

Acts 2:38: Must One be Baptized to be Saved?

The idea that the waters of baptism had magical-efficacious powers arose slowly in the Second Century A.D. Despite the fact that adult baptism only after conversion was the norm through the age of Constantine (ca. 337 A.D.), spurious ideas on the salvific value of water baptism persisted through the Middle Ages. Even today, there are those who insist that water baptism is a categorical prerequisite to salvation.

Acts 2:38 is a propping post for these arguments, when in fact, it teaches just the opposite!

Peter's Recorded Messages on Salvation

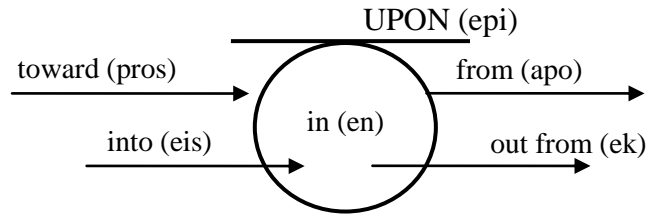
1. Peter persistently taught that salvation _____ upon the name of Christ (_____ is not even mentioned)
 - Acts 2:21 (to 16 national entities at Pentecost)
"...whosoever shall call upon the _____ of the Lord shall be saved" (Peter quotes Joel 2:32)
 - Acts 3:19 (to thousands at the temple)
"...repent and be converted _____ (pros to + infinitive = grammatical formula for result or purpose) your sins may be blotted out..."
 - Acts 4:12 (to the Sanhedrin)
"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other _____ under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
 - Acts 10:43 (to the house of Cornelius)
"to Him all the prophets witness that, through His _____, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

THE ISSUE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME OF JESUS

(so also in John's Gospel: John 1:11-13; 20:30-31)

2. Peter's words in Acts 2:38 DO NOT contradict his teaching elsewhere in Scripture.
 - Command #1, "Repent"* (all of you) –
 Aorist Tense, Active Voice, Imperative Mode, Plural
 *Repent = change your mind about Jesus of Nazareth whom you crucified because God has made Him both Lord & Messiah and His resurrection proves this (Acts 2:22-36)
 - Command #2, "Let everyone of you be baptized"
 Aorist Tense, Passive Voice, Imperative Mode, Singular
 - The Key to Forgiveness: lit. *"UPON (not "in") the name of Jesus..."*

- The preposition is *epi* (ἐπι), “upon,” “resting upon,” “upon the ground of,” or “upon the authority of”
- *Epi* is used consistently in the salvific passages in Acts: see 2:21; 9:42; 11:17; 16:31; 22:19.



- **The Result:** “*for* (eis/εἰς) *the forgiveness of sins*”
 “...rest upon the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins”

CONCLUSION: Water baptism is not part of, nor in any way related to, forgiveness of sins. It is as Peter will later state, “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1Peter 3:21b).

Five Strengths of this Exposition

1. It is based upon the normal use of the preposition *epi* (ἐπί).
2. It is consistent and congruent with other statements by Peter in *Acts* on the subject of forgiveness. We could support this argument with clear statements from the Pauline letters, but in this article, I am trying to show that Peter is consistent as is all of *Acts* on this subject.
3. It maintains the normal usage of the preposition *eis* (“for”), i.e., “resting upon the name of Jesus Christ for (*eis*) the remission of sins.” Some good Bible teachers have sought to show that *eis* (εἰς) is causal here; i.e., “be baptized in the name... because of the forgiveness of sins.” It is better in my opinion to maintain the normal use of both *epi* (“upon”) and *eis* (“for”) in explaining this verse. Consistent hermeneutics always seeks normal usage.
4. It is consistent with the normal use of “the name of Jesus Christ” in *Acts*.
5. It is consistent with the salvation of the thief on the cross!