

New Birth

It is often when one begins writing on a topic he is faced with the challenge to be for or against something. At that point the writing becomes the justification the position taken. This writing is different. For while writing on baptism or New Birth (which will be used interchangeably in this writing) one might be tempted to presuppose I am against baptism. This is not the case for I believe the Bible is very clear on the topic.

I am for baptism just as I am for the Holy Spirit and likewise good Christian works. Each of these, including water baptism, has a place, part, time and purpose. This very day I prayed for the baptism of a few people in my life. To state the intention of this writing more clearly, it is my desire is define the proper place, part, time and purpose of water baptism in the Christian life and experience.

Having come from the non-instrumental Church of Christ denomination background that preaches and teaches that water baptism is exclusively and solely the point at which one is a born again Christian, I am aware of the passion behind this topic. The Church of Christ is not the only denomination to take this stance. This writing is to take a stance against that teaching. This teaching is not only in error but also dangerous. It is dangerous in that it violates what the Bible teaches and turns a beautiful moment into a superstitious exercise.

I take this writing on with timidity of which has nothing to do with fear of backlash among those who may disagree. For those who disagree and call down for the destruction of my teaching I will stand toe to toe. As will be seen through this writing, those who argue that baptism IS THE point at which New Birth begins OR that a person MUST be water baptized to become a Christian is demeaning the grace of God and is anti-gospel. Requiring anything to receive the free gift of God's grace is a damnable sin. (Galatians 1:9)¹

The timidity is more of the appropriateness of this writing. The world is on fire. Unruly actions such as wars and rumors of wars, detestable sexual behavior, marriages and families are being attacked by the enemy with great success; disobedience and the love of self all are rampant around me. Sin is having its way and the grace of Christ must be proclaimed through the word of mouth of preaching and teaching, through books and blogs and music and through the everyday obedient and faithful living of Christ followers.

¹ The topic at hand in this passage is that of circumcision. There were those who taught in order to become a believer one had to be circumcised. This was a common teaching. In the same way, today and for many decades, the teaching is that unless you are immersed in water baptism you are not saved. Even though the Galatians passage is about a different topic in principle it is exactly the same. Belief + anything for salvation = error.

Even as I write this what is fresh on my mind is a phone conversation from earlier this very day. Another marriage is broken through sexual infidelity. There are generations of souls who are hopelessly following the whims of this world. (Ephesians 2:1-3) They are walking DEAD. It is through the proclamation of Him by way of the mouth that souls are awakened to God's saving grace.²

And while these the world is falling apart and some walk about dead it is the believers who debate subjects that are utterly meaningless to the lost. I hate that there are some who do not understand the elementary (simple to understand, easy to comprehend) topic of baptism. (Hebrews 6:1, 2) While we Christians debate it takes away from the message of Christ being proclaimed and what kind of a trade is this?

Secondly it is not necessary that one knows exactly when their New Birth came about. In the same way it is not necessary that they fully or properly understand New Birth. One can be "born again" and not understand it completely.

One Biblical example would be Roman's 6:3 where Paul wrote, "Do you not know," meaning perhaps many Romans did not know the full meaning of baptism. They certainly knew more after Paul's letter. Justification is not based on flawless behavior or on perfect understanding because NO ONE QUALIFIES on their own merits. We are justified in Christ alone.

It is only important that one knows that their righteousness is of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21) and that it is a gift of grace from God. (Ephesians 2:8-10) Regardless if one agrees or disagrees with me about the POINT at when New Birth occurs the only things we must agree upon are those two things.

Thirdly, I ponder if there will be any true change from this writing. In past having reasoned with some who are of the "Baptism is when you are saved" crowd, I have found it frustrating. In these discussions there is total agreement on every discussed step and piece of logic concerning this topic. Yet upon conclusion, based on those pieces of logic, they stubbornly and foolishly can't commit.

There are many who have made up their mind on this matter. Their conclusions are based upon a number of passages taken out of context and the repetition of weekly teachings combined with an instilled fear that if their conclusion differs from what their misinformed teachers and leaders have shared with them, then an eternity of hell's punishment awaits them.

² Romans 10:15-17 describes that the means through which a soul is able to hear is through the mouth. This is the method that God has chosen to awaken the lost and cause new birth. It is amazing to see how this has played out in through scripture. The following are a number of random and explicit examples of this fact: Acts 15:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; Acts 11:14; I Corinthians 3:6,7; 2 Corinthians 14:24; 15:11; Galatians 3:3; 1 Peter 1:23; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; Titus 1:3; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:12, 25; 3:1; 4:6; James 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:13; Acts 22:14; 1 Corinthians 1:21; John 5:24.

To those who have made up their mind and will not in any way even consider changing their interpretations, I ask, does it really matter? Will anyone really care if this writing shows the New Testament Greek word baptizo was not translated but transliterated and therefore the references to baptism in Romans 6 can be metaphorical and not literal? Could I simply be accused of warping the scripture just to suit my fancy? Would not those who feel they have all the answers really learn from this writing or simply dismiss it as drivel?

This is not the first writing on this topic. It has been written and preached upon, debated and discussed for centuries. It is my utmost belief that this compilation of thoughts and words are the truth. There are more extensive writings on this topic, however, this will remain a concise treatise. This writing is clearly to compile systematically, short and, as much as possible, complete study on the topic Baptism. If minds are changed to accept the gospel's position on baptism then praise be to God.

To have a brief written record of this study as a basis for which to teach and share remains the motive for this writing. So this writing is not to begin another stirring among believers but rather a simple proclamation of fact based upon the Holy Scriptures. As this is written it must be confessed that these words are a compilation of study and meditation spanning decades.

This is a thesis on the grace of God and what an amazing and wonderful grace it is. The work of saving a soul from our well deserving wrath of God comes through believing. And even this ability to BELIEVE is a gift of God and comes from God. The entire part of salvation comes through God. (Matthew 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:9; John 6:44, 65, John 1:13) Not one single part of the grace which saved me was done by me.

Through this writing there will be several exhibits presented with contextual exegesis. The exhibits are as follows:

Exhibit 1 – John 3:1 – 15	Washed of Water vs. Washed of Spirit
Exhibit 2 – Acts 2:38	Because of vs. In Order to Receive
Exhibit 3 – Acts 2:38	Descriptive vs. Prescriptive Passages
Exhibit 4 – Romans 6:3, 4	Literal vs. Metaphorical

The Exhibits above do not deal with every single passage upon Baptism. These passages were chosen because they, when first looking at them or casually reading them, seem to say that New Birth happens at the point of water baptism. These are the Scriptures which are used by most who proclaim that baptism is necessary for forgiveness from God. However, they must be understood in context.

One example would be Mark 16:16. This scripture was spoken by Christ himself and it says:

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Mark 16:16 is also one of the passages used by the “water baptism saves” crowd. However, it does not say that water baptism saves. It can be twisted to support the water baptism saves point. But that is NOT what it says.

This passage gives the positive statement: “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”. But then it also gives the negative statement: “whoever does not believe will be condemned.” It does not say that whoever does not become baptized will be condemned but ONLY that one MUST believe to be saved.

