, I must say that I am struck by how complicated your explanations are when compared to simple straight-forward scriptures. I never thought you taught the Holy Spirit baptism argument, nor do I

doubt that the Holy Spirit has a role in the conversion process. He helps us as we tell others about JESUS. **11**

[Ray remarks: I see no reason whatever to believe the Spirit has any role in conversion until God GIFTS the Spirit to those who have chosen freely to repent and be baptized in water. And Marion later adds: *I will just say regarding the Holy Spirit that I do not credit Him for some miraculous work on the hearer's mind, nor do I pretend to define His work precisely, but I am confident that the Spirit was very active in the presentation of the message by the apostles, helping to assure that the message that was presented was accurate and consisted of what needed to be heard. Beyond that I do not have evidence of further working.*]

I do believe that you go far beyond the scriptures when you insist that the moment of salvation precedes water baptism. I find it very ironic that you taunt those of us who believe that it is at baptism that one becomes saved (receives forgiveness of sins/ has sins washed away, etc.) with the “nose breaking the water surface” argument, but then you concede that you yourself do not know when one becomes saved! I have never before heard of anyone arguing that it is not possible to know when one becomes saved. If you don't know when, you also don't know whether! I find this to be a very disconcerting concept.

I have continued to try to really get a clearer understanding of what you believe, asking specific questions to help me get a practical application of your teachings. That is why I asked if you thought the 3,000 on Pentecost were saved before their baptism. And how would they know to add 3,000 to their number on Pentecost if no one knew whether or not they were saved? Some time back I asked you the precise moment when Naaman's leprosy was healed, and was it at the precise moment when his nose broke the surface of the water? **I was and am disappointed that you did not provide answers.**

To that I would add these questions: When were Saul's sins “washed away”? Was it at the precise moment when his nose broke the surface of the water? Does the fact that you do not know mean that it did not happen at all? Is it not sufficient that God knows? Jesus com-

12 mands that the convert is to be baptized. Does Jesus know when the act is complete?

The conversion process is compared to the birth process. Do you ask when the precise instant of physical birth occurs? Is it when the first bodily part emerges? Is it when every last body part is clear? [Ray adds: *Is it when the first breath is taken? That might compare best with the moment when God's "breath," His Spirit, is given to the new Christian—at baptism in water says Peter*]. Does an inability to define the "exact instant" of birth mean that the birth did not occur? I find your reasoning to be so strange!

You seem to echo the Baptist tenet ruling out baptism as the point of receiving salvation on the basis that baptism is a "work," they say, and since one is not saved "by works," baptism could not be a part of the conversion process. The Baptists had to address the problem of just WHEN a person becomes saved. Their solution is to have one pray for salvation—the so-called "sinner's prayer." (*This is despite the fact that the Bible says absolutely nothing about anyone ever being told to pray for salvation or anyone ever being saved through prayer.*) A further irony in the Baptist teaching is that they say that one must pray, which involves considerably more "work" than standing passively while another baptizes him or her!

Some Pentecostals and others go a bit farther than some Baptists. They commonly have people come to a "mourner's bench" and engage in extended, often agonizing pleading with God to save them, as if God is really reluctant to provide salvation and needs an awful lot of prodding!! [RAY: *Does the Word still say "Whosoever will may come"?* (John 3:16,36 and Revelation 22:17)]

Several of your statements seem to imply that a man can do nothing to help facilitate his salvation, and that to do so would somehow violate the principle of salvation by grace through faith. Surely you are aware of God's long history of rewarding a *demonstrated* faith. This has nothing to do with any sort of "salvation by works." It has happened over and over. The lepers were to go show themselves to the priest. The blind man was to wash in the pool of Siloam. Naaman to dip in the Jordan River. Abraham was to sacrifice his son. And on and

on. In none of these cases were the blessings the result of their own efforts. It was always through **God's power reacting to demonstrations of faith.**

Is it not precisely the same with baptism? No one claims that anything in water washes away sins (any more than anything in the Jordan cured Naaman's leprosy). Those who pretend that we believe that baptismal water heals or in itself by itself washes away sin are both cynical and dishonest. [RAY: Accuracy and honesty IS the best policy.]

