

Acts 2:37-38 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

Now when [the Jews present at the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost] heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 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.

Misinterpretation: This is the “flagship” Scripture of the UPC and of all Oneness Pentecostal churches. There are many ways that this Scripture is mistaught by the UPC, but the only error that I will point out here is that many Oneness Pentecostal preachers and saints misquote the Scripture by reciting, “Men and brethren, what shall we do *to be saved.*”

Facts: The careful reader will notice that the words “to be saved” are not found in Acts 2:37. Peter had already told the believers how to be saved in Acts 2:21, when he quoted the prophet Joel and said, “[W]hosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” By the time Peter concluded his sermon in Acts 2:36, the Jews who were present were “pricked in their heart.” That is when they asked Peter and the “rest of the apostles,” “[W]hat shall we do?”

The reason that this is important is because these men had already believed in Christ. That’s why they were pricked in their heart! They wouldn’t have ever asked the question unless they already believed on Christ! If they didn’t believe then they would have laughed and walked off. However, they did believe, and so they were moved to ask what they needed to do. Peter responded by telling them to be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, and that they would receive the Holy Ghost.

The point is that it was not baptism who saved the new believers, it was their belief. (More properly, it was God's grace working through their belief). Their baptism was a *response* to their salvation, not the *cause* of their salvation. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia sums it up well when they write, "Peter's 'Repent ye, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ' (Act_2:38) is meaningless unless faith were exercised in Christ." ((ISBE, "Justification"))

I will conclude my discussion of Acts 2:37-38 by quoting the story of the jailer's conversion, found in Acts 16:27-34, which makes the distinction between belief and baptism even more clearer.

Act 16:27-34 KJV

(27) And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

(28) But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

(29) Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

*(30) And brought them out, and said, Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?***

*(31) **And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.***

(32) And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

(33) And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

(34) And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.