

# REEXAMINING THE RULE OF CONCORD IN ACTS 2:38

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Those who deny that water baptism plays any part in salvation have long been troubled by Peter's seemingly straightforward linkage of the two in Acts 2:38. In response to the question "What shall we do?," posed in v. 37 by conscience-stricken hearers, Peter declared, "Μετανοήσατε [Repent], καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ] εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν [for forgiveness of your sins] καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος [and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit]."<sup>1</sup>

Luther B. McIntyre Jr. has recently argued that the phrase εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν cannot be syntactically connected to the command βαπτισθήτω because the personal pronoun ὑμῶν is second person plural whereas the command βαπτισθήτω is third person singular.<sup>2</sup> He bases that claim on the general proposition that the rule of concord requires that the personal pronoun agree with its antecedent in gender, number, and person. Since ὑμῶν and βαπτισθήτω do not agree in number and person, he concludes that the phrase εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν relates exclusively to the second person plural command μετανοήσατε.<sup>3</sup> This makes καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ a parenthetical command, and in his opinion, effectively denies that the baptism commanded by Peter is in any sense "for the forgiveness of your sins."<sup>4</sup> McIntyre diagrams his claim as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Aland and others, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3d corrected ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1983) 423-424 (omitting [φησὶν]).

<sup>2</sup> Luther B. McIntyre Jr., "Baptism and Forgiveness in Acts 2:38," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (January-March 1996): 54-59. This interpretation was earlier advocated by Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983) 359.

<sup>3</sup>This argument is to be distinguished from the claim that the second person plural imperative and the third person singular imperative cannot refer to the same subject. On that point, Greek literature reveals a customary usage "in which the third person singular imperative functions in concert with a second person plural imperative so as to bring emphasis to a command by allowing the speaker addressing a group to address members of that group individually." Carroll D. Osburn, "Interpreting Greek Syntax," in *Biblical Interpretation Principles and Practice*, eds. F. Furman Kearley and others (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 242.

Though McIntyre (59-62) attempts to bolster his interpretation of Acts 2:38 by surveying the relationship between repentance, baptism, and forgiveness in a few other New Testament texts, this article is limited to a critique of one aspect of his syntactical analysis.

<sup>4</sup>It is noteworthy that McIntyre (53) rejects the claim of A. T. Robertson, J. R. Mantey, and a number of others that εἰς in Acts 2:38 means the basis or ground on which baptism is performed. He concedes that εἰς in this verse is purposive. On this point, see J. C. Davis, "Another Look at the Relationship between Baptism and Forgiveness in Acts 2:38," *Restoration Quarterly* 24 (1981): 80-88 and Murray J. Harris, "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,"

- Repent [second person plural]  
     be baptized [third person singular]  
     each [third person singular] of you
- for the remission of your [second person plural] sins

This article focuses on the specific claim that the rule of concord prohibits εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν from relating to βαπτισθήτω, but two other points should at least be mentioned before addressing that issue. First, McIntyre's argument does not have the theological significance he attaches to it. That is, it does not establish the absence in this verse of a logical connection between baptism and forgiveness of sins. For even if εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν is *syntactically* related only to μετανοήσατε, the phrase καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν may be exegetical and thus be *logically* connected to εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν.<sup>5</sup> In that case, the command that each person be baptized is an explanation of how their repentance is to be manifested for them to receive the forgiveness of their sins. Peter's answer to their query is, "Repent, that is [καὶ], each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for forgiveness of your sins."<sup>6</sup>

Second, McIntyre completely ignores the possibility that εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν modifies *both* μετανοήσατε and βαπτισθήτω. He assumes that the prepositional phrase must relate to one verb or the other<sup>7</sup> and therefore does not examine how the rule of concord applies when such a phrase modifies two verbs of differing number.<sup>8</sup> Given the number and caliber of scholars who unhesitatingly declare that εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν applies to both μετανοήσατε and βαπτισθήτω,<sup>9</sup> this is a major flaw in his analysis.

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in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 1208-1209.

<sup>5</sup>Καί often introduces an exegetical clause. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d. ed., rev. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 393.

<sup>6</sup>This is the view of A. Andrew Das, "Acts 8: Water, Baptism, and the Spirit," *Concordia Journal* 19 (April 1993) 118-119. McIntyre acknowledges this interpretation (57) but does not address it.

<sup>7</sup>He writes (pp. 53-54), "Instead, conceding the εἰς is purposive, a more fundamental question must be addressed: To which verb -- μετανοήσατε ('repent') or βαπτισθήτω ('be baptized') -- the only occurrence of this third person imperative in the New Testament -- does the prepositional phrase 'for the remission of your sins' refer?"

<sup>8</sup>Neither of the texts McIntyre cites as supporting his argument (Ex. 16:29; Zech. 7:10) are relevant to this issue because they do not include a prepositional phrase modifying two verbs.

