BAPTISM INTO OR UNTO.

BY ALBERT R. BOND, A. M., D. D., EDITOR BAPTIST AND
REFLECTOR, NASHVILLE, TENN.

The following paper proposes a radical variation from custom in rendering the expression βαπτίζω εἰς. The writer does not recall a similar proposal, except those of Broadus and Fritzsche, hence his effort might seem to border on presumption and temerity, unless supported by cogent reasons. These he will seek to indicate. Uniformity in rendering the same Greek expression would certainly be desirable, if permitted by grammar and correct exegesis.

The text of Westcott and Hort contains seventeen passages (counting the parallels of Mk. 1:4 and Lk. 3:3 as one) in which the expression βαπτίζω εἰς occurs. In these the American Standard Revision renders εἰς thus: in, once; into, twelve times; unto, four times. In this list the physical element of the ceremony is mentioned but once, and the American Revision gives it thus: "And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in [εἰς] the Jordan" (Mk. 1:9). However, the margin has "Gr. into"; either in or unto might be used here, for εἰς often has the static meaning equivalent to *in*; also εἰς with a verb of motion often means into.

It will not be necessary to discuss this one passage (Mk. 1:9). The other sixteen examples give the figurative or spiritual element of the ceremony. Our task has to do with them. We propose to show that for these examples the rendering "unto" for εἰς is to be preferred. In speaking of a group of five of these examples, Dr. Broadus remarks: "The question may also arise whether it is not better, with the great grammatical commentators Fritzsche and Meyer (comp. also Weiss) to understand εἰς to *onoma* as meaning in all these cases 'unto the name', with reference to the name, as that to which the ceremony is

restricted . . . We believe then that it would be a decided improvement to render baptize *eis* everywhere by 'unto' ".¹ I prefer "unto" for the entire list.

1. GRAMMAR.

The problem of rendering may be resolved only through an accurate appreciation of βαπτίζω as a verb of motion, of the force of the preposition *eis*, and of the meaning of the accusative case. "The word extension comes as near as any to expressing the broad general idea of the accusative as applied to its use with verbs, substantives, adjectives, prepositions. It is far more commonly used with verbs, to be sure, but at bottom the other uses have this same general idea . . . The accusative measures an idea as to its content, scope, directions".² The action of βαπτίζω will be limited to the use of accusative with *eis* in these examples.

"But, though *eis* really means the same thing as *en*, it was early used only with the accusative, and gradually specialized thus one of the usages of *en*. The locative with *en* however, continued to be used sometimes in the same sense as the accusative with *eis*. The accusative indeed normally suggests motion (extension), and that did come to be the common usage of *eis* plus the accusative. The resultant idea would often be 'into', but this was by no means always true . . . In itself *eis* expresses the same general dimension relation as *en*, viz., *in*. It does not of itself mean *into*, *unto*, or *to*. That is the resultant idea of the accusative case with verbs of motion."³ In the New Testament the accusative is always used with *eis*, whereas *en* has the locative case.

In speaking of Acts 2:38, Dr. Robertson says: "Only the context and the tenor of N. T. teaching can determine whether 'into', 'unto' or merely 'in' or 'on' ('upon') is

¹ Broadus, Com. on Mt. 28:19.

² Robertson, Gram. Gr. N. T., p. 468.

³ Robertson, *ibid*, p. 591.

the right translation, a task for the interpreter, not for the grammarian".¹ This statement might equally apply to the other examples under review; hence we turn our efforts to their exegesis.

II. EXEGESIS.

1. *Baptism Unto Something.*

a. Repentance and Remission.—“John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto [*eis*] remission of sins” (Mk. 1:4). “And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto [*eis*] remission of sins” (Lk. 3:3). “I indeed baptize you in water unto [*eis*] repentance” (Mt. 3:11).

