

## **PRACTICAL PRIORITIES**

### **Lesson 1: Baptism**

#### **Purpose Statement:**

To provide Christian leaders with an understanding of the meaning and significance of baptism and a method to conduct a baptismal service.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

This lesson provides Christian leaders with the following:

1. A statement of purpose for water baptism
2. A method of preparation for a baptismal service
3. Suggestions for conducting a baptismal service

#### **Introduction:**

Much debate surrounds the practice of baptism. Some believe in infant baptism; others baptize only those who have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. There are also differing views of the method of baptism: should we sprinkle, pour, or immerse the candidate?

For the sake of simplicity, this lesson deals only with the practice of adult baptism. Regardless of your particular views on baptism, you can follow many of the principles presented in this lesson.

#### **I. Purpose**

A. There are at least two purposes for water baptism :

##### 1. Obedience

The candidate desires to obey the Lord Jesus' command to be baptized (*Matthew 28:18-20*).

##### 2. Identification

- a. Historically, water baptism has been understood to be an expression of faith on the part of the one being baptized. In the first century the creed or confession of the candidate was "Jesus is Lord." Such a declaration by the candidate identifies him/her with the person and work of Jesus Christ:

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Romans 10:9-10).*

Baptism is a symbol of his/ her identification with Christ (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-6).

NOTE: Symbols (or signs) in the gospel are illustrations that help us to see truths more clearly. A good illustration for Westerners is the symbolism the wedding ring has in marriage:

- In Western culture a wedding ring signifies that a person is married.
- The essence of marriage, however, is certainly not the wedding ring. Instead, the essence of marriage is the couple's commitment to one another.
- In the same way, baptism signifies our association or identification with Jesus Christ.
- As a ring is expected at every wedding ceremony, so also in the New Testament culture, baptism was expected and assumed to take place in the lives of those who had believed in Jesus Christ.

#### B. Baptism is not essential for salvation

1. Jesus clearly spoke against any attempt to be saved that involved outward activity.
2. Though baptism was a consistent practice in the early Church, many passages in Acts do not include baptism as a requirement for salvation. Examples are *Acts 16:31* and *Acts 26:18*.
3. Paul tells us in *Ephesians 2:8-9* that salvation is not through any outward act, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone.
4. Many other Scriptures on salvation include no hint of or reference to baptism.

**Note:** The appendix of this manual deals with the false teaching of baptismal regeneration in further detail.

## II. Preparation of the Baptismal Candidate

Each person desiring baptism should be prepared by the local church leadership to:

- A. Give a verbal testimony of his/her personal faith in Jesus Christ.
- B. Give a clear explanation of the purpose of baptism.
- C. Give a clear explanation of his/her responsibility to serve Christ.

### **III. Conducting the Baptismal Service**

#### A. Time

The baptism may be included in other regularly scheduled services, or it may be conducted as a separate service. If there are several candidates to be baptized, it is recommended that a separate service be considered.

#### B. Facilities

The facilities or place of the baptismal service may vary; a formal church building is not a necessity. The preparation necessary will be determined by the site. Some possible locations are:

1. A church building with a baptistry
2. A lake, river, or pond of appropriate depth
3. If no water is available, consider sprinkling.

#### C. The service should include the following elements:

1. Prayer -- Pray especially for the candidates, that they would walk in obedience to God and live lives of service and find great joy in Christ.
2. Hymns -- Select hymns which celebrate the cleansing from sin and new life found through faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Teaching and Scripture --
  - Focus on God's grace and power in bringing salvation through Jesus Christ (*Ephesians 2:1-10*)
  - Provide a clear statement of the purpose and significance of baptism (*Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 3:23-29*)
4. Testimonies -- Those being baptized should tell of the work of grace God has done in their lives and how they plan to serve Christ in the local church. The testimonies of the candidates provide significant evidence to family and friends of the saving grace of God.

## 5. Baptism --

- The Pastor/leader gives a formal declaration, quoting from *Matthew 28:19*:

"In obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ and upon your profession of faith in Him as your Lord and Savior, I baptize you \_\_\_\_ (name), in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- Immerse (or whichever mode of baptism you practice).
- Pray specifically for the person baptized.