Finally, as I read the scriptures and see the messages and instructions given to the first converts to Christianity, I can only imagine how bewildered and perplexed they would have been had they tried to figure out the complex set of principles which you have come to embrace. (I have been around for nearly eighty years and I am having a heck of a time trying to figure out what you are saying!)

Thanks, Marion.

Ray remarks, "**I can understand all right. But it indeed is complicated, and obviously *faulty*, reasoning.**" How does this compute with the Way being understood by even the very simple? Marion rightly points out that what Al wants us to believe on this subject is not simple truth if it were even truth at all. I do not read in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is involved in conversion prior to the time Peter says He is. That's as God's gift AFTER the new birth is complete (Acts 2:38). The babe's first breath is AFTER the birth. An apt comparison is with the breath (pneuma=spirit or wind) of God given at a Christian's birth. And since Jesus keeps the book of life, I'm thinking that it's Jesus who saves and adds to His church.

Interested readers also could take a look at an article about the influence of ROBERT RICHARDSON: <http://missionoutreach.org/cubo7.pdf>, which was written by A. J. Albert as his November 2011 California letter. And do read my comments about a similar heresy taught by Jack Cottrell, long-time professor of Bible at Cincinnati Bible Seminary in Ohio. On the internet at <http://missionoutreach.org/tyranny.html>.

14 It reads: Jack Cottrell points out well that faith alone is dead just as James earlier reported. But it seems to me that he and others miss the mark in claiming that a second baptism, by the Spirit, is always done somehow as proclaimers of the gospel baptize converts in water. Some even say there is a "baptism by the one Spirit" done when no water baptism is actually performed! Al Maxey, also right so often, has this idea which I think is non-apostolic and incorrect. See <http://www.zianet.com/maxey/reflx353.htm> and also #515.

Any baptism performed by the Spirit would obviously not be a baptism in water. These are two separated actions. One is performed by humans. The other is not. They are separate actions if indeed there is in fact a baptism performed by the Holy Spirit. I see no reason to accept this theory as apostolic teaching. Where is there in our Bibles any mention of a baptism by the Holy Spirit except in a mistranslation of 1 Corinthians 12:13?

The baptism Paul speaks of in that verse is one which all Christians have experienced, and that Paul knew they knew they had experienced. Paul would no more have claimed that everyone's immersion was performed by the Holy Spirit than he would have denied that Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. What could he gain by introducing something totally unknown when his aim was to UNITE all who knew they had been immersed in water as Jesus commanded? And they all knew it was human hands which lowered them and raised them up into the new life!

The translators use a phrase often properly and correctly translated as "in one spirit" (note NO capitalization) and turn it into "BY the one Spirit." Is there any other mention of a baptism by the Spirit in inspired writings? No. Not one. The baptism commanded by Jesus is performed by proclaimers of the gospel. It's in water. It's a burial and a RESURRECTION INTO NEW LIFE, raised OUT OF a watery tomb (see Romans 6). The Spirit is promised as a gift to those who repent and ARE baptized in water in recognition of the Lordship of Jesus of Nazareth. The inspired writers said nothing of a baptism by the Holy Spirit. Not once. Never.

Sinners are Begotten for New Birth by the Word

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 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.

Human birth requires a begetting to precede and cause the actual birth. It appears there are equally two steps in the new birth. 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 actual 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 the way to enter the Way.

Jesus speaks of the new life which is possible through His death and resurrection. In Luke 8 and in Matthew 13 we read of gospel seed which is “planted” in the soil of a human heart. The seed in many cases produces spiritual life which leads to eternal life. But not all who hear the gospel do believe and obey it. Jesus informs that those who reject gospel truth will be eternally sorry.

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

16 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 (obeyed) the gospel* (Galatians 3:5).

Obedient Believers Are Born Again (Saved)

In faith that the gospel story is true, believers who repent and are baptized are spiritually reborn. We then 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 (they believe and intend to obey) the implanted word which is Christ’s gospel (James 1:18,21) and are then baptized in His name.

In the new birth we are reborn of water and spirit and then receive God’s Spirit within. Chapters 6-8 of Romans, and 1 Corinthians 12:13 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. That’s the message in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

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 in water is part of the new birth which brings us into Christ and into His body. It’s the “one baptism” of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 4:5. If our loyalty is to Jesus Christ, through new birth of water and spirit we become part of the “one body” which is Christ’s church. Jesus prayed that we would realize and actualize our unity in Him (John 17).