Concerning these two examples (count Mk. 1:4 and Lk. 3:3 as one), Dr. Broadus gives four possible interpretations.² [1] “The most natural way to understand this preposition (with its case), in Greek as in English, would be ‘in order that you may repent’. So the same expression in Wisdom 11:23, ‘Thou overlookest the sins of men unto repentance’. The difficulty is that John’s baptism evidently presupposed repentance, and was to be followed by ‘fruits worthy of repentance’. [2] Accordingly, some urge that the preposition *eis* (with its case), ‘unto’, must here denote the occasion or ground of the baptizing, a meaning which it clearly has in 12:41, and which is ascribed to it here by the Greek commentator Euthymius. This, however, is a very unusual and difficult use of the preposition, though certainly possible. [3] Others take it to mean generally, ‘with reference to repentance’ (so Tyndale, ‘in token of’). Such a meaning the preposition with its case does somewhat frequently have, and that gives here a very good sense (as it would also in Luke 3:3; Mark 1:4, ‘unto remission of sins’).

¹ Ibid, p. 592.

² Com. on Mt. in loco.

But it is best to adhere if possible to the common and most natural sense 'in order to'. [4] And it may perhaps be so understood if we revert (Cremer) to v. 7, 8, the special occasion of what John is saying. Those whom he baptized all professed repentance, but concerning some it was very doubtful whether there was any real change of thought and purpose (see on v. 2), and he exhorts them to show by the appropriate fruits that such was the case. He might therefore say, 'I baptize you in order that you may really repent', including in the one view and one expression, the primary change of purpose and the subsequent results thereof. This makes the design that of John in baptizing (so Hofmann in Keil), and not exactly the design of the baptism itself (as Meyer, and many others)."

Let us examine these views further. (1) In these passages *εἰς* cannot have the telic force suggested by the rendering "in order to", because repentance and remission of sins in theory and fact antedate baptism; this is true not only for the preaching of John the Baptist but also for the entire New Testament. Believers' baptism, in which the soul has previously turned away from the old life of sin to God, is the fundamental New Testament doctrine, but it may not here be argued. (2) Dr. Broadus has sufficiently indicated the difficulty here. (4) The fault of this theory is that it makes the entire process of John's baptizing the design, rather than each individual case of the ceremony, the object of *εἰς*. This would be easy for one to see, as one might look back over either the fact or the record of John's ministry, but the actual recipient of the rite would not have this perspective; to him it would have individual and particular reference. Baptism meant something to each subject, who would not be thinking about John's entire ministry as he came to the ceremony at the hands of John. The theory is too far removed from the candidate.

My own view more nearly conforms to the third theory, though Tyndale's expression is not quite broad enough

to cover the other examples. "Unto", "with reference to" the accusative with *eis*, would designate my view; the special "with reference to" must be gathered in each case. Here the meaning would be: "I baptize you unto, with reference to repentance or remission, which you have already experienced." Baptism is retroactive, not telic, in its significance.

"And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto (*eis*) the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2.38). Here, as in the other two examples, it would be impossible to escape the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, if "unto" (*eis*) has the force of "in order to", or "for the purpose of". Other New Testament teaching will not allow such a doctrine; salvation is prior to baptism and is the *sine qua non* of the rite. "Be baptized unto (with reference to) remission" means that "in your baptism you are setting forth the fact of your remission which you have already experienced and which was mediated to you through your repentance".

b. Death.—"Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into (*eis*) his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into (*eis*) death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3, 4). In these two passages I would render *eis* by "unto" (with reference to). In verse three the *eis τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ* refers to the sacrificial death of Christ. "We were baptized with reference to (unto) His death." Baptism would have no meaning apart from the atonement made by Him. In emphasizing baptism the apostle "singles out only its reference to the atoning work of Christ, the objective dying for sin, because he is occupied particularly with this side of the subject. The question of the apostle really is: 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized

with reference to Jesus Christ, were baptized with reference to his atonement?"¹ To render *eis* by "into" would not give the accurate and full meaning (see later under II.1, b).