It would be similar to say, “He who believes and lives in Ohio will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Therefore, the emphasis is not on baptism, but rather belief.

The Bible can't say in one area one thing and then contradict itself in another. This statement will be repeated several more times and in every exhibit. The Bible says that salvation and forgiveness of sin is a free gift of God and there is no work a person can do to attain it. (Ephesians 2:8-10) This reality prompts the Bible student to study the word of God diligently and seek agreement in all parts.

Brain washed critics and Bible students who do NOT contextualize their interpretation and those who have attended any of the Church of Christ “madrassah” which is namely their school's of preaching,³ will not typically be able to digest this writing. For it violates the teaching they have had and also the teaching they provide others week after week and year after year. Have no doubt, there is nothing a person can do to save themselves. Salvation is a gift of God. Through these exhibits one can fully begin to see what the Bible has to say about Baptism and New Birth.

To be properly understood herein lays the purpose of this writing: To show that water baptism is an outward sign and symbol of a spiritual reality that has already taken place. The public baptism represents in an outward physical way what has already been done through the Holy Spirit.

³ Madrassah are the typical Islamic school usually offers two courses of study: a *hifz* course teaching memorization of the [Qur'an](#). *Madrasah* literally means "a place where learning and studying are done". Schools of preaching, in the interpretation of this writer, are a Christian type of Madrassah. Students, over a period of two years, are given pat answers to Bible questions. These schools are designed to make cookie cutter preachers to lead churches and the leaders are poorly trained to interpret scripture on their own.

Exhibit 1

Washed of Water vs. Washed of Spirit

John 3:5

“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

This exhibit specifically mentions John 3:5, however, to best interpret this verse it will address not only the entire chapter of John 3 but also other passages within the book of John. Context is a very important part of interpretation.

This most likely would be one of the top two or three passages to reference if one was to support or argue that water baptism is necessary to receive God’s grace or forgiveness of sin. As will be seen through careful study it makes the exact opposite point and teaches that the forgiveness and grace of God comes in no way through any human effort.

As we come to this chapter we find a man named Nicodemus who was a high ranking Pharisee who desires to meet with Jesus. Not only was he a Pharisee, he was a member of the highest ruling counsel named the Sanhedrin. Jesus often called Pharisees hypocrites and most Pharisees were very jealous of Jesus because he undermined their authority and challenged their views.

Nicodemus comes at night to meet Jesus, most likely to save his reputation but as can also be determined he was searching for answers. He thought Jesus may have had some answers he was seeking. He came personally, even though he could have sent a personal assistant. Maybe he wanted to separate fact from rumor. One can only speculate to the motive of his visit so let us concentrate to the content of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

To be a Pharisee was to have the best in religious education. The Sanhedrin would be similar to our Supreme Court in that they were incredibly learned in matters of the law. This is a man who KNEW the law. He knew the Talmud and Mishnah. He had attended the best law schools.

Don’t let our culture define law here because in the United States of America when you hear the term law a reasonable person would immediately think of constitutional law or case law. This was not the circumstance in Nicodemus’ day for the law in reference here was Biblical Jewish law or our Old Testament. A goal for a Pharisee was to memorize the entire Old Testament and someone of Nicodemus rank, being in the Sanhedrin; it is assured that he had accomplished this feat.

Pharisee’s were concerned with outward appearance. Their view was if they kept the law outwardly they would be righteous. They spent each hour of the day

debating righteous living and made their laws binding upon other who also wanted to be righteous.

Jesus idea of righteousness was drastically different in that he taught it was not an outward action but rather from the heart (Matthew 5, Matthew 23:27). This is extremely clear in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

As Nicodemus begins the conversation by the praising of Jesus' abilities and the origin of his power and it was Jesus who wastes no time and gets right to the heart of the issue:

"Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

This is NOT the first mention of New Birth in John. Looking back in chapter 1 in what we would define the introduction to the book (1:1-18) we have the first mentioning of New Birth.

"But to all who did receive him (Christ), who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God." John 1:12,13 ESV

This passage sets the foundation for New Birth. Everything concerning New Birth must pass through this passage. For the Bible will not say one thing in one area and then contradict that in another area. If a Bible student finds the Bible saying one thing in one passage and then seemingly saying something opposite of that in another area there is an interpretation problem. It is not a problem with the Bible, rather, it is a problem with interpretation. In the John 3 scenario if one is to suppose Jesus to say new birth begins when one is water baptized the it would be contradictory to John 1:13. So either one interpretation or both interpretations are wrong.

John 1:12, 13 clearly states that New Birth or becoming children of God, is not something that comes about by the will of a person. In the same way, when a man and woman make love and the result of that act a child is conceived in the woman and then later birthed into the world, it would be crazy to think or say the baby decided to be conceived and born - not at all. The man and the woman made the decision. The yet to be born baby has no will to choose to be born.

In the same way the Bible here states that New Birth comes not by human will. The New Century Version interprets John 1:13 in this way:

"They did not become his (God's) children in any human way-by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God."

New Birth is an act of God. It is God's decision, God's action, God's will and God's fingerprints are all over it.

Move ahead in the New Testament to Ephesians 2:8-10 where further insight to God's action in the life of a believer can be found. The context here speaks of the pre-saved believer in that they were dead in their former life (does this not give perspective to Luke 9:60 or Matthew 8:22). This death was not a literal death but a spiritual death. This pre-saved believer followed the way of the world. Their desires were to obey the passions of this world.

Then there is a transition into the mercy of Christ and the grace of Christ. God wanted to show the "immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us" through Jesus.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before, that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-10 ESV

Very similar to John 1:12, 13 this passage indicated that salvation has nothing to do with me or you. It is all about God. It is God's grace, which means his gift, towards us. Our salvation and our faith, both items, come from God and are not of our own doing. At new birth the word of God brings spiritually dead souls to life (see footnote on page 2). We don't work to get this salvation or this faith.

There are works in the Christian life. God has things for us to do, but those things come after his gift of grace and faith, which means it comes after he saves us and they play no part in our salvation.

So the New Testament Bible passages of Ephesians 2:8-10 and John 1:12, 13 are very descriptive on WHO does the saving work. There is no mistaking the thoughts put forth in these two texts that salvation is of God and God's choosing. A dead person can't will themselves to life and a person that is not born can't work to conceive their birth. New Birth is of God.

Therefore, as we proceed in John 3, note that this is not John's first reference to New Birth. As we read through John 3 we need to bear in mind what John has stated in the opening of his book.

Jesus, sets the tone of the conversation and sets the topic of the conversation between he and Nicodemus by saying, "you can't be a part of God's kingdom without being born again." To which Nicodemus response could be seen as a "smarty pants" response. I do not think that is the case. I believe he was logically trying to wrap his head around what Jesus was saying. Maybe he was thinking out loud as he pondered "How can I get back into a birth sack of my mother? I am old, I am much bigger and I don't understand how I can enter my mother's womb a second time to be born."

The correction came from Christ,

"I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit he can not enter the kingdom of God." John 3:5 ESV

Thus the foundation of this first exhibit lies in that verse. If taken at face value those who say that water baptism IS THE POINT at which one becomes a Christian, a believer and part of God's kingdom, can and have used this verse in this chapter of John to make their point. Water baptism, in their interpretation, is what Jesus is talking about here in John 3:5. In their opinion, to be a part of the kingdom of God, one must be baptized.