## **PRACTICAL PRIORITIES**

### **Lesson 2: Lord's Table**

#### **Purpose Statement:**

To provide Christian leaders with a biblical basis for the Lord's table and a method for conducting a communion service.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

This lesson provides Christian leaders with the following:

1. A definition of communion
2. A discussion of the significance of the Lord's table
3. Instructions for determining who can partake of communion
4. Suggestions for preparing and conducting a communion service

#### **I. Definition**

*When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. "After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22:14-20).*

The Lord's table, communion, is a local assembly of believers' sharing together in the bread and cup as symbols of Christ's body and blood.

The Lord Jesus Christ initiated the practice of communion at the Last Supper with His disciples. The church has practiced this service as part of worship since the first century and will continue to do so until the Lord returns.

#### **II. The Significance of Communion**

A. Remembrance of Christ -- The church reflects on the historical reality of the finished work of redemption which Christ accomplished in His earthly ministry (*I Corinthians 11:24-25*).

1. The bread is a symbol of Jesus' body.
2. The cup, or fruit of the vine, signifies Jesus' blood.

- B. Fellowship with Christ and His Church -- Sharing in the Lord's table unites us with the universal body of believers and allows us to interact (commune) with the risen Christ. The communion service is a remembrance, but because the living Christ dwells within His people, He is present, and they fellowship with Him.
- C. Hope for the Future - The Church renews their faith in the promised Second Coming of Christ (*Matthew 26:29; I Corinthians 11:26*).

### **III. Requirements for Those Who Participate**

The Lord offers specific direction for the participants at His table. Those who partake of communion must be:

- A. Believers in Jesus Christ
- B. Living in fellowship with Him. Anyone living in sin should not participate (*I Corinthians 11:27-29*).
- C. Able to understand the significance of the Lord's table. The Bible does not tell us at what age children may begin to partake of communion, but it is important that they understand what the elements signify.

### **IV. The Communion Service**

#### **A. When to hold the service**

1. The Bible does not specify how often the Lord's table should be observed. Each local assembly is responsible for determining the frequency of this service. Depending on the church, communion may be served throughout the week, once a week, once a month, or at special times during the year.
2. The Lord's table may be served as a part of a regular worship service (during or after), observed in connection with a meal, or conducted as a separate worship activity.

#### **B. Preparation**

Make certain that the elements are available in adequate supply to serve the expected number of participants.

1. The Bread -- Some assemblies pass a common loaf; others use wafers or crackers prepared for this service.

2. The Fruit of the Vine -- Some assemblies use a common cup; others use small individual cups. The cup is filled with grape juice or wine, depending on the preference of the church.
3. It is convenient, though not necessary, to place the elements on a table in the worship facility, ready to be distributed.

### C. Conducting the service

The service should include the following elements:

1. Teaching -- The Pastor/leader should insure that all understand the purpose and significance of the Lord's table. The key passage of Scripture for this service is *I Corinthians 11:23-32*.
2. Prayer -- Permit members of the assembly to express thanksgiving for God's grace in salvation. The "remembering" in the Lord's table is intended to produce a walk of holiness and purity among God's people.
3. Distribution and partaking of the elements

Below is one format you may wish to follow:

- Introduce communion by reminding the congregation that:
    - a) The elements represent the body and blood of Christ.
    - b) In taking them we share a unique union with Him.
    - c) Those who are not Christians or who are not in fellowship with Christ should not participate (see *I Corinthians 11:27-29*).
  - Read *I Corinthians 11:23-24*, and then pray.
  - Pass out the bread, and invite the congregation to partake of it.
  - Continue reading the Scripture passage, *verse 25*, then pray.
  - Pass the cup, and invite the people to drink.
4. Hymns -- The Lord sang a hymn with His disciples at the close of the service (*Matthew 26:30*), and the church has continued this practice.

## **PRACTICAL PRIORITIES**

### **Lesson 3: Weddings**

#### **Purpose Statement:**

To provide Christian leaders with a biblical basis for Christian marriage and guidance in conducting a wedding ceremony.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

This lesson provides Christian leaders with the following:

1. Principles of marriage to be used in counseling potential marriage partners
2. Necessary elements of the Christian wedding ceremony

#### **Introduction:**

The Christian wedding ceremony offers a special and beautiful opportunity to express the uniqueness of the Christian faith. God created man and woman in His image, and in marriage they honor one another as they serve Christ. The design of marriage gives dignity to both of them and demonstrates God's wisdom in bringing stability to culture through the family unit.

