Let All the Heathen Writers Join
Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Let all the heathen writers join
To form one perfect book;
Great God, if once compared with Thine,
How mean their writings look!

Not the most perfect rules they gave
Could show one sin forgiv'n,
Nor lead a step beyond the grave;
But Thine conduct to heav'n.

I've seen an end to what we call
Perfection here below;
How short the powers of nature fall,
And can no further go!

Yet men would fain be just with God
By works their hands have wrought;
But Thy commands, exceeding broad,
Extend to every thought.

In vain we boast perfection here,
While sin defiles our frame,
And sinks our virtues down so far,
They scarce deserve the name.

Our faith and love, and every grace
Fall far below Thy Word;
But perfect truth and righteousness
Dwell only with the Lord.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Baptismal Regeneration in Acts 2:38
Kevin T. Bauder

Some professing Christians believe that baptism is a sufficient condition of the forgiveness of sins. Others believe that baptism, while not a sufficient condition of forgiveness, is nevertheless a necessary condition. Roman Catholicism belongs to the former category; the Stone-Campbell (the Churches of Christ and the Christian Churches) movement to the latter. Both views may rightly be labeled as *baptismal regeneration*.

Among those who affirm baptismal regeneration, one of the most popular proof texts is Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Catholics and Campbellites take this verse to mean that people must be baptized *in order to have their sins forgiven*. Many Baptists have responded by insisting that the preposition *for* (*eis* in Greek) is causal in use, meaning that people should be baptized *because their sins have been forgiven*. Neither interpretation, however, deals seriously with the construction *baptize for* or *into* (*baptizein eis*) as it is used in the New Testament.

Obviously, the most basic use of *baptizein eis* is material: to be baptized into something is to be physically immersed in it. For example, Mark 1:9 states that Jesus was baptized "into the Jordan." The idea is that he was immersed in the river. Clearly this material use is not in view in Acts 2:38, where Peter commands people to be baptized, not into a substance, but into an abstraction (forgiveness).

The New Testament contains several examples of *baptizein eis* being used metaphorically. One of the most intriguing is found in 1 Corinthians 10:2. In context, Paul says that the Israelites were under the cloud and passed through the sea—a kind of symbolic immersion. He then claims that they were "*baptized unto* Moses in the cloud and in the sea." To be baptized into a person means metaphorically to be identified with that person. By passing under the cloud and through the sea, the nation of Israel was identified with Moses.

In the same way, Paul asks whether the Corinthians were "*baptized in* the name of Paul." Again the construction is *baptizein eis*, and Paul is asking

whether the Corinthians' baptism identified them with him. He repudiates this idea, expressing horror "lest any should say that I had *baptized in* my name." Clearly the significance of water baptism was to identify people with Christ, not with Paul.

In fact, identification with Christ is exactly the point in Acts 8:16. Samaritans had received the word of God, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. They were, however, "*baptized in* the name of the Lord Jesus." Water baptism identified the Samaritans with Jesus and marked them as His followers.

As an aside, being baptized "in the name of Jesus" does not mean the same thing in Acts 8:16 that it means in Acts 2:38. In Acts 8, the preposition is *eis*, which implies baptism into identification with Jesus. In Acts 2, the preposition is *epi*, which implies being baptized upon the authority of Jesus. Submission to Jesus' authority was a central issue for those whom Peter had just charged with crucifying their Messiah.

Back to the main point: water baptism identifies recipients with Jesus. It also identifies them with the entire Godhead. Part of the mission of the church is to make disciples by "*baptizing* them *in* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mat. 28:19). Here the same idiom is at work: to be baptized into (*eis*) a person or into a name is to be identified with that person or name.

A comparable use occurs in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul says that "we all are *baptized* by one spirit *into* one body." Based on Paul's consistent use of the term *Spirit* in the immediate context, he must be referencing the Holy Spirit. He says that "we all" are baptized "*by* one Spirit" (the Greek preposition here is *en*), but *into* (*eis*) one body. Based on his use of "by one Spirit" (*en pneumati*) in verses 3 and 9, the Spirit must be the one who does the baptizing, and He baptizes into the one body. In this case, *baptizein eis* points to the fact that this baptizing work of the Spirit identifies or even unites all believers with the one body, the body of Christ.

These are all examples of the metaphorical use of *baptizein eis*. They are not the only ones. Very consistently, this phrase functions as an idiom for identification. Does this usage hold, however, when *baptizein eis* is used with an abstraction?

Matthew 3:11 yields a clear answer to this question. In that verse John says, "I indeed *baptize* with water *unto* repentance." Materially, John baptized people into water. Metaphorically, he baptized them "unto repentance." That cannot possibly mean that he baptized them with a view to repentance; clearly people sought John's baptism only because they were already repenting. Consequently, their baptism indicated that they were repenting. It identified them as repenters.

The metaphorical use of *baptizein eis* is regular throughout the New Testament. Whether used with a person, a name, or an abstraction, it functions idiomatically to express identification with the thing into which one is immersed. The New Testament includes no exceptions to this regular use.

Consequently, in Acts 2:38 Peter is commanding those who repent to be baptized *in identification with* the forgiveness of sins. Their baptism was the badge that identified or labeled them as those who were forgiven. Just as John's baptism identified its subjects as repenters, Christian baptism identifies its subjects as forgiven people. In other words, water baptism in Acts 2:38 functions as neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition of salvation, but as a declaration that one has been saved. This verse cannot be used to prove baptismal regeneration.

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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.