Water baptism was not foreign to Nicodemus. There were two types of water baptism at this point. First, for centuries, according to history, Jews did baptized people who converted from another culture, religion or race to Judaism⁴. This was called proselytizing. Foreigners who became familiar with the Jewish people and were drawn by their God often became often became worshipers of the one true God. Examples would be Ruth, Rahab, the Roman centurion, (Luke 7:5-10) and a woman named Lydia who had been a worshiper of God before she heard Paul's message in Thyatira (Acts 16:14). So this baptism, and for the men converts circumcision, was to signify their conversion and belief.

Secondly, water baptism was something that John the Baptist encouraged as he prepared the way for the coming ministry of Jesus. (Luke 3:7,8) In fact Jesus participated in John's baptism (Luke 3:21, 22). It was a baptism unto repentance, meaning, this baptism is for changed hearts or repentance. Meaning it was a pledge to live godly, better and different lives. (Luke 3:3)

Yet if we are to take this interpretation of this verse in that manner it would contradict John 1:12, 13 and Ephesians 2:8-10. It would be contradictory in this way: If I have to be water baptized to become a Christian, then that is a requirement on our part to do something to get salvation. It is a step to take to get a desired goal. The desired goal is to be saved, then looking at this passage in that way means I have to do something to get that goal. Aside from having to do something to get that goal I have to also DECIDE to do it. John 1 and Ephesians 2 is clear, there is NO WORK on the part of me to be saved. There is NO DECISION on the part of me to be saved. It is of God and it is from God.

This would mean Faith + Baptism = Salvation. Therefore, God would be in a position of owing me. If I do something to get something, at some point I am owed. God is NEVER in the place of owing ANYONE, EVER.

⁴ Everyday Living: Bible Life and Times, (MJF Books, 2006) 386-387; Davis, John, Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, (Westminster Press, Philadelphia) 59

Therefore since the John and the Ephesians passage are exceedingly clear without any doubt of their meaning, then John 3:5 cannot be interpreted to mean that water baptism is New Birth. The Bible is not contradictory. Then what could its meaning be?

This man Nicodemus knew the law. Jesus knew Nicodemus. In the vast wealth of knowledge of the Old Law, what would Jesus' words stir in Nicodemus? For there are several references in the Old Law about this and without any doubt a man of Nicodemus stature and learning did know them. He had memorized them! He was well aware of Ezekiel 36:25-27:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." ESV

This interpretation can be bolstered with the full meaning of Jesus first response in John 3:3. The original language of the Bible is Greek. When you read a Bible in English, you are reading an interpretation from the Koine Greek to the English language.

John 3:3 the Greek "You must be born again" has a dual meaning and can also be translated, "You must be born from above." This is the literal translation of John 3:3 and lies in perfect harmony with verses 6-8 and also John 1:12, 13 and Ephesians 2:8-10. Other passages that note that New Birth is an act of God whereby eternal life is imparted to the believer are 2 Corinthians 5:17,18; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.

Just as Jesus was NOT referring to a literal returning to a mother's womb and being birthed again, he is also NOT referring to literal water washing. These both are figurative terms defining a spiritual reality.

Jesus referred not to a literal water here, but to the need for cleansing, thus the passage from Ezekiel 36 is very relevant. When water is used figuratively in the Old Testament, it habitually refers to renewal or spiritual cleansing, especially when used in conjunction with spirit. (See Psalm 51:7-10; Isaiah 32:15; 44:3-5; Jeremiah 2:13; Joel 2:28,29) Jesus was referencing here a need for spiritual washing which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. (Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5).

John 3:6 once again reiterates the very nature of New Birth in that it is not something done by flesh. Humans can not give New Birth. They can receive it. They can't will it on themselves. They can't work to get it. It is the same thought that is through out scripture. It is also the same harmony of thought from John 1:13 and

John 3:3 and Ephesians 2:8-10 and many other passages as will be seen in the remaining exhibits.

This New Birth is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Jesus in John 3:8 talks about the Spirit's work. You can not see the wind but you can see the evidence of the wind. In the same manner the Spirit, which in Greek the word for wind and Spirit is the same, works and you can't see the Spirit but you can see the affects of the Spirits work. I can attest for that in my own life and give praise and glory that the change in my life is not a work of my own but that of the Spirit working in me.

As the evidence of this exhibit is concluded let it be known that the consistency of interpretation is of vital importance. Stated earlier, one can't have the Bible saying one thing in one passage and then have it saying something else in a different passage.

Jesus words with Nicodemus are clear. They are clear before, during and after John 3:5. New birth is from God. It is willed by God and decided by God alone. New birth comes from above where God is. The evidence of New Birth is clear because God's Spirit is active. John 3:5 is not referring to literal water baptism. No, it is another reference to the glorious grace of God through the Holy Spirit.

Exhibit 2

Acts 2:38

Because Of vs. In Order To Receive

Acts 2:38 is the pinnacle passage everyone cites if they endorse the necessity of baptism to receive the forgiveness of sins. There is good reason for this fact. When read by itself, without proper context it appears to say that one has to believe AND be baptized in order to be saved.

In this essay on New Birth a decision has been made to spend two exhibits on Acts 2:38. The reason Acts 2:38 is broken into two exhibits are as follows:

1. The effort to remain in the second chapter of Acts and deal with verse 38 in that context solely. In this explanation there will be very little leaving this chapter.
2. Going outside the chapter and interpreting it in light of the context of the entire Bible. As with any single verse or passage, we discern what it teaches by first filtering it through what we know the Bible teaches on the subject at hand. In the case of baptism and salvation, the Bible is clear that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of any kind, including baptism.

There are those who will teach there are steps to being saved and one must do several things in order to get to salvation. Mainly this teaching is based it upon passages like Acts 2:38 which come at the end of a convicting sermon given by Peter. His words touched the hearts of many who were there and they wanted to know what to do about their sin and Peter replied,

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

When pulling that one passage out of the text it does appear that Acts 2:38 gives clear instructions on “How To” become saved. Seems like a simple step process that if you do ___ and you do ___ then you will receive salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This passage stands out midst all others on baptism and will be explained in detail and in context.

Between the two exhibits there will put forth three facts:

1. Those who were baptized in Acts 2 were already convicted believers
2. The call for baptism was for those who were already forgiven
3. Evidence of a believer is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

The focus in this exhibit will be the entire chapter. This will enable us to get a bigger and clearer picture. Context is everything and as written earlier if we look ONLY at

verse 38 it would appear that one must do something in order to receive God's grace.

The English word "be baptized **for** the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 can be an improper translation. The Greek word "EIS" (pronounced ice) which is "FOR" can be translated many ways Thayer Greek & English Lexicon has 9 columns covering 5 pages with different uses for EIS. One of the translations is because of, in reference to and as regards to. Therefore the passage could be translated:

"Repent and be baptized **because of** the forgiveness of your sins"

Often, the discussion of whether or not this passage teaches baptism is required for salvation centers around the Greek this word EIS. Those who hold baptism is required for salvation are quick to proclaim this verse and the fact that it says "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." This would be to assume that the word translated "for" in this verse means "in order to get." But, in both Greek and English, there are many possible usages of the word "for."