The material in this lesson is intended to supply basic principles of Christian marriage while allowing the expressions in wedding ceremonies which are unique to various cultural and ethnic heritages.

#### **I. Premarital Counseling**

The Pastor/leader should instruct the couple on the principles of Christian marriage at least three months before the ceremony. It is possible that, after counseling, the couple could decide not to get married. Starting instruction early gives them time to work through problems that may be exposed during the counseling sessions. These sessions should include instruction in the following areas:

##### **A. The couple's salvation**

Both partners must be Christians and express a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ (*II Corinthians 6:14-15*).

##### **B. Permanence of marriage**

Marriage is a holy union instituted by God. It is to be a lifelong commitment. Divorce should not take place (*Matthew 19:6*).

### C. Leaving and cleaving

The couple must leave their respective families. This means forsaking dependence on their parents and making a commitment to the new relationship. They are to unite closely and permanently to each other (*Genesis 2:24*).

### D. Roles in marriage

Marriage is to follow God's pattern set forth in *Ephesians 5:22-33*:

1. As head of the household, the husband is to lead and guide his wife and love her sacrificially.
2. The wife is to yield to her husband's leadership and honor him.

### E. Sexual purity and fidelity

God expects us to refrain from sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship.

1. As you begin counseling the couple, do not ask questions about their past, but instruct them to practice sexual purity until their wedding day. Do not perform their wedding ceremony if they cannot make such a commitment.
2. The husband and wife are to remain faithful to each other in thoughts as well as actions (*Malachi 2:15; Matthew 5:28*).

## II. Civil and/or Legal Authorization

The Pastor/leader should:

- A. Be familiar with the legal guidelines for marriages in the country.
- B. Assist the couple in securing all licensing and legal documents necessary for marriage and file them promptly.

## III. The Wedding Ceremony

The individual elements in a Christian wedding ceremony vary significantly with each culture. In planning the service, it is important to be sensitive to the traditions of your culture and the ethnic heritage of the couple. However, some elements are common to every Christian wedding ceremony.

- A. The ceremony is honoring to Jesus Christ.
- B. Some teaching, however brief, is included on the origin and permanence of marriage according to Scripture. Primary Scripture passages are *Genesis 2:24-25* and *Ephesians 5:22-33*.
- C. The couple exchanges a verbal commitment and states their intention to honor God in their union.
- D. Pastor/leader prays, committing the couple to God in their life together.

## **PRACTICAL PRIORITIES**

### **Lesson 4: Dedication of Children**

#### **Purpose Statement:**

To provide Christian leaders with a biblical basis for the dedication of children and a method for conducting a dedication service.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

This lesson provides Christian leaders with the following:

1. A statement of purpose for the dedication of children
2. The Scriptural basis for the dedication of children
3. Suggested elements to include when conducting a dedication service

#### **Introduction:**

Children are a blessing from the Lord. Christian parents are responsible for instructing and training their children to love, honor, and obey God. A child dedication service provides an opportunity for the parents to make a public and formal declaration of their intention to obey God in this serious but joyful task.

#### **I. Purpose**

It should be noted that, while many churches practice infant baptism, the material in this lesson deals *only* with the dedication of children (refer to Lesson 1 for information on baptism).

There are two purposes for dedicating children:

- A. Gratitude --The parents desire to make a public expression of thanks for the life of the child God has graciously given to their family.
- B. Commitment -- The parents make a public expression of their desire and intention to obey God in all His instructions to Christian parents concerning the education and nurturing of children.

#### **II. Scriptural Principles for Child Dedication**

- A. Children are blessings from the Lord (*Psalms 127:3-5*).

- B. Parents are given the responsibility of teaching their children to love and obey God (*Ephesians 6:4*).
- C. Parents are to provide a consistent example for their children of what it means to honor God (*Deuteronomy 6:4-7*).
- D. What parents teach affects not only their children, but also generations to come (*Psalms 103:17-18*).
- E. Parents are to encourage their children to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior (*Luke 18:15-17*).

### III. The Dedication Service

The following should be included as part of the dedication service:

#### A. Sermon and/or Scripture readings

These should be related to the parental obligation to rear children to know and honor God.

#### B. Charge to the Parents

Ask the parents to make a verbal commitment to model the Christian lifestyle, train their children to obey God, and encourage their children to accept Christ. Below is an example:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Parents' names), the Lord has graciously given you this child, a (son or daughter), \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name). Children are a heritage from the Lord, and because they are, God holds you responsible as parents for the spiritual welfare of this child.

