

Baptism: Necessary For Forgiveness Of Sins, Or Because Sins Have Already Been Forgiven?

Jon Mitchell

There is much confusion and division in Christendom about the subject of baptism.



Why were you baptized?

Professed followers of Christ disagree over its definition. (Is it pouring, sprinkling, or immersion? Is one baptized in water, or in the Holy Spirit?) They disagree over its purpose. (Must it happen in order to have sins forgiven, or because sins have already been forgiven? Must one be baptized in order to be saved, or is it simply a public confession of faith and obedience after having already been saved?) There is division over baptism's recipients. (Should infants be baptized? Can anyone be baptized?) There is confusion over whether a need would ever exist to be re-baptized. (What if I was baptized as an infant? What if I was baptized for the wrong reason? What if I have sinned greatly after being baptized?)

These and many other questions are often asked when the subject of baptism is raised. All of them are legitimate, and deserve a biblical answer. This is why if God is willing the next few articles from this writer will be devoted to answering these and other questions related to baptism. After all, baptism was commanded by Christ himself ([Matt. 28:18-20](#); [Mark 16:15-16](#)), and so it is certainly worthy of careful consideration. May we all receive what God's Word has to say about this subject with a desire to at least understand, if at first we do not agree, and then read the Bible carefully to see if the conclusions reached in these articles are true ([Acts 17:11](#)).

As mentioned earlier, Christ himself after his death and resurrection commanded his apostles to preach the gospel and baptize believers in their efforts to make disciples everywhere ([Matt. 28:18-20](#); [Mark 16:15-16](#)). A short time later, the apostle Peter preached the gospel in Jerusalem on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost, and commanded people to repent and be baptized ***“for the forgiveness of sins”*** ([Acts 2:38](#)). After exhorting his audience to be saved, many responded by being baptized ([Acts 2:40-41](#)).

Some believe that the “for” in [Acts 2:38](#)’s “**for forgiveness of sins**” means “because your sins have been forgiven” rather than “in order for your sins to be forgiven.” This is because the Greek word translated “for” (*eis*) sometimes means “because of;” however, in most cases *eis* means “in order to.” Which is the proper meaning in [Acts 2:38](#)? Jesus’ thoughts about the cup when he instituted the Lord’s Supper ([Matt. 26:28](#)) shed light onto this conundrum. When defining the fruit of the vine as “**my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many...**”, he used the identical grammatical construction in the Greek as is used in [Acts 2:38](#): “**..for forgiveness of sins.**” When he said this...several hours before he died on the cross to provide forgiveness for the sins of mankind...did he intend his phrase “**for forgiveness of sins**” to mean that his blood had ALREADY provided forgiveness of sins? Obviously not. It is clear that he intended to convey that his blood would be shed for many IN ORDER TO provide forgiveness of sins. Since [Acts 2:38](#) contains the same identical phrase, we can confidently conclude that Peter was telling them that they needed to be baptized IN ORDER TO have their sins forgiven ([Acts 2:38](#)), and they responded accordingly ([Acts 2:41](#)).

This makes even more sense when one sees that Peter also commanded repentance in addition to baptism in order to have sins forgiven. The idea that sins could be forgiven BEFORE one repented of them is foreign to Scripture ([2 Cor. 7:9-11](#); [Acts 3:19](#); [Luke 13:3, 35](#); [24:47](#)). Thus, it is clear that Peter was telling them to repent and be baptized IN ORDER TO have their sins forgiven, not because their sins had ALREADY been forgiven.

Do you want your sins forgiven by God? If so, then God’s promise and command through Peter to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins applies to you just as it did to Peter’s hearers on Pentecost. We know this because Peter then said, “**For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself**” ([Acts 2:39](#); cf. [2 Thess. 2:14](#); [Rom. 1:16](#); [Mark 16:15-16](#)). Why delay? Repent of your sins, and be baptized to wash them away ([Acts 22:16](#)). Future articles will give more information about this needed topic.