One example would be, when one says "Take two aspirin for your headache," it is obvious to everybody that it does not mean "take two aspirin in order to get your headache," but instead to "take two aspirin because you already have a headache." Now there are three possible meanings of the word "for" that might fit the context of [Acts 2:38](#): 1--"in order to be, become, get, have, keep, etc.," 2—"because of, as the result of," or 3—"with regard to." Since any one of the three meanings could fit the context of this passage, additional study is required in order to determine which one is correct.

We need to start by looking back to the original language and the meaning of the Greek word EIS. This is a common Greek word (it is used 1774 times in the New Testament) that is translated many different ways. Like the English word "for" it can have several different meanings. So, again, we see at least two or three possible meanings of the passage, one that would seem to support that baptism is required for salvation and others that would not. While both the meanings of the Greek word EIS are seen in different passages of Scripture, such noted Greek scholars as A.T. Robertson and J.R. Mantey have maintained that the Greek preposition EIS in [Acts 2:38](#) should be translated "because of" or "in view of," and not "in order to," or "for the purpose of."

There are some in the Church of Christ denomination who will say that in the New Testament EIS is NEVER looks back but always looks forward⁵. Therefore EIS

⁵ One example among many is from Christian Courier in an article by Wayne Jackson in which he states, "The Greek term *eis* is found about 1,750 times in the New Testament. While it has a variety of meaning shades, it **always** is prospective (forward looking), and is **never** retrospective (backward looking) in its direction." The highlighted emphasis is originally placed by the author Wayne Jackson and this quotation appears exactly as it did on the web site. (<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1143-preposition-eis-in-acts-2-38-the>)

means “in order to obtain.” There are many Greek language scholars such as Lydell & Scott, Thayer, A.T. Robertson, Vine and Wuest, which say the opposite.

There are passages in the New Testament where EIS is used where it does not mean “in order to receive.” Are we baptized in order to obtain the name of the Father, Son and Spirit (Matthew 28:19)? The word “in” in Matthew 29:19 is the word EIS. So the answer to that question is, no we are baptized in regards to or because of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Another example of how this preposition is used in other Scriptures is seen in Matthew 12:41 where the word EIS communicates the “result” of an action. In this case it is said that the people of Nineveh “repented at the preaching of Jonah” (the word translated “at” is the Greek word EIS). Clearly, the meaning of this passage is that they repented “because of” or “as the result of” Jonah’s preaching. In the same way, it would be possible that Acts 2:38 is indeed communicating the fact that they were to be baptized “as the result of” or “because” they already had believed and in doing so had already received forgiveness of their sins (John 1:12; John 3:14-18; John 5:24; John 11:25-26; Acts 10:43; Acts 13:39; Acts 16:31; Acts 26:18; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 1:12-14). This interpretation of the passage is also consistent with the message recorded in Peter’s next two sermons to unbelievers where he associates the forgiveness of sins with the act of repentance and faith in Christ without even mentioning baptism (Acts 3:17-26; Acts 4:8-12).

Context = The Entire Section Of Scripture

Here is the chance where you the reader can decide what Acts 2:38 says. Because of the CONTEXT of the passage which includes Acts 2:21 & 41, I am convinced that Peter is urging repentant believers who are already saved to be baptized.

Notice how important it is to look at the entire text around Acts 2:38. It is interesting that those who place so much emphasis on 2:38 place little to no emphasis on Acts 2:21, “*that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” Additionally Acts 2:41 gives true account WHO was baptized, in that those who had received the word were baptized that day. The Thayer lexicon defines received (588) as to accept or believe. Luke was ONLY New Testament writer to use this word. He used it in his first book, Luke, and here also in Acts. Kenneth Wuest translates Acts 2:41 this way:

“Then those who received his word with approval were immersed.”

Besides the precise meaning of the preposition translated “for” in this passage, there is another grammatical aspect of this verse to carefully consider—the change between the second person and third person between the verbs and pronouns in the passage. For example, in Peter’s commands to repent and be baptized the Greek verb translated “repent” is in the second person plural while the verb “be baptized,” is in the third person singular. When we couple this with the fact that the pronoun

“your” in the phrase “forgiveness of your sins” is also second person plural, we see an important distinction being made that helps us understand this passage. The result of this change from second person plural to third person singular and back would seem to connect the phrase “forgiveness of your sins” directly with the command to “repent.” Therefore, when you take into account the change in person and plurality, essentially what you have is “You (plural) repent for the forgiveness of your (plural) sins, and let each one (singular) of you be baptized (singular).” Or, to put it in a more distinct way: “You all repent for the forgiveness of all of your sins, and let each one of you be baptized.”

Negative Inference Fallacy

Another mistake in interpretation made by those who believe [Acts 2:38](#) teaches baptism is required for salvation is sometimes called the Negative Inference Fallacy. This is the idea that just because a statement is true, we cannot assume all negations (or opposites) of that statement are true. Just because [Acts 2:38](#) says “repent and be baptized....for the forgiveness of sins...and the gift of the Holy Spirit,” it does not mean that if one repents and is not baptized, he will not receive forgiveness of sins or the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is an important difference between a condition of salvation and a requirement for salvation. The Bible is clear that belief is both a condition and a requirement, but the same cannot be said for baptism. The Bible does not say that if a man is not baptized then he will not be saved. If that were true, Jesus would never have been able to assure the criminal crucified with Him that he would be with Him in paradise that very day ([Luke 23:39-43](#)). One can add any number of conditions to faith (which is required for salvation), and the person can still be saved. For example if a person believes, is baptized, goes to church, and gives to the poor he will be saved. Where the error in thinking occurs is if one assumes all these other conditions, “baptism, going to church, giving to the poor,” are required for one to be saved. While they might be the evidence of salvation, they are not a requirement for salvation.

The fact that baptism is not required to receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit should also be evident by simply reading a little farther in the book of Acts 10:43. This will be discussed more completely in the next exhibit.

Acts 2:38 does not teach that baptism is required for salvation. While baptism is important as the sign that one has been justified by faith and as the public declaration of one’s faith in Christ and membership in a local body of believers, it is not the means of remission or forgiveness of sins. The Bible is very clear that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone ([John 1:12](#); [John 3:16](#); [Acts 16:31](#); [Romans 3:21-30](#); [Romans 4:5](#); [Romans 10:9-10](#); [Ephesians 2:8-10](#); [Philippians 3:9](#); [Galatians 2:16](#)).

Exhibit 3

Acts 2:38

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive

To review that which was stated in the introduction and repeated in Exhibit 1, the Bible can in no way state something in one part of the Scriptures and then say something that contradicts that statement somewhere else. To give a silly example, the Bible would not state in one place, "Do not run to the mail box ever," while saying somewhere else, "Run to the mail box."