But perhaps in 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul was saying the baptism was performed by God's Spirit rather than in a spirit of humility. Many want to think so. *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 do have the presence of His Spirit to help us stand fast for Him.

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 immersion in water 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," which he says is Himself. 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. These should be what we want in our life, shouldn't they? Peter also urges us to 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.

18 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 to our faith. 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 most likely 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 enlightened." 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 de-

termination. 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 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. God's Spirit *does not give us new and different instructions from God.*

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 does not agree with God's revelation 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 to pray 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.

Obviously then, 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.

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

20 self-centered spirit 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 baptism 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. The terms as used in the Bible refer to the same people.

There is no baptism in or by the Spirit for Christians today. 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. His Spirit is God's 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.

We who are in Christ were each *baptized into* Him and into His one body. We are called to maintain the unity of that body. 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.

Baptist Doctrine Examined

Now I offer for your thought a totally different idea from one who has adopted Baptist thought and still 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 (<http://www.zianet.com/maxey/reflx515.htm>) 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 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 in his statement here. What WE find in what IS said is not what Al by quoting others claim that we teach. The clear instruction by the apostle was that sinners needed to both repent AND be baptized for the remission of sins and to receive the gift of the Spirit. **WE are not claiming that baptism is a sacrament.** We don't cite the passage to prove anything at all about baptism **alone**. Al's remarks above and his own statements quoted next are off base entirely.

Yes, "on the surface, in English," the words of Peter do indeed *seem* to promote such a view, but deeper study and reflection 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

22 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 NT 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*.

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 are reported to have practiced. "We" have not, as is alleged, depended on the meaning of only any single word or any single verse.

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!!

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. 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" (Eph. 2:8).

RAY: 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 act in accordance with the apostolic teaching? The foundation is here being laid by the One Jesus said would be the rock upon which the church was built!* So is it true that salvation by grace through faith alone is a rock upon which the church was built? It surely is not!

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 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 is REPENTANCE and baptism, both based on faith in Jesus as Lord. So of course that is what "we" teach and call for. WE are not straw men!

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! 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). "This shows

24 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].

RAY: How many times must a truth be stated before it can be believed? Is Acts 2:38 not true since in the next chapter only repentance is mentioned? This is what is implied. Let's consider every conversion reported in Acts! In each case, the convert was immediately baptized. And never was the baptism performed by the Holy Spirit. But was repentance always mentioned? Of course not.

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: 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 be baptized "FOR the forgiveness of your sins." Thus, sins are forgiven AT baptism! Right?!

RAY: What Peter in fact said is that new believers in Jesus as Lord must REPENT and be baptized, after which God would forgive sin and gift them with His Spirit. He did not, and we do not, claim that baptism alone forgives sin. Yet that is what Al seems to claim we believe and teach. We believe Peter knew what Jesus calls for sinners to do to enter His Kingdom. And we are sure that Jesus would not have His Spirit later contradict what Peter said as recorded in Acts 2:38 or try to explain it away. Nor do we think it is so complicated that it's even hard to understand by those who want to understand it.

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: Did the 3,000 that day baptized into Christ have access to the passages Al thinks are needed in order to understand what Peter said? Or do you suppose they just believed he knew what they needed to do? I think they just understood and obeyed simple truth. As we also surely should do! And truth is not changed by later revelation which may expand on the truth but will never change it.

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: Has Al convinced us that baptism is an "act of faith"? I see clearly that Peter calls baptism simply submitting to what is required in order to enter the Kingdom and have sins remitted. I'm confident that Luke in writing about what Peter taught and what his hearers did also understood the matter without needing to go to other passages in order to understand. The other passages need to be understood in the light of what Luke reports that Peter said rather than vice versa.

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."

26 RAY: What is clear is that Al Maxey denies that water baptism is for the remission of sins. He moves it away from conversion to something that a Christian may do later if and when that's convenient. But in apostolic times it was done immediately. As soon as possible. Luke says in Acts 2 that 3,000 repentant believers were baptized that day. And 2,000 more the next day!

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. 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*, but rather as a required manifestation of one's faith.