In light of this responsibility, I must ask you to answer three questions:  
(After each question, the parents answer, "we do.")

1. Do you promise to train \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) in body, mind, and spirit for service to and fellowship with God?
2. Do you purpose by God's grace to live an obedient Christian life before \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name)?
3. Do you promise to do all you can to lead \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), at the proper time, to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as (his/her) personal Savior?

#### C. Prayer of Dedication

Pray for the parents and the child, as in the sample below:

Our Father and our God, we have before us today, \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), whom you have entrusted to these your children, \_\_\_\_\_ (parents' names).

We ask of You grace and direction upon them as they bring up this child in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Give them patience, wisdom and discernment in their task.

Bless \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), O Lord, with strength of body and spirit; and grant Lord that in the years to come, (he/she) may be found among those who love and serve your Son and our Savior. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **PRACTICAL PRIORITIES**

### **Lesson 5: Funerals**

#### **Purpose Statement:**

To provide Christian leaders with a biblical basis for comforting those who grieve and with practical assistance in conducting Christian funerals.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

This lesson provides Christian leaders with the following:

1. Suggestions for comforting those who mourn the death of a loved one
2. A discussion of the purpose for a funeral
3. A method of preparation for a Christian funeral service
4. Suggestions and primary Scriptures for conducting a funeral service

#### **Introduction:**

Death, because of sin, is part of the human experience (*Romans 5:12*). In dealing with this reality the Pastor/leader has the opportunity to comfort the family of the deceased and challenge everyone to prepare for one of life's tragic realities. The Pastor/leader must lead and guide people through this experience.

#### **I. Ministering to the Family and Friends of the Deceased**

*John 11*, which recounts the activities of Jesus after the death of Lazarus, provides a clear example for the Pastor/leader to follow in comforting those who are grieving over the loss of a loved one. Upon learning of a death the Pastor/leader should:

- A. Visit the home/family of the deceased to express compassion.
- B. Be prepared to address pain, anger and other emotions. Allow the family members to grieve and express doubt without criticizing them.
- C. Provide a ministry of presence. Being there as a friend who cares and listens is a ministry in itself. Provide counsel when asked, but be cautious on the initial visit.
- D. Reassure them with the truth of God's Word to provide comfort.
  1. Jesus himself experienced death and understands our suffering.
  2. Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death and giving us confidence in our future resurrection if we are His followers.

## II. The Funeral Service

### A. Purpose of the funeral

1. Dignity -- Mankind has dignity because he is created in the image of God (*Genesis 1:27*). The Christian funeral is an opportunity to focus on human kind as the highest of God's created beings and the fact that Jesus Christ died to redeem man from the curse of sin, of which death is a part (*Romans 5:14, 18-19*).
2. Comfort -- The family of the deceased grieves over the loss of a loved one. The Pastor/leader must be prepared to offer the comfort of the Scripture and the love of God to those who mourn (*1 Corinthians 15:50-57*).
3. Challenge -- The Pastor/leader must ask the living to face the reality of dying and consider their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He alone provides the solution to victory over sin and death (*Romans 5:1-2*).

### B. Preparing for the Service

Help the family answer such questions as:

1. Where and when will the service be held?
2. Does the family desire that a specific Scripture be included?
3. Is there a special tribute to be offered?
4. Did the deceased leave any instructions for the service?
5. Are there specific hymns to be sung and by whom?
6. Where will the burial take place?
7. Does your country have any legal codes concerning death and burial that you must consider?

### C. Conducting the funeral service

The following considerations should shape a funeral service:

1. The service should not be too long.
2. The message should be from the Scripture. Suggested Scripture passages include:
  - *Psalms 23, 46, 91, or 103*
  - *John 11 or 14*
  - *I Corinthians 15*
  - *II Corinthians 5:1-10*

3. Subjects should be chosen based upon the relationship of the deceased to Christ (heaven, resurrection, eternity etc.).
4. Direct the message to the living and their responsibility before God.
5. Tell people how to be saved, briefly, clearly and honestly.
6. Be certain that you show tenderness and compassion in all you do.
7. Following the service be available to people who may have questions or need to speak with you.