So, therefore, it can't be taught that one must do something to be saved if the Bible clearly states that New Birth comes not from "the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God," (John 1:13) and also that "it is by grace that you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God not as a result of works so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9). Additionally as we learned in Exhibit 1 that the "washing" is "from above," then it would be accurate to state that New Birth or salvation comes by God's grace and God's grace alone, through faith alone and these are gifts from God. When I was saved it was 100% God and 0% me. There was no action I did to save me.

Yet there are those who state that one must do things to get forgiveness or salvation. There are some who state specifically that in order to be saved you must be baptized. I do not agree with the sentiment because it is an outward action of one person dunking another person under the water is the point one becomes saved. After reading our passages from John 1, 3 and Ephesians 2 and then say that one must undergo water baptism to be saved place the Scriptures in a position that does not exist in agreement.

So if the Bible in one area says that New Birth or salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone and also says that New Birth comes by the will of God and not by any choice of a person and then says in another place that you have to DO baptism to be saved, how does that match up? Is this not a contradiction? I firmly say that this appears to be a contradiction. The contradiction seems to take place if two things happen:

1. Pull the passage out of context
2. Misinterpretation

The Bible does not contradict BUT the interpretations or some Bible teachers can and do contradict.

The Bible states over one hundred times that in order to be saved one must simply believe. Having grown up in the Church of Christ they have a phrase for this called, "easy believism." I don't know why they call it that, for there is nothing easy about

being a Christian. In fact it comes with a lot of work (Ephesians 2:10; Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 1:6)

The Churches of Christ, among a few other denominations, are very strong on water baptism. I suppose one could call their view easy baptismism. There really is not much work in getting dunked in water. In my lifetime I have seen teachers, coaches and clowns get dunked in water at county fairs and local carnivals. All they did was sit there till someone hit the target with a hard ball. Every child I have raised I have dunked in the water and they did not have to do anything. They held their breath because I blew in their face suddenly so that water dunk was really easy. Okay so obviously my remarks are sarcasm for I know their use of the term “easy believism” is derogatory.

When pulling that one passage out of the text it does appear that Acts 2:38 gives clear instructions on “How To” become saved. Seems like a simple step process that if you do ___ and you do ___ then you will receive salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This passage stands out and will be explained in detail and in context.

In exhibit 2 Acts 2:38 was explained in relation to Acts 2. There were a few outside passages brought forth, however, the effort was to remain in Acts 2 as much as possible.

In this exhibit more time will be spent using passages outside of Acts 2 to help in interpreting Acts 2:38. Was Acts 2 DESCRIBING what was taking place on the Day of Pentecost and Peter’s sermon or was it PRESCRIBING on what must take place in every place at any time salvation is experienced? There will be more on this later.

Please be reminded of the three ideas to learn from Acts 2:

4. Those who were baptized in Acts 2 were already believers
5. The call for baptism was for those who were already forgiven
6. Evidence of a believer is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Introducing the Holy Spirit

When he was baptized by John we learn something important about Jesus. All the accounts of Jesus baptism can be found in Matthew 3; Mark 1:8-11; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:29-34.

John was preaching and people were coming to listen. He was preparing the way for Jesus. He was getting hearts set for Jesus’ message and ministry. He was calling attention to Jesus who was to come after him. Then Jesus came to John to be baptized. This is what John the Baptist said,

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, who sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

This same thought is repeated in Acts 1:5. As Jesus was preparing his disciples for his upcoming death the gospel of John records his encouraging words about the promised Holy Spirit or counselor that is to come. He instructed that if he did not go through the upcoming trial and death the Holy Spirit could not appear. (John 14:15-31) Jesus' baptism as referred to in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Is this not a repeat of Exhibit 1 where the washing came from ABOVE? The passage in Ezekiel 36 stands out even stronger. But let's take this one step further and look at Ephesians 5:25,26.

The context of this writing is explaining how husbands should love their wives. In placing a description on what this love a husband should have for a wife it explains that husbands should imitate Jesus' love for the church in that he gave himself up for her. This act of Jesus giving up his life sanctified the church by:

"Cleansing her by the washing of the water with the word. . ."

The washing is the same washing of John 3 and Ezekiel 36. It is not a difficult word picture to figure. It comes by way of the Holy Spirit. The word picture of sprinkling and washing continues to appear in throughout God's word. In Hebrews 10 there is an excellent description of the purpose of the Old Law and how it ties into the New Law. Down in verse 22 is another appearance of this same purification.

*"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with **our hearts sprinkled clean** from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*

In 1 Corinthians Paul specifically brings up the very sinful past from a group of people who were now saved and says this:

*"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and **by the Spirit of our God.**" I Corinthians 6:11*

Even the small book of Titus has something to say about this cleansing.

*"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us not because of WORKS done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and **renewal of the Holy Spirit** who he **POURED** out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Titus 3:5, 6*

The common theme here is that the New Birth or regeneration in which Jesus came to bring was from above. Not something we could do. Ephesians 4:5 says, for there is One Lord (God the Father), One Faith, (God the son) and One baptism (God the Spirit).

One may wonder why there is so much explanation on this matter. Why is this so important to get right? What does it matter if one teaches they have to get baptized in water to get to salvation and forgiveness of sin? It is strikingly important because:

1. The Bible calls my righteousness is “as a dirty tampon” (Isaiah 64:6) before God. And Paul considered that all his righteous deeds he performed were human waste or poop (Philippians 3:8). Suddenly it becomes very clear that anything, any work I do on my own is junk. It also demeans the gift of God’s grace. Therefore it must be said clearly - My righteous actions = BAD but ALL of Jesus actions = GOOD, PERFECT and RIGHTEOUS.
2. It places more importance on water than on the blood sacrifice Christ offered. One does not have to get far in the Old Testament to see a LOT of blood. After sin, blood became one major communication piece between God and man. It pointed forward to Christ (Hebrews 10:10) who on the cross said, “It is finished!” and then died. The importance is in His blood.
3. Rules and laws cannot justify (Galatians 2:16). Those who look at baptism as a necessary action in order to receive salvation make baptism a law. We are not saved by acts of a law. Law did not save in Old Covenant, why would it change in New Covenant?

Salvation is about the glory of Christ. This is Christ’s work. This is the reason why Paul was so quick to pronounce damnation upon those who added to the gospel message. (Galatians 1:8,9) Some were saying, much like today, you need to do _____ in order to be saved. They filled in the blank with circumcision. This is false. Faith + Nothing = salvation. When I begin to ADD things to the gospel message it dilutes the work of Christ and the Spirit.

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive Passages

The Holy Spirit being IN the believer is the sign that the believer is saved. This Holy Spirit is God, it was through this power by which Jesus was raised from the dead and it is also residing in every Christian believer. (Romans 8:8-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 1:22)

This is KEY: every person who is a Christian, a disciple of Christ or saved and forgiven HAS THE HOLY SPIRIT. This is of vital importance. If one does NOT have the Holy Spirit living in them, they are NOT saved. (Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Galatians 5:16-28) Other passages that describe this saving work of the Holy Spirit are as follows:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of

adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Rom 8:14-17)

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom 5:5)

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#))

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ([1 Corinthians 6:19](#))

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. ([Romans 8:9](#))

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. ([Romans 8:11](#))

If one were to read Acts 9:17 and Acts 10:44, it would be clear that the Holy Spirit was IN those believers before baptism. They had the Spirit and then were baptized. When looking at these passages one can easily see that forgiveness precedes the rite of baptism.

