

LESSON FIVE

SALVATION AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

- 1) The question of the membership or composition of the church is answered by the study of the nature of the church in lessons one and three: the church is the people of God, the body of Christ, the community of the Holy Spirit; that is, it is a people characterized by its relationship to deity.
 - a) One becomes a part of the church by being in the people of God, being incorporated into the body of Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit.
 - b) Thus, membership in the church is part of a broad doctrinal perspective.
- 2) This lesson addresses what is involved in how one is brought into that relationship.
- 3) The same idea may be expressed as “being saved.”
 - a) Another way of describing the nature of the church is to say that the church is those persons who are saved from their sins.
 - b) The church, therefore, may be defined as the community of the saved.
- 4) This definition of the church once more emphasizes the centrality of Christ for understanding the church since his mission was to seek and save the lost. Luke 19:10.
 - a) The church is the product of the saving purposes of God as expressed in Jesus Christ.
 - b) God obtained the church with the blood of his Son. Acts 20:28.
 - c) As a result, there is salvation in no one else. Acts 4:12.
 - d) Christ is the Savior of the church, his body. Eph. 5:23.
 - e) Christ saves the church.
 - f) Those who are saved from their sins are added by God to the number of his people. Acts 2:47.
- 5) It is important to remember that, while the church does not save (Christ is the Savior), neither does the church have nothing to do with salvation; the church is the people who are saved.
 - a) Some depend on the church to save them.
 - b) Others make only a minimal connection between church membership and salvation, saying that one becomes saved in one manner and becomes a church member in another.
 - c) Both positions misunderstand Biblical teaching.
 - d) God places the saved in the church, which is his people.
 - e) The church is the community of the saved.

BODY:

- 1) God’s action. John 3:16.
 - a) Because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), the only way that human beings can be saved is for God iN his grace to take the initiative.

- i) The Bible does not offer a systematic explanation of how the atonement works or why God accepts the death of Jesus as providing forgiveness of sins.
 - ii) The writers of the New Testament do describe the meaning of what God has done in terms familiar to the people of the time.
 - iii) They employ various images drawn from familiar experiences to convey a truth; these images illustrate a reality, but they do not explain how the reality works.
- b) Different descriptions of the atonement.
- i) Sacrifice – the language of worship.
 - (1) Sacrifice was the universal language of religion in the ancient world.
 - (a) While there were sacrifices of grain, fruit, incense, and liquids