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The Eis of Grace

The question of how Acts 2:38 fits with the inclusive nature of the Gospel and the accomplished work of Jesus Christ is one that comes up from time to time. Acts 2:38 and I had an all day wrestling match about a year ago and I have to say that the outcome was well worth the torment.

In the process of studying Acts 2:38, especially the “be baptized for the forgiveness of sins” part, I employed a Bible study technique shared with me by my mentor. He first told me to always let Jesus be my hermeneutic. To look for the answer through the lens of “Who is Jesus?”

Then he said to me, “If you cannot determine what the passage IS saying then come at it with the question; “What do I KNOW it cannot be saying?”

This way of looking at a difficult passage is extremely helpful in many ways. Not the least of which is that it helps us eliminate certain possibilities as not possible.

Specifically, in Acts 2:38, the idea that there is somehow an exchange between God the Trinity and me at my personal water baptism where I trade wet clothes for forgiveness is absurd. Now before the stones fly, let me say I recognize that there is substantially more going on in the sacrament of baptism than the hydration of our under garments. Still, is it even plausible that the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world would indeed wait for my baptism to impart to me this forgiveness? Perish the thought because it is blasphemous! Let me ask this first: is Jesus a procrastinator? Did Jesus simply get tired of His earthly ministry and say, “I’m going home now and I’ll finish this later.”? What part of the work of Jesus was not included in His statement from the cross, “It is finished?”

In Acts 2:38 Peter is talking to Jews who, just about 50 days earlier that same year, had been shouting in the streets of Jerusalem about Jesus: “Crucify Him!” Peter has just shared with them the Gospel of Jesus and they wanted to know what to do in response to what they heard. Peter says to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Interestingly, Peter mixes the verb tenses in this passage when he says repent and be baptized. Repent is *metanoeo* in the Greek and Pete uses it in the second person plural. When he says be baptized (*baptizo*) he uses third person singular.

What that means is that Peter says “repent” to the whole of the crowd. He is telling this group (remember they are members of the mob that cried “crucify Him!”) to change their way of thinking about Jesus- to believe Who He is.

In using the second person singular, in his instruction to be baptized, Peter is speaking to individuals. He is telling them to proclaim their personal faith publicly.

Now in the phrase “for the forgiveness of your sins” the preposition “for” is *eis* (pronounced *ace*) in the Greek. It is used here in the accusative case. It means “because of.” Imagine you saw a poster that said “Models wanted for a catalogue shoot” You know that the photo session for this catalogue has yet to take place. That use of “for” is the future case.

Now imagine a wanted poster that reads, “Jesse James wanted for murder.” We are crazy to think that someone has selected a person to be killed and they are looking for Jesse James to do the job. “For” in the wanted poster is accusative case. It tells you that the murder has already taken place. When Peter says repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sin he is saying repent and be baptized on account of, or because, your sins are forgiven.

The forgiveness of sin has been accomplished once and for all in Jesus. The other places in the New Testament that call us to repent refer to a familial repentance. It means that in your repenting (or not repenting) you are adopted as sons and daughters.

My two little girls can break a family rule and say they are sorry or not say they are sorry, but either way they remain my daughters- beloved of their father.

In the same way you and I belong to the Father, Son, and Spirit and I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (I read that somewhere)

Not even your sin can separate you from the One in Whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28.)

Acts 2:38 flows and meshes with all that we read about Jesus and all that He is and has done to us, in us, with us, and for us! God the Trinity loves you and likes you and has done everything necessary from before the foundations of the earth to have you in fellowship and union with Him. Truly Acts 2:38 helps us answer more clearly the question “Who is Jesus?”

~ Bill Winn