On a side note it is interesting that before Peter began addressing the crowd, (Acts 2:2-4) the Holy Spirit descended upon everyone at the gathering. A rushing wind came in and filled everyone with the Holy Spirit gave everyone there the perfect ability to speak in tongues.

This is not the speaking in tongues, the private prayer language, where there is a lot of gibberish and utterances. Everyone there was able to speak and understand another language and even in proper dialect. Then Peter began to speak.

To summarize and assemble everything to this point and to ensure that we have this in complete context and isolating nothing let us consider the following points.

1. Jesus did not come to baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11)
2. The crowd was already full of the Holy Spirit. Not only were they speaking MIRACULOUSLY in tongues but they were convicted of sin (2:37). Jesus said in John 16:7-11 one of the effects of the Holy Spirit was "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment concerning sin."

3. According to verse 41 the hearers had “received”, or “believed” the word” Peter was preaching and then they were baptized.

New Birth is of God and it is his grace towards us. The Bible could not be clearer but when you have a group or denomination taking words out of context and twisting them with other passages in other places, picking and choosing as if the Bible was a buffet of words and commands, you get a mixed up message.

The dominate teaching throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation is the salvation or New Birth is by grace alone, through faith alone and this is a gift of God. When Acts 2:38 is isolated and pulled it seems to make a command. To pull verse 38 away from 41 is a tragedy for it is in verse 41 that we see that those who had **RECEIVED** the word were baptized.

You do not ask an unsaved person to tithe to the church. You do not ask an unsaved person to take of the communion elements. You do not ask an unsaved person to submit to the elders and leadership of a local church. In the same way, you do NOT ask an unsaved person to be obedient in baptism. These are actions of repentant believers and baptism is for **REPENTENT** believers.

Below is a chart of what is required in the New Testament for believers and non-believers:

Non-Believers	Believers
Repent or Believe (both are two sides of the same coin) that Jesus is God’s son	Tithe Love Wife as Christ Loved Church Be Baptized Submit to Elders Go To Church Assembly Remember Christ in Communion Etc.

Water baptism is an act of obedience and a wonderful expression. I am FOR water baptism. I am for obedience. It is the outward sign of what has taken place in the life. Water baptism was what 3000 believers did in Acts 2. Water baptism is what the Ethiopian did immediately in Acts 8. Water baptism is what Saul/Paul did in Acts 9 and also the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. Water baptism is an awesome act of obedience however, proper understanding of its place is vital.

Another error that is made by those who believe Acts 2:38 teaches baptism is required for salvation is what is sometimes called the Negative Inference Fallacy. Simply put, this is the idea that just because a statement is true, we cannot assume all negations (or opposites) of that statement are true. In other words, just because Acts 2:38 says “repent and be baptized....for the forgiveness of sins...and the gift of

the Holy Spirit," it does not mean that if one repents and is not baptized, he will not receive forgiveness of sins or the gift of the Holy Spirit. This applies and is similar to the Mark 16:16 passage.

There is an important difference between a condition of salvation and a requirement for salvation. The Bible is clear that belief is both a condition and a requirement, but the same cannot be said for baptism. The Bible does not say that if a man is not baptized then he will not be saved. If that were true, Jesus would never have been able to assure the criminal crucified with Him that he would be with Him in paradise that very day (Luke 23:39-43). One can add any number of conditions to faith (which is required for salvation), and the person can still be saved. For example if a person believes, is baptized, goes to church, and gives to the poor he will be saved. Where the error in thinking occurs is if one assumes all these other conditions, "baptism, going to church, giving to the poor," are required for one to be saved. While they might be the evidence of salvation, they are not a requirement for salvation.

In the same way, this may best be explained this way. There is a difference between descriptive passages, passages that DESCRIBE or explain what happened in one setting at one time and prescriptive passages, passages that PRESCRIBE what MUST happen in every situation in every time period.

In Acts 2:38, there was mentioned that as a result of baptism the believer would receive the Holy Spirit. Does Acts 2:38 give an account DESCRIPTION or PRESCRIPTION of how to get receive the Holy Spirit? The best way to determine this is to look at other similar passages where the Holy Spirit is involved and not just involved but living in or indwelling a Christian.

So if the Holy Spirit is key let us compare other passages where the Holy Spirit is involved.

Acts 3:18-19 Christ's death and repentance is the focus for the forgiveness of their sins. In Acts 4:2-4 Jesus & the resurrection is preached, no baptism mentioned but it does say they believed the word & 5,000 were saved.

Acts 9:17-18 Paul gives his testimony he refers back to the Damascus road encounter as the time of his Spiritual birth. In vs. 17 it tells us when Ananias laid hands on him he was filled with the Spirit then he was baptized. Therefore Holy Spirit came before water baptism.

Acts 10:43 Peter says "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*"

We have the exact reversal of Acts 2, they then received the Spirit from hearing the word & believing, before any baptism. It was in verse 48 they were instructed and led to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Acts 11:15-18 As Peter was SPEAKING (Romans 10:15) the Holy Spirit fell on the crowd. It is then that Peter recounts the Jesus saying about the difference between water baptism and spirit baptism. Verse 17" if therefore God gave them the same gift as he did unto us, when *we believed* on the Lord Jesus Christ;"

Acts 15 the Jerusalem council was called because some men said that certain parts of the law needed to be obeyed. Vs 8 Peter recounts how the gentiles heard the word of the gospel and believed, God seeing their hearts acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did us. And making no distinction between us & them, *purifying their hearts by faith vs.11" We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we shall be saved in the same manner".* Notice that Peter makes it clear it's by grace and that the gentiles were actually saved being baptized in the Spirit before any confession or baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13). Everyone enters into Christ the same way then and today. Ephesians 1:13 tells us when they believed in the gospel (1 Cor.15:1-4) they were sealed by the Holy Spirit.

As this exhibit comes to a close it is very clear the people who heard the first gospel message after Jesus death, burial and resurrection were filled with the promised Holy Spirit. This is the baptism of Jesus, the baptism of the Spirit. This is not only the proper full contextual explanation on Acts 2:38 but it also exists in harmony with our other passages on New Birth.

Exhibit 4

Romans 6:3, 4

Literal vs. Metaphorical

To repeat that which has been stated several times, the Bible does not contradict itself. It does not say in one passage, text or thought one thing and then say the exact opposite in another passage, text or thought. If it does, one or both interpretations are incorrect.

Therefore the topic at hand is, does water baptism save? Is the point a person becomes water baptized make them a Christian or give New Birth? For there are a number of passages that clearly state that salvation is by grace only through believing and that believing and being saved are gifts from God. The Bible also states that there is no work that a person can do to be saved (Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 12:2; Psalm 98:1).

On the other hand there are passages that seem to state that baptism is what saves. These passages seem to proclaim that unless one is water baptized they can't be saved.

So how do we make sense of it all. How can these passages be justified so as to agree with each other? What explanation or interpretation can be provided to rectify the passages that seem to contradict?