## **PRACTICAL PRIORITIES**

### **Lesson 6: Giving and Personal Finances**

#### **Purpose Statement:**

To equip Christian leaders with an understanding of basic principles for managing personal finances.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

This lesson provides Christian leaders with the following:

1. Specific principles for managing personal finances and giving
2. Opportunity for the Christian leader to apply these principles by budgeting income, giving, and spending

#### **Introduction:**

The Lord Jesus spoke frequently about money during His earthly ministry. In fact, more than half of His parables discuss man's use and management of material goods. Jesus knows the conflict people have between serving Him and serving the world and its treasures. This lesson contains discussion of Biblical principles to guide our thinking about our finances, and with these principles, some practical steps for organizing finances and planning a budget.

### **I. Principles of Personal Financial Management**

- A. Recognize and apply the truth that God is the Master of our money (*Psalm 24:1*).

We are simply stewards of His gifts.

- B. In giving, we are to give first of ourselves to the Lord (*II Corinthians 8:5*).

If our lives are completely dedicated to Him, our finances will be, as well.

- C. Giving is to be systematic and proportionate (*I Corinthians 16:1-2*).

Prayerfully determine how much of your income to give. At the beginning of each month, give that amount **first**, rather than waiting until the end of the month to give what is left over. It is helpful to examine your finances periodically, making a record of your income and expenses (section II provides assistance in this area).

D. Giving should be generous and sacrificial (*II Corinthians 8:2-4; Luke 12:41-44*).

We are to give whatever amount God lays upon our hearts to give. The ten percent of our income that many believe we should give is to be considered a **minimum** today.

E. Giving should be an expression of love with a joyful spirit (*II Corinthians 8:8-9; II Corinthians 9:7*).

The attitude of the giver -- not the amount he gives -- is what is important to God.

F. Giving is not for the praise of men but for the praise of God and for His glory (*Matthew 6:2-4*).

Some people in the church will want others to know how much they give, but this should be avoided. Take steps to insure that giving records are kept confidential. Do not favor the wealthy or single them out for special attention just because they give more.

G. The primary focus of giving is to be the local church to which you belong (*I Timothy 5:17-18*).

Some people want to donate money to many organizations. When God leads you to do so, give to other organizations, but remember that **your own church** is to be your main focus.

H. The believer is to save and invest money for future giving opportunities (*Luke 10:33-35*).

When you hear of special needs, you will be able to help by giving immediately if you have saved money for the future.

I. Generous giving results in bountiful blessing from the Lord (*II Corinthians 9:6*).

God's blessings will come in many different forms, not just through finances.

J. Giving of financial resources communicates a very clear message about spiritual priorities in life (*Matthew 6:21*).

## **II. Applying Principles of Personal Financial Management**

Based on a typical month, fill in the budget sheet on the following page:

## Managing Finances

A	B	C
	Planned Spending	Actual Spending
Offerings		
Taxes / Government Fees		
Food		
Housing		
Clothing		
Family / Recreation		
Other		
<b>TOTAL</b>		
<i>Income</i>		

1. Write down in Column B the amount you *plan* to spend in each category of Column A.
2. Write down at the bottom of Column B your total expected income.
3. Add the amounts listed in Column B to find and record your total expected spending for the month.
  - Is your total spending in line with your income? If the total will exceed your income, you need to look at each category more closely to determine where you can reduce spending so that **your spending is at or below your income level.**
4. Each month, record in Column C the amount you *actually* spend in each area.

- You should limit your spending so that you **do not exceed your budgeted amount** in any category.

**Note:** Another copy of this form is in Appendix C of this manual. Use it each month to plan and evaluate your use of the financial resources God has given you.

## APPENDIX A

### HOW TO RECOGNIZE FALSE TEACHINGS

#### **Purpose Statement:**

To provide Christian leaders with a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of baptism in the New Testament.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

1. To be aware of the false teaching that claims baptism is necessary for salvation.
2. To examine some of the primary Bible verses that advocates of baptismal regeneration use to defend their view.
3. To understand the correct meaning and significance of baptism in the New Testament.

#### **Key Scripture**

Romans 6:3-4:

*“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

#### **Introduction:**

This lesson will not teach the procedure of how to do a baptism service, nor will it discuss in depth whether one should practice infant baptism or believer's baptism (believer's baptism being defined as baptizing only individuals who have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ).