In verse four, two interpretations are possible. (1) *eis τὸν θάνατον* may refer to Christ's death, with reference to which the baptism gets its meaning; the believer also participates in the benefits of the risen life of Christ. (2) The death may be the symbolic act by which the recipient of baptism sets forth the fact that he himself has benefited by the work of Christ both in death and resurrection. "The resemblance does not cease with the burial. The immersion is, of course, temporary, momentary; the subject of it is immediately raised up from the watery grave, and this is like the resurrection of Christ from the dead. . . . The action of burial and resurrection is in each case momentary, but the consequence of resurrection is continuous. As Christ lived and lives after his death, just so the believer lives and shall continue to live after his union with Christ, as exemplified in his baptism." This view is preferable.

c. Indefinite.—Paul asked the poorly instructed disciples of John: "Into (*eis*) what then were ye baptized?" (Acts 19:3.) "Unto" (with reference to) is clearly better than "into".

d. John's Baptism.—Their reply is given. "And they said, Into (*eis*) John's baptism" (Acts 19:3). There is no difficulty here in the use of "unto" (with reference to), since their act took meaning from John's teaching, and their mention of it is historical. As a matter of fact they were not baptized "into" John's baptism but with it, and his baptism had reference to repentance and remission of sins as being typified by the rite.

e. One Body.—"For in one Spirit were we all baptized into (*eis*) one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). The "body"

¹ Shedd, Com. on Rom. in loco.

² Dargan, Com. on Rom. in loco.

does not mean the local church organization. Nowhere does the New Testament say that a person is baptized into membership in the local church. Baptism is a prerequisite, not an initiatory act, of church membership. Meyer translates *eis* by "in reference to".¹ Neither does baptism transfer one into the spiritual, mystic body of believers; that comes only through regeneration, which is prior to baptism. However, it does formally and externally set forth the fact that the person has come into the body, composed of all true believers. "Unto" correctly suggests this idea.

2. Baptism Unto Some One.

a. Name.—Five examples of *eis τὸ ὄνομα* occur: Paul (1 Cor. 1:13, 15), Christ (Acts 8:16; 19:5), the Trinity (Mt. 28:19). The ancient Hebrews were accustomed to regard the name of Jehovah as referring to His person. This same manner is abundantly followed throughout the New Testament regarding God and Christ, and numerous cases can be cited in the papyri of such usage in the profane writers. It may be accepted without special argument.² Therefore, in disclaiming the right for the ceremony to be performed unto his name, Paul intends to say that it cannot be related to himself as the one who may give efficient meaning to the rite.

Certain Samaritan believers had not been taught fully concerning the Holy Spirit; "only they had been baptized into (*eis*) the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16). The complete instruction of the disciples of John led them to be baptized in the true sense; "they were baptized into (*eis*) the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). To be valid the rite must be with reference to Jesus.

"Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into (*eis*) the name of the Father

¹ Meyer, Com. on 1 Cor. in loco.

² Cf. Robertson, *supra*, p. 692; Broadus, Com. on Mt. 28:19; Thayer, sub *ὄνομα*; Lambert, Dict. Christ-Gospels, sub *name*.

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19). This passage has often been questioned, but doubtless without sufficient reasons, as to its historicity. "We may, unless our judgments are obscured by critical prejudices, turn to this passage as supplying the needful summary of all those thoughts about God which we have gleaned from the teaching of Christ and the gospels. The expression *εἰς τὸ ὄνομα* is important: Christian baptism is to be "into the name". The phrase recalls the language of the O. T. in which the 'Name' of God stood for Himself as revealed or brought into relation to men. So the name *Jehovah* was the sign or mark of the old covenant. Can we fail to gather that the name which marks the new covenant is that of Father, Son and Holy Ghost? In this name is contained the revelation of God which Christ brought to man. It must also be observed that the word is singular, *τὸ ὄνομα*, suggesting the unity of the God-head. The name is threefold, yet it is *one*." It is very natural that Christians should everywhere employ in baptizing this phrase, 'unto (into, in) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', and we see no reason for departing from it. But it is of doubtful propriety to call this a *law*, and to insist that baptism would not be 'valid' without the use of this particular phrase. For it must be remembered that baptize is nowhere else in the New Testament associated with this particular expression. In Acts and the Epistles we find only 'the Lord Jesus', or 'Jesus Christ', or simply 'Christ'. We may well enough understand that this is a compendious expression, which touches the main point or peculiarity of the great Christian purification. We could not wisely infer from that usage that it is improper or undersirable to employ the full expression given by Matt., but we are bound to understand that it is not indispensable." With Dr. Broadus we prefer the rendering "unto" here.