In the introduction Mark 16:16 was interpreted and justified. In the close of this writing 1 Peter 3:21 will also be interpreted and justified. Exhibit One properly interpreted the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3. Exhibit Two placed the Pentecost Sermon of Peter and specifically Acts 2:38 in context. This last exhibit will focus on Romans 6:3, 4.

One important thing to remember about the Greek word used for baptism or baptize, is that this word was never translated, but rather transliterated. A former Church of Christ college professor of mine said this word was "anglicized". Simply the Greek, baptizo, became baptize.

A big help in understanding how to interpret an ancient word is to see how it was used in contemporary literature of the same time period. Several Greek scholars have followed this pattern.

- Homer, in the Odyssey describes the hissing of the burning eye of the Cyclops and it is compared to the sound of water where the smith dips (baptizo) a piece of hot iron, tempering it.
- In the Battle of the Frogs and Mice, it is said that a mouse thrust a frog with a reed and the frog leaped over the water, dyeing (baptizo) it with his blood.

- Euripedes uses the word of a ship which goes down in the water and does not come back to the surface.
- Lucian dreams that he has seen a huge bird shot with a mighty arrow, and as it flies high in the air, it dyes (baptizo) the clouds with his blood.

In better efforts to define or translate baptize, Kenneth Weust gives this definition;

“The introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition.” (Weust Kenneth, Great Truths To Live By, p.80)

Having looked at John 3 and Acts 2 we come to Romans 6:3, 4:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

This passage on baptism in Romans speaks of a metaphorical sense of baptism. One does not literally die while being baptized. The person being dunked into water is metaphorically dying. One is not literally buried in a tomb or grave while being water baptized. This is not the case for they are only metaphorically being laid in a tomb as Christ was. Likewise, they do not come back to life, but rather they re-enact Christ death, burial and resurrection in baptism. It is a symbol of doing exactly what Jesus did. It is a metaphorical activity that I believe ALL believers need to encounter.

Look at how perfectly the baptism definition works in Romans 6: 3, 4. As Romans 6 begins it points back to 5:20, 21 which states the reality that the law points out sin and sin points to the grace of God in the saved soul. So chapter 6 picks up right there and asks the question, if grace is so great and sin points it out, then shouldn't we sin all the more? The response, may it never be or forbid it happen or by no means or even unthinkable!

We died to sin with the verb here, according to Greek scholars, refers to the habitual action of sinning. Make no mistake, until the saved reach glory, there will be sin, even in the life of the believer (1 John). However, there will not be an unrepentant string of habitual sin that leaves no mark on the conscience.

We look first at the phrase ‘baptized into Christ Jesus.’ It is set in a context of supernaturalism. In verse 2 we have the supernatural act of God breaking the power of indwelling sin for the believer. In verse 4 we have the supernatural act of God imparting divine life to the believer. Verse 3 reaches back to the action spoke of in verse 2 and forward to that spoke of in verse 4.

The believing sinner is introduced or placed in Christ, thus coming into union with Him. By that action he is taken out of his old environment and condition in which he had lived, the First Adam, (Romans 5:12-21) and is placed into a new environment and condition, the last Adam.

By this action his condition is changed from that of a lost sinner with a totally depraved nature to that of a saint with a divine nature. His relationship to the law of God is changed from that of a guilty sinner to that of a justified saint. All of this is accomplished by the act of the Holy Spirit introducing him into vital union with Jesus Christ. No ceremony of water baptism ever did that. The entire context is supernatural in its character. The Greek word here should not be transliterated but translated.

This change is brought about by the Holy Spirit! The process by which this is done BY THE HOLY SPIRIT is called Holy Spirit baptism. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

What baptism did Jesus come to bring? Jesus came to baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) Look back and remember Ephesians 4:5, “One Lord (God the Father), One Faith (God the Son), One Baptism (God the Spirit).”

The problem which arises with failure to translate is that we so often associate the English word, “baptism” with the rite of water baptism. It is then that we read that baptism ceremony into Romans 6. It would be best if “baptize” would have been translated and not transliterated.

The meaning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit has been greatly obscured by the fact that the word is also used for water baptism. There is probably no dissent by anyone who knows even a little Greek, to the fact that the primary root meaning of the Greek word used here is “to plunge, dip or immerse.” Obviously these definitions cannot be applied literally to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, even if the reader does not agree that Romans 6:3-4 is metaphorical; even if we simply agree that it is literal, the fact remains that one can’t pull out this passage and twist it to make it a requirement to receive God’s forgiving grace. It is a beautiful picture, a living drama of a reality that has already taken place.

In any language there are literal and metaphorical meanings of words. In English there is the word “iron” which is a metal. But if it is said that “iron has entered his soul,” what comes to mind? This phrase originated in the Vulgate translation of a Psalm. With that in mind we do not think of the chemical symbol Fe nor do we think of a metal. Rather we think that iron means tribulation. Iron also means courage, hardness, strength of character, firmness, stubbornness or obstinacy of will. These are ALL metaphorical meanings for “iron”. (Barnhouse, Donald, Romans Volume 3, page 32, 33)

In the exact same way the word “baptize” can have a metaphorical meaning far removed from anything to do with water. Now the problem with transliterating can be fully

detected. Romans 6 is not the only place where “baptize” is metaphorical. There are also times in the New Testament when the word “baptize” is literal. Below is a short list for both the literal and the metaphorical.

Literal or Ceremonial	Metaphorical
Leviticus 14:8,9 LXX Leviticus 15:5-11 LXX Mark 7:4 Matthew 3:6 Matthew 28:19 Acts 2:38	Matthew 20:22,23 Mark 10:38 Luke 12:50 1 Peter 3:21 1 Corinthians 15:29

To the Bible student who comes to Romans 6:3, 4 with prejudices and preconceived interpretations you may will look upon this exhibit with skepticism. I have spent much of my life around these types of Bible students. I was one of these types.

In my past, I brought to the table that one must be water baptized in order to be saved. This passage seemed to reinforce that. Yet over time and being exposed to the true definition of grace there became a need to see how these two thoughts could live together.

One can not in anyway, say:

You are saved by grace and not by ANY work (Ephesians 2:8-10)

And ALSO teach, think or believe that:

In order to be saved you must be water baptized. (John 3; Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3,4)

Once in this exhibit and several times throughout the entirety of this writing it has been stated that the Bible does not contradict itself. The Bible does not say one thing in one place and the exact opposite in another.

So, to the Bible student who comes to the Holy Scriptures with preconceived notions that water baptism IS the point and IS the method one is saved and brought to New Birth, then this explanation may fall on deaf ears. A true student does not try to make the Bible fit his or her notions.

One may then be tempted to challenge me in this way: did not I (the writer) bring a preconceived notion to Romans 6? Am I trying to make John 3, Acts 2:38 and the passage here in Romans 6 fit the notion that water baptism is not the point one becomes saved?

