

Why the First Believers Were Baptized (Part 2)

Jesus instructed His apostles to make disciples baptizing them in His name. (See last week's article.) How well did they do in carrying out His instruction?

On the Day of Pentecost following the crucifixion of Jesus an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Joel was fulfilled, and the commotion gathered quite a crowd. Filled with the Holy Spirit Peter preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to the crowd. When the people realized that they had crucified the Son of God, they were *cut to the heart* and asked Peter and the others what they should do.

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

—Acts 2:38

So, Peter instructed the believers to repent, i.e. change their mind/perception (about Jesus), and to be baptized in the name of Jesus; just as Jesus had instructed in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

And how did the people respond?

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

—Acts 2:41

So, the Apostles instructed the people exactly according to the instruction given by Jesus, and the crowd understood and responded accordingly by being baptized; and the stated reason for baptism: *Forgiveness of sins and the receipt of the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Just so you know, some folks have discounted this simple and direct instruction by saying that baptism is not 'for' forgiveness, but 'because of' forgiveness. Their reasoning is based on a possi-

ble rendering of a Greek term found in the verse. However, does that make sense in light of the broader context?

The idea behind this alternate translation assumes that the listeners were saved by belief alone. If so, we should be able to discover the point at which the people believed and were saved.

Their response (v. 37) revealed their belief; *they were cut to the heart* when Peter showed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and that they had crucified Him. However, based on Peter's instruction it does not sound like they were saved just *because* they believed. After all, Peter told them to repent and a person does not repent because they have been saved, but because they have not been saved.

To deal with this inconsistency concerning repentance, some have chopped up the verse to say that they were to repent because they *were not* saved and that they were to be baptized because they *were* saved. The Greek text simply does not read that way, nor does the English text. Read it again yourself and see if this explanation makes sense.

When a person reads this section of scripture without bias it is clear that Peter and the apostles followed Jesus' instruction from the Great Commission. Then in response, the first believers were baptized into Christ so that their sins would be forgiven and so that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So, the *instruction of Jesus* in the Great Commission was that believers were to be baptized into Christ. Then, by example, we see that *the teaching of the apostles and the practice of the first believers* mirrored the instruction of Jesus.