

Into Forgiveness of Sins

by David A. Huston

This paper is presented to assert and explain the biblical truth that forgiveness of sins comes through biblical water baptism.

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.... Acts 2:38

AT THE LAST SUPPER, Jesus took the cup, offered thanks, and gave it to His disciples telling them, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28). A short while later He told them, “I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). The place Jesus was going to prepare can be understood in several ways. It can be thought of as the eternal dwelling place of the saved. It can be understood as a reference to the glorious immortal bodies of the saved. But within the context of the Last Supper, it can also be thought of in terms of the spiritual place Jesus has prepared for us to dwell in during this present life. Let me explain.

Jesus knew that He would be leaving the Last Supper to go to Gethsemane where He would be arrested, taken for trial, beaten, and crucified. The impending shedding of His blood was to be “for the remission of sins” The word translated “remission” is *aphesis* (ah’-feys-ees), a Greek word that means literally “a sending away.” In its common usage during New Testament times, it meant pardon, deliverance, or forgiveness. W.E. Vine writes that *aphesis* means “a dismissal or release,” is used of the “forgiveness” of sins, and is “translated ‘remission’ in Matthew 26:28.” The fact that *aphesis* can be translated either “remission” or “forgiveness” is reflected in the New International Version’s account of the Last Supper, which reads, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the *forgiveness* of sins” (emphasis mine).” It could also be translated for the pardon of sins, the dismissal of sins, or for the release from sins.

Since the purpose of Jesus shedding His blood was for the forgiveness of sins, it is on the basis of His sacrificial death that He has acquired and set in place the forgiveness of sins for every human being, offering Himself “once for all”

(Hebrews 7:27). This means that forgiving sins is not something God decides on arbitrarily from person to person or incident by incident. It is a spiritual reality He has established and which every human being may partake of by exercising the appropriate faith. In this sense, it is a spiritual place. When He left the Upper Room, Jesus went to prepare a place for us called, among other things, the forgiveness of sins.

The question then arises: what is the appropriate faith that brings us into this place of forgiveness? Some have suggested that the answer is found in 1 John 1:9, which says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...." But this was written to those who had already entered into the place of forgiveness (ref. 1 John 2:12). This verse is teaching us how to maintain a forgiven state, not how to acquire it. Others point to Romans 10:9, which states "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Again, this instruction is written to those who have already experienced the salvation of Jesus Christ (ref. Romans 1:7). It is not telling us how to become saved, but how to live as a saved person. Beyond that, the verse does not specifically mention the forgiveness of sins.

There is, however, a verse in the book of Romans that does provide insight into how a person enters the place of forgiveness. In Romans 6:3 Paul wrote, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" This verse is referencing a past experience of the believers at Rome: their water baptism. Since Jesus told His disciples that a fundamental purpose of His death on the Cross was to provide the forgiveness of sins, it follows that the way we enter into this provision is by being "baptized into His death." Through water baptism we acquire all that the death of Jesus accomplished for us. This idea is confirmed in Acts 2:38 where Peter declared, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...." This verse specifically states that water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is "for the remission (*aphesis*) of sins." The N.I.V. says "for the forgiveness of your sins."

The key word in the English translation of Acts 2:38 is "for." It is the Greek word *eis* (ice), which Strong's Dictionary defines as a primary preposition meaning "to or into (indicating the point reached or entered), of place, time, or (figuratively) purpose" (NT1915). Thayer's Dictionary says, "Used metaphorically, *eis* retains the force of entering into anything, 1. where one thing is said to be changed into another, 2. after verbs of going, coming, leading, etc., *eis* is joined to nouns designating the conditional state into which one passes, falls, etc." Thayer goes on to say that *eis* is used "after words indicating motion or direction or end."

Baptism is a word of motion (i.e. be baptized). According to Act 2:38, a person is baptized “for” or “into” the forgiveness of sins, as though entering into a building or room. Since *eis* is always looking ahead to the place reached or entered into, forgiveness of sins has to be the result of baptism, not something that precedes it as some people teach. This is confirmed by Ananias’ exhortation to Paul in Acts 22:16, where he said, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” In the New Testament, we call upon the name of the Lord by being baptized. And through this act of faith our sins are forgiven, or remitted, or washed away.

An essential element in receiving salvation is receiving the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, Jesus sent out His disciples to preach the gospel to every creature, telling them, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). Not he who is saved will be baptized, but he who is baptized will be saved. This harmonizes with Paul’s statement in Romans 10:12-13, which says, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” This does not contradict what Paul wrote in Romans 10:9, but rather complements and amplifies it. Since to call on the name of the Lord is equal in the New Testament to being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, what Paul wrote in Romans 10 agrees perfectly with what Jesus said in Mark 16. This also explains why Peter would compare New Testament salvation to Noah’s salvation in the ark, writing, “There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism” (1 Peter 3:21). No one can be saved without forgiveness of sins, and no one can enter into the place of forgiveness without being baptized into it.

The reason these Bible writers would put forward that we are saved through water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is because they understood that we are baptized into the spiritual reality that Jesus provided through His death, namely, the forgiveness of sins. There is no other New Testament means for partaking of this inestimable gift. Once a person has been baptized, he must then only confess his sins, that is, honestly admit his failures, and God, who is faithful and just, will keep him in that place which is free from sin, that spiritual place called forgiveness.

Note to the reader:

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