The response is a resounding no. This “no” is based upon the Holy Scriptures themselves proclaiming that New Birth is entirely based upon the grace of God. That grace is a

FREE GIFT. (Romans 5:15) The God inspired Bible explains that there is nothing one can do to cause New Birth. God causes New Birth. (John 1:13; James 1:18; 2 Timothy 2:25; Philippians 1:29) My loving God was patient, kind and long suffering (Psalm 78:38) while the preparations for the coming of the Messiah were taking place. I serve and praise a loving God that brought me and everyone like me who were completely dead spiritually, following the ways of the world (Ephesians 2) and gave them life, is a reason to praise loudly. This is grace upon grace and none of this of my own doing. It is completely and solely God. This is a thought the New Testament repeats over and again.

The preconceived notions I bring to Romans 6:3, 4 come from the Bible itself. It is then the Bible student's job to properly study and seek how the entire Bible fits together. One does a GREAT disservice to the Bible when it picks and pulls passages like a dinner buffet and teaches others to do the same.

Oh, the depth and the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Romans 11:33)

Conclusion

I come from a long history of water baptism churches. Having grown up in the Church of Christ this was preached three times a week, every week for over 20 years. It was difficult to see it any other way.

In the Summer of 1990 grace was brought to my attention like never before. I remember sitting down on an afternoon in my office which had an unimpressive personal library of eight books. I looked at Romans 3 and 4 and Galatians 3 and began to do a verse by verse break down.

It changed me. Up to that point in my Christian life I viewed salvation as, "I do as much good as I can and God will do the rest." Oh, how pitiful that is (Isaiah 64:6). My teaching changed immediately.

Then I was challenged. I had no answer for the challenge. A Church of Christ minister overheard my sharing Romans with a fellow believer and in a condescending way he told me in no uncertain terms was my teaching correct. He admonished both of us that we do HAVE to do something to be saved.

He brought up James 2:14-26 in that "faith without works is dead." He mentioned Noah, in that he had to build the ark (a work) in order to be saved from the flood. His logic was if he did not build an ark, and to the exact precise measurements God gave, then he would have died like the rest. So likewise we Christians have to do something to be saved. God has a plan and we must follow that plan and do it to be saved.

I had no reply. I knew what the Bible said. I knew what Romans and Galatians said but my ignorance could muster no reply. I just knew that the Bible could not say in one area one thing and in another something different. This statement has had a tremendous impact on me because at the heart of being a Bible student is finding the true interpretations for the Holy Scriptures. I did not want to find him and beat him in the argument. My reaction was, I want to find out why Romans and Galatians seem to say one thing and seemingly something else is stated in other parts of the Bible.

Oh, how part of me wishes I could have that conversation back. At the time I was not embarrassed because I did not have a reply. I was puzzled at how contradictory the Bible seemed right then and there.

It was later, through the years and study that it all began to fit together. Through time I began to see that James 2 did not contradict Romans and Galatians. Paul and James had the same take and teaching on saving faith. James 2:14-26 looked from the back end of faith in that the work of God, the true faith that God provides, is an active faith and a faith that works.

For it is clear that not only did God cause my faith (2 Timothy 2:25; Philippians 1:29) but God ALSO caused Abraham to believe (Genesis 20:13). God caused Abel's worship,

Enoch's walking, Noah's building, Abraham's wondering, Sarah's love making, Moses delivering and Rahab's hiding. These were all acts of faith based upon the work of God already in their lives. God has prepared for me, in time past, works to do. (Ephesians 2:10) These works come after justifying faith and the works have nothing to do with justifying me. James speaks that works point to the fact of being justified.

"God is the author and perfecter of my faith" (Hebrews 12:2). God sparks a holy desire within me to work. I study because I love God. My service and praise are because I am changed by God. I give because I am saved. The fruits of the Spirit are in me because I am saved. I will "work out my salvation with fear and trembling," because it is "God who is at work in me" (Philippians 2:12). I am baptized because as 1 Peter 3:21 states it, it is a symbol of my salvation.

We come to the end of this study on baptism having not looked at every single passage on baptism. There are most definitely other passages but the goal was to study in some detail the passages that seemed to state that water baptism IS the point one is saved and IS the cause of salvation.

The Bible is very clear in that belief is the point of New Birth:

"The righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17)

"And the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." (Romans 4:5)

"For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." (Romans 14:23)

"It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21)

"Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Corinthians 4:13,14)

"Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified." (Galatians 2:16)

"But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (Galatians 3:22)

"And be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." (Philippians 3:9)

"And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus:" (2 Timothy 3:15)

"He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God who

raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.” (1 Peter 1:20,21)

“And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” (1 John 3:23)

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. . . And this is the victory that overcomes the world- our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believe that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:1,4&5)

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13)

This is not an exhaustive list but rather a good collection of Scripture that indicates clearly in the power of belief.

One final objection that must be addressed are those Bible students who state that they look at what the ENTIRE Bible has to say about being saved and combine it all. This seems to point that those who believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone have only taken part of the Scriptures. This can be best represented by the following quote:

“But someone with a different church background may say I didn’t quote the verses that deal with faith. They may say they can show me more verse that say faith saves than I have assembled regarding baptism. But I can counter their argument by simply acquiescing to them on this point and saying, ‘yea verily, perhaps they can; and I believe every such verse you can find.’ Some people in effect, embrace what I call an ‘Or’ theology. They concentrate on or accept the verses stressing faith ‘OR’ the verse stressing baptism. I prefer and ‘AND’ theology, in which our doctrine (Church of Christ) should be consistent with all the verses found in the Scripture. The restoration movement has historically accepted both the verses which teach of faith ‘AND’ those which teach of baptism; because, they all blend together harmoniously in to the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scripture.” (Yancey, Walt; Endangered Heritage An Examination of Church of Christ Doctrine, p. 99)

I could not disagree more. There is an issue when anyone, anywhere, at anytime says that you are saved by faith AND _____ (you fill in the blank).

This is no small matter. In the early church, an entire “convention” was organized to fix an “and” mentality. (Acts 15:1) There were those who were teaching that one had to be circumcised to be saved. This was not true.

The mentality was also the subject of Galatians and specifically chapter 1 when Paul says two times, back to back for emphasis that if anyone teaches another gospel they should be damned. There were teachers perverting the Gospel by adding requirements of the Old Law as necessary for salvation. (Galatians 3:3)

I am not against baptism. I love baptism. In the introduction the fact was brought forth that in a work like this it may bring a temptation to think the author is against baptism. This is simply not true. This work is brought forth to place baptism in the proper light.

Baptism is a beautiful thing. Baptism is an act of obedience. One who is saved should have no hesitation or issue with being baptized. (Acts 8:36) Baptism is an outward symbol of what has already taken place in the heart and mind of the believer. The passage in 1 Peter 3:21 describe this wonderfully well. With great clarity Peter writes that the actual waters are not the saving power but that it is an “appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

John Piper stated it best in noting the wedding ring. When a man and woman are married they exchange rings. “With this ring I thee wed,” is repeated by each. They are not marrying the ring. The rings are NOT the marriage. They represent the covenant of the marriage. In the same way Baptism represents the union with Christ publicly. It is an outward display of an inward reality.

Do you believe that Jesus is Lord? Some of Jesus’ last words before returning to the right hand of the Father,

“All authority has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20