#### **I. The Awareness of False Teaching Concerning Baptism**

##### A. What is the meaning and significance of baptism?

1. Baptism is very important.

Jesus was baptized (*Matthew 3:13-17*)

Jesus commanded:

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)*

2. But just how important is Baptism? Is it necessary for salvation?

##### B. There are the three types of viewpoints that teach baptism as necessary for salvation.

1. Some churches teach that baptism washes away original sin.
  - a. Everyone is born with original sin and baptism is the way that it is removed.
  - b. Infants are baptized to wash away this original sin.
2. Some churches teach that God miraculously provokes faith in the person being baptized.
  - a. Faith is necessary for salvation, and baptism can and will promote this saving faith.

- b. Proponents of this view also almost always baptize infants.
3. Some churches that believe that baptism is necessary for salvation and identify true baptism as believer's baptism.
- a. Infant baptism is not included as a proper baptism; therefore, those who have faith in Jesus Christ and have been baptized only as infants are not true Christians.
  - b. This viewpoint would force the wrong conclusion that the majority of the leaders in the history of the Christian Church are all going to hell. Such leaders as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc., all believed in infant baptism. Are they going to hell? These men, some of the greatest in the history of the Church, believed in Jesus Christ and lived for Him. Are they not saved even though they never were baptized as adults?

**Please Note:** Despite the fact that there are differences in the three views presented above, it is important to recognize the common element that all these views hold. This common element is the view that baptism is necessary for salvation.

## II. Primary Bible Verses Used to Defend the Idea That Baptism is Necessary for True Salvation.

A. *John 3:5*: “. . . ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’”

1. Baptism necessary for salvation view:

The phrase “born of water” refers to baptism. Those that are born of the Spirit but not “born of water” (defined as baptism) cannot enter the kingdom of God.

2. Proper biblical perspective:

The word “water” in this verse can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

It can mean:

- a. “Baptism”-- but even if it does mean “baptism” it would likely be a reference to John the Baptist’s baptism, which signified repentance.
- b. “Purification”; “cleansing” -- a reference to the Holy Spirit -- “water” is one of the symbols for the Holy Spirit (the word “Spirit” in this verse can be translated “wind”.)

The verse might be understood in terms of a physical and spiritual idea of the Holy Spirit -- “unless one is born of water and wind one cannot enter the kingdom of God”)

Regardless of how one interprets the word “water” in this verse, it is essential to notice that the emphasis on this passage is not on physical baptism, but rather on *spiritual rebirth*.

B. *Acts 2:38*: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . . .’”

1. Baptism necessary for salvation view:

- Peter's command was not simply to repent but also to be baptized. If one only needed to repent and have faith in Jesus, why would Peter also include the command to be baptized?
2. Proper biblical perspective:
 

Baptism is a very important ordinance in the local church, and it was a consistent practice in the early Church.

    - a. In the early Church people were baptized immediately after acknowledging faith in Jesus Christ. *Acts 2:38* assumes this practice.
    - b. Many passages in Acts clearly do not list baptism as a requirement for salvation (read *Acts 10:43*; *Acts 13,38*; *Acts 26:18*).
- C. *Titus 3:5*: “. . . *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. . .*”
1. Baptism necessary for salvation view:
 

The “washing” Paul writes about is a description of baptism; in other words, Jesus saved us through baptism and the renewal by the Holy Spirit.
  2. Proper biblical perspective:
 

The word “washing” in this verse can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

    - a. “Washing” is probably a description of the cleansing of one's sin. When a person becomes a Christian, his sins are washed away. “Washing” probably refers to the act rather than the place of washing.
    - b. Although the main meaning here is the spiritual washing away of sins, it is important to remember that Christian baptism is a symbol of the washing away of sins (we will be discussing this in section 3 in further detail).
- D. *I Peter 3:20-21*: “. . . *and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also -- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.*”
1. Baptism necessary for salvation view:
 

Peter's words are clear -- “baptism now saves you.”
  2. Proper biblical perspective:
 

This verse is clearly meant to be taken symbolically. Notice that Peter clearly argues that the baptism waters symbolize the flood waters in the days of Noah.

    - a. Just as the baptismal waters symbolize the flood waters in Noah's day, so the effect of baptism is a symbol of the regeneration of the Christian.
    - b. This verse has many parallels to *Romans 6:3-4* (see Section III).