<sup>9</sup>"The phrase 'for the remission of sins' in Acts 2:38 is commonly understood as modifying both of the preceding imperatives, 'repent' and 'be baptized.'" Osburn, 239. After quoting Lake and Cadbury on the matter, Osburn states,

In asserting that the rule of concord prohibits εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν from relating to βαπτισθήτω, McIntyre does not take into account the exceptional nature of the pronominal adjective ἕκαστος, the subject of βαπτισθήτω.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, he overlooks the fact that the singular form of ἕκαστος occasionally serves as the antecedent of a plural personal pronoun.

The most pertinent example of this syntax is in Acts 3:26. Luke writes (translated literally): ὑμῖν πρῶτον [to you first] ἀναστήσας ὁ θεὸς τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ [God having raised up his servant] ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν εὐλογοῦντα ὑμᾶς [sent him to bless you]<sup>11</sup> ἐν τῷ ἀποστρέφειν ἕκαστον [by turning each one]<sup>12</sup> ἀπὸ τῶν πονηριῶν ὑμῶν [from your evil ways].<sup>13</sup> A normal English rendering would be: "God, having raised up his servant, sent him first to you to bless you by turning each one [ἕκαστον] from your [ὑμῶν] evil ways." The phrase "your evil ways" describes what "each" is turned from, and thus the antecedent of the plural personal pronoun ὑμῶν is the singular pronominal adjective ἕκαστον.<sup>14</sup>

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"Similarly, 'remission of sins' is unhesitatingly connected with both imperatives by F. F. Bruce, B. Newman, G. H. C. Macgregor, and most others." *Ibid.*, 239-40.

<sup>10</sup>Bauer, 236, notes that the singular of ἕκαστος may be used with pronouns or verbs in the plural. See also, James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), vol. 3, *Syntax*, by Nigel Turner, 312.

<sup>11</sup>εὐλογοῦντα being a telic participle, as reflected in KJV, RSV, NAS, NIV, JB, NEB, NRSV, REB. See James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979) 147.

<sup>12</sup>Speaking technically, Barrett notes that ἐν τῷ introduces an adverbial determination of the process of blessing, meaning the servant blesses in the act of turning ("in turning"). C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 214. More colloquially, this is translated as an instrumental ("by turning"). See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 146, and NAS, NIV, NEB, JB, NRSV, and REB. Friedrich W. Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 162 and A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934) 800 take ἀποστρέφειν to be intransitive, which yields "when each turns" (taking ἐν τῷ temporally) or "in/by each turning." This is certainly possible, but as Barrett (214) points out, in Greek the intransitive meaning is most often expressed in the passive or middle and the verse makes better sense if it is God's act in turning men from evil. See also Bruce, 146, and KJV, RSV, NAS, NIV, NEB, JB, NRSV, and REB.

<sup>13</sup>Though B omits ὑμῶν and a number of later manuscripts have αὐτοῦ in its place, "[b]oth external evidence and internal considerations strongly favor ὑμῶν." Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) 315-316.

<sup>14</sup>This result is unaffected by interpreting ἀποστρέφειν intransitively. In that case, "your evil ways" describes what "each" turns from.

Haenchen's suggestion that ὑμῶν in Acts 3:26 is a displaced partitive belonging with ἕκαστον rather than with πονηριῶν is unfounded.<sup>15</sup> It not only ignores the LXX parallels for the construction in Acts 3:26<sup>16</sup> but also goes contrary to Luke's own usage. In each of the other 263 instances in which Luke ends a sentence or clause with a noun followed immediately by a genitive personal pronoun, the pronoun modifies the noun it follows.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in each of the other eight instances in which Luke uses ἕκαστος with a partitive genitive, the genitive immediately follows ἕκαστος (seven times) or is separated from it only by a definite article modifying the genitive (one time).<sup>18</sup> Clearly, Haenchen's proposal is driven more by his own Greek style than by Luke's.

A comparison of Jn. 7:53 and Rev. 20:13 illustrates the flexibility of ἕκαστος with regard to personal pronouns. In Jn. 7:53, the singular nominative ἕκαστος is used with a third person plural verb [ἔπορεύθησαν -- they went] and serves as the antecedent of a singular genitive personal pronoun [εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ -- to his house]. In Rev. 20:13, the singular nominative ἕκαστος is again used with a third person plural verb [ἔκρίθησαν -- they were judged], but there

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<sup>15</sup>Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Bernard Noble, Gerald Shinn, R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) 210 (n. 4).

<sup>16</sup>E.g., Baruch 2:8 -- καὶ οὐκ ἐδεήθημεν τοῦ προσώπου κυρίου [Yet have we not prayed before the Lord] τοῦ ἀποστρέψαι ἕκαστον [to turn each one] ἀπὸ τῶν νοημάτων τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν τῆς πονηρᾶς [from the thoughts of their evil heart]. Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979) 2:750.