RAY: I'm surely glad that Al will not in the future wrongly proclaim that baptism is a sacrament. I'm sorry he ever did so. But he is tragically wrong in trying to remove it from the timing Luke reports that it had then. It was not something to be done *sometime*. It was to be done immediately when a sinner believed in Jesus and turned to Him. Anyone who doubts this should read again the Bible book of Acts.

Forgiveness comes to those who turn from sin and in faith turn to the Lord. 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: This paragraph which links baptism with Christian living surely makes clear what Al Maxey now believes about baptism. It is, to him, no part of the new birth of water and spirit which inducts sinners into Christ. It's just something that can be done some time.

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.

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."

RAY: Al Maxey is far more concerned than I am about the meaning of this one word. He implies that we believe Peter's words only if they agree with our prejudices. That is not the case. But we clearly see that Peter was telling these seekers that BOTH repentance (turning away from sin—**turning to Jesus as Lord**) AND baptism are required as part of the new birth of water and spirit. And that truth remains true.

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 New Testament teaching? Of course it would. 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 New Testament 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.

RAY: What Al Maxey next says is obviously in ignorance of what the apostle actually said. "Repent AND be baptized for the remission of your sins ..." He did not say his hearers should repent and then some day later be baptized. Both verbs are related to the result of re-

28 ceiving remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit. Sinners repent for remission of sins. Sinners are baptized for remission of sins. That's for the purpose of washing away sin. But Al is surely right that "for" has more than one meaning in different uses. Both repenting and being baptized are FOR the remission of sins. That's "in order to receive." Peter is answering the question, "What shall we DO?"

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].

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: So Al Maxey accepts Baptist doctrine while rejecting what is believed and taught in Christian churches. He asks us all to do so as well. I am not a Baptist. I am a follower of the Christ. Jesus calls for PEOPLE to baptize each new believer. Al says the Spirit will do it!

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!!

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]. "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].

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].

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

30 *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*]. [Wow! I guess that proves something!]

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.

It is not reasonable to suppose that any sincere believer in the inspiration of apostolic writings could fail to see that the church 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 can be. The “scholars” he quotes are not members of a Church of Christ or a Christian Church which is associated with the Restoration Movement (Stone-Campbell variety).

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

- cb-bo1 “How to ENTER Christ’s Way,”
- cb-bo2 “Preface to ‘Were You BURIED With Christ?’”
- cb-bo3 “Do Peter’s KEYS still work?”
- cd-bo1 “What did Jesus say about Himself?”
- cd-bo2 “What about False Teachers?”
- cd-bo3 “What about False Apostles?”
- cd-bo4 “About two False Teachings,”
- cd-bo5 “We follow Jesus in TRUTH,”
- ce-bo1 “We are begotten into new life by God’s WORD,”
- ce-bo2 “We Sinners are invited to
SAVE OURSELVES by turning to JESUS,”
- ce-bo4 “Hell is Real,”
- ce-bo6 “It’s life – or eternal death. WE MUST CHOOSE,”
- ce-bo7 “Here’s how to BECOME a Christian,”
- ce-bo8 “Here’s how some BECAME Christians,”
- ce-bo9 “Here’s why one turned to Christ,”
- ce-b11 “Jesus Lives!,”
- ce-b12 “Here’s how one found God,” and
- ce-b13 **“Will eating chocolate save us?”**
- cf-bo1 “Why walk when you could ride?”
- cl-bo7 “Church leaders are pastors”
- cu-bo2 “In Search of UNITY in Christ”

32 And I invite your attention to three 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**.

RAY: I invite others to join me in speaking out for truth and for unity in Jesus. My doing so is as Mission Outreach Publications, with mailing address as P O Box 265, Joplin MO 64802-0265. For a gift of \$10 I can mail you 5 copies of this booklet you can share with others.

As well as sharing publications with others, you can help by sharing in expenses of the mission. It is not at this time a non-profit corporation, so gifts are not tax deductible. But gifts will go toward publishing and promoting written material such as the booklet you have in your hands or are reading otherwise.

Gifts are needed also to enable the continuing e-mail and internet ministry of Ray Downen. I have worked long past retirement age, but am no longer employed, so I need support from friends now. Gift checks should be made to RAY DOWNEN and mailed to me (if handing to me is not easier) at P O Box 265, Joplin MO 64802-0265.