**Please Notice:** The four verses above are some of the strongest arguments that those who hold to the idea that baptism is necessary for true salvation can give. As we have seen, none of these verses clearly suggest that baptism is necessary for salvation. We will now turn to the consideration as to what baptism really means in the New Testament, and it will become very clear that baptism is not a necessary element of salvation.

### III. The Meaning and Significance of Baptism in the New Testament

#### A. Baptism is not essential for salvation

1. Jesus clearly spoke against any attempt to be saved that involved an outward activity.
  - a. The Jewish groups in Jesus' time were trying to do good things, thinking that was what God wanted. They were wrong, however; Jesus emphasized the need to have a pure heart.
  - b. Notice Paul's words in *Ephesians 2:8-9*:  
 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast."  
 In this verse it is very clear that salvation is not through any outward act, but by faith alone.
  
2. There are many verses in the Bible that do not include baptism as a necessary ingredient for salvation. If baptism were to be part of salvation, why wouldn't every verse that deals with salvation include something about baptism? Indeed, God wants us to be saved. This is one of the most important things in all of the Bible. Since this is the case, surely He would have made it more clear if baptism were part of salvation!
  - a. There are many verses that claim salvation is through belief in Jesus Christ -- with absolutely no hint or reference to baptism (look at *Luke 7:50*; *Luke 23:43*; *John 3:16*; *John 3:36*; *Acts 10:43*; *Acts 13:38*; *Acts 16:31*; *Romans 4:1-17*; *Romans 11:6*; *Galatians 3:8-9*; *Galatians 5:6*; *Ephesians 2:8-9*; etc.).
  - b. John's Gospel, written for the express purpose that men and women might believe in Jesus Christ (*John 20:31*), teaches that salvation is through belief in Jesus Christ alone.  
 Example: *John 3:16*.
  - c. One of Paul's main points is that human sin can be justified on the basis of faith alone (look at *Rom 1:17*; *Rom 3:21-26*; *Rom 4:9,16*; *Rom 9:30*; *Rom 10:6*; *Gal 2:16*; *Phil 3:9*; etc.).
  
3. Special consideration of *Luke 23:39-43*
  - a. Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in paradise that day.
  - b. The thief acknowledged Jesus Christ.
  - c. Obviously, the thief could not have been baptized!

## B. The Meaning and Significance of Baptism in the New Testament.

As we will see, baptism is a symbol of our identification with the death of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and our eternal relationship with Jesus Christ.

1. Baptism is a symbol of our identification with the death of Christ.

*Romans 6:3* states,

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

- a. When someone is baptized, notice that the person is placed in a position under the water that could signify Jesus lying in his tomb (that is, His death).
- b. Jesus died for our sins that we might have fellowship with God. As baptism is a symbol of our identifying with the death of Jesus, so also baptism is a symbol of the washing away of our sins.

2. Baptism is a symbol of our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Romans 6:4* states,

*“We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the death through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

- a. When a person is coming up out of the water in the baptism procedure, it is a symbol of Jesus Christ coming to life again after three days.
  - b. Jesus Christ’s resurrection guarantees that we can have true forgiveness of sins; that is, that we might be able to live a new life.
3. Baptism is a symbol of our everlasting relationship with Jesus Christ. *Romans 6:5* says,

*“If we have been united with Him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection.”*

Baptism signifies our identification with Christ. This identification is with His death and resurrection, and it guarantees eternal life with Him.

4. Symbols (or signs) are illustrations in the gospel to help us see truths more clearly. The symbol of baptism shows us the Gospel and its promises more clearly. A good illustration for Westerners is the symbolism of a wedding ring in marriage:
  - a. In Western culture a wedding ring signifies that a person is married.
  - b. The essence of marriage, however, is certainly not the wedding ring. Instead, the essence of a marriage is the couple’s commitment to one another.
  - c. As a wedding ring signifies a marriage, so also baptism signifies our identification with Jesus Christ.
  - d. As a wedding ring is expected at every ceremony, so also in the New Testament culture baptism was expected and assumed to take place with those who had believed in Jesus Christ.

**Concluding Note:** As we have seen, baptism is not an essential part of salvation. However, it is commanded that the faithful followers of Jesus Christ will be baptized and will baptize others (*Matthew 28:19*); it is not an item that is to be forgotten in the Christian life. Baptism is a beautiful thing, as it uniquely identifies us with Jesus Christ -- but baptism is not part of salvation!