<sup>17</sup>A Gramcord search of the text of the 26th edition of Nestle-Aland GNT revealed 183 occurrences of this construction in Luke and 80 occurrences in Acts (excluding 3:26). The end of a sentence was defined by the presence of a period, and the end of a clause was defined by the presence of a lesser stop. The construction appears in: Lk. 1:13, 15, 16, 18, 20 (twice), 23, 24, 32, 38, 41, 42, 44 (twice), 47-49, 51 (twice), 54-56, 63, 64, 68-70, 73, 75-78; Lk. 2:8, 19, 29, 31, 34, 43, 47, 48, 51; Lk. 3:4, 14, 16, 17; Lk. 4:6, 11, 12, 21, 23, 24, 32 (twice); Lk. 5:6, 15, 20, 22-24, 29; Lk. 6:8, 10 (twice), 13, 14, 17, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27, 38, 40, 41, 42 (three times), 45; Lk. 7:3, 7, 8, 15, 16, 27, 35, 46; Lk. 8:5, 12, 25, 41, 44, 49, 56; Lk. 9:14, 31, 38, 41-43, 47, 48, 52, 59, 61; Lk. 10:2, 6, 7, 17, 22, 27, 39; Lk. 11: 1, 2 (twice), 4, 8, 13, 18, 34, 48, 54; Lk. 12:4, 17, 19, 22, 31, 34, 39, 45; Lk. 13:1, 6, 12, 19, 35; Lk. 14:21; Lk. 15:19 (twice), 21, 22, 29; Lk. 16:2, 4, 5, 15, 21, 23 (twice), 24, 25, 27; Lk. 17:1, 24; Lk. 18:3; Lk. 19:18, 39, 42, 44; Lk. 20:28, 42, 43, 45; Lk. 21:12, 17, 19, 20, 28 (twice); Lk. 22:28, 30, 32 (twice), 71; Lk. 23:23-25, 28, 42, 46, 51, 55; Lk. 24:8, 26, 38; Acts 1:9, 14, 18; Acts 2:14, 18, 26, 28, 30, 34, 35, 39; Acts 3:13, 16-18; Acts 4:26, 29; Acts 5:3, 10; Acts 6:1; Acts 7:3, 10, 11, 15, 22, 32, 33, 38, 39, 41, 49 (twice), 52, 59; Acts 8:1, 22, 27, 32, 33; Acts 9:14, 24, 40; Acts 10:2, 30; Acts 11:8, 14; Acts 12:8; Acts 13:8, 22 (twice), 41, 50; Acts 14:3 (twice), 16, 17; Acts 15:9, 14, 23; Acts 16:15, 19, 31, 32; Acts 17:20, 33; Acts 18:2, 6, 8; Acts 19:18, 37; Acts 20:32, Acts 21:19; Acts 22:14, 16, 20; Acts 23:29; Acts 26:16, 18; Acts 28:3, 4.

<sup>18</sup>Lk. 4:40, 13:15, 16:5 (article); Acts 2:3, 2:38, 11:29, 17:27, 21:26. As Bruce points out, ἡμῶν in Acts 2:8 does not belong with ἕκαστος but with τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ, meaning "in our own language." Bruce, 116. See Blass, 151. Luke employs the identical construction in Acts 1:19 (only the person of the pronoun varies) with the meaning "in their own language."

serves as the antecedent of a plural genitive personal pronoun [κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν -- according to their works]. This same flexibility is evident in the LXX.<sup>19</sup>

McIntyre cites Eph. 4:26-27 as a structural parallel to his argument regarding Acts 2:38,<sup>20</sup> but these verses are not helpful. Not only does ἕκαστος not appear in them, but the analogy between the two breaks down when one tries to interpret Eph. 4:26 in conformity with McIntyre's suggested interpretation of Acts 2:38. The third person singular command ὁ ἥλιος μὴ ἐπιδύετω [do not let the sun set] clearly has a syntactical relationship to the following prepositional phrase ἐπὶ [τῷ] παροργισμῷ ὑμῶν [on your anger], despite the difference in number between ἥλιος and ὑμῶν. The most McIntyre can claim from this verse is that a personal pronoun need not always refer to the nearest substantive, but that is not a subject of controversy.

Since ἕκαστος can serve as the antecedent of a plural personal pronoun, McIntyre's reliance on the rule of concord to separate baptism and forgiveness in Acts 2:38 is misguided. Indeed, virtually all scholars acknowledge some kind of linkage between the two in this verse.<sup>21</sup> Even A. T. Robertson, who vigorously denied that baptism has any role in the forgiveness of sins and whom McIntyre cites as an authority on the rule of concord, accepted the syntactical relationship between εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν and βαπτισθῆτω in Acts 2:38.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>E.g., Ex. 1:1, 5:4, 7:12, 33:8; Deut. 16:17; Josh. 24:33; Jer. 6:3.

<sup>20</sup>McIntyre, 58.

<sup>21</sup>In addition to those mentioned in n. 9, see, e.g., Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 349; Albrecht Oepke, "βάπτω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 1:539; Haenchen, 184; G. R. Beasley-Murray, "βαπτίζω," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 1:146, 148; H. Vorlander, "ἀφίημι," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 1:701; Bauer, 132; Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 283; Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 2:7; Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Passages in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 123; Lars Hartman, "Baptism," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 590; Barrett, 154.

<sup>22</sup>He argued that εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν describes the basis or ground on which the command βαπτισθῆτω is performed. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1930) 3:35-36.