¹ D'Arcy, Dict. Christ-Gospels, sub **Trinity**.

² Broadus, Com. on Mt. 28:19.

b. Person.—“And were all baptized unto (eis) Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). Most scholars so render the passage.

“Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into (eis) Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3.) “For as many of you as were baptized into (eis) Christ did put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Shedd rightly says:¹ “eis, ‘with respect to’. The rite of baptism is referential, merely. ‘The formula βαπτίζεσθαι eis designates the object in respect to which the baptism is received, Mat. 28:19; 1 Cor. 1:13; 10:1, 2. Hence the equivalent formula, βαπτισθῆναι ἐπὶ ὀνόματι (Acts 2:38), and ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι (Acts 10:48). Tholuck, *in loco*. So also, Bengel, Meyer, Hodge. Believers are not baptized in order to bring about a union with Christ, but because such a union has been brought about. The rite has reference to this fact of union, and is the sign, and not the cause of it. Baptism presupposes regeneration, and does not produce it.” “Baptists hold a perfectly simple and consistent view of baptism. They have but one baptism for all, based upon the spiritual condition of the recipient. . . . What they insist on with unwavering fidelity is that repentance must precede baptism in every instance.”²

To translate eis by “into” in these two passages would give ground for either of two false views: (1) baptismal regeneration, or (2) that the Spirit is limited to the rite, as a condition, in his work. To use “unto”, with respect to, would escape both views, and would present the rite as an external symbol of the inner experience previously had. Union of the believer with Christ is a spiritual process, dependent only upon the soul’s attitude in repentance and faith. The entire New Testament teaching on salvation supports this contention..

¹ Shedd, Com. on Rom. 6:3.

² McGlothlin, *Infant Baptism*, p. 18.

III. COMPARISON.

A brief glance may be given to the use of *eis* with the locative case. The idea of the locative case "is location, a point within limits, the limits determined by the context, not by the case itself. The word itself is the main determining factor in the resultant sense, and each example has its own atmosphere. There is indeed variation in the resultant idea. Hence, besides *in*, we come to the idea of *on*, *at*, *amid*, *among*, *by*, *with* . . . The use of the locative without *en* is much more common in Homer than in later Greek . . . As to *en* it adds so little to the locative case that it is not surprising to find it so frequently used, especially as the locative, instrumental and dative all used the same endings . . . As a matter of fact *en* always has the locative."¹

A bare grouping of the examples will suffice for our purpose.

1. Locative with *en*.

a. Physical sense.—The region in which the action of the verb is performed: wilderness (Mk. 1:4), Aenon (Jno. 3:23). The element of the rite: river Jordan (Mt. 3:11, Mk. 1:5)), water (Mt. 3:11; Jno. 1:26, 31, 33).

b. Figurative sense.—Holy Spirit (Jno. 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor. 12:13); Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11, Lk. 3:16); name of Christ (Acts 2:38, some texts have *en* but Westcott-Hort have *en*; 10:48); cloud and sea (1 Cor. 10:2).

2. Locative case without preposition.

a. Physical sense.—Water (Mk. 1:8, Lk. 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16).

b. Figurative sense.—Holy Spirit (Mk. 1:8).

IV. CONCLUSION.

1. Uniformity.—We have shown that "unto" may be the uniform rendering for *eis*; both grammar and exegesis

¹Robertson, *supra*, pp. 520, 524.

will thus allow. The American Revisers could not render by "into" in four examples. There is no reason to forbid this uniformity, while much may be said in its favor.

2. Doctrinal.—The chief ground for this thesis is to be found in the fact that it escapes doctrinal difficulties. It would be hard to escape the implication of baptismal regeneration upon the rendering "into".

3. Exegetical.—In several passages "unto" secures, while "into" obscures, the real meaning of the text. In every case "unto" is fitting.

We commend this change as worthy of adoption, or at least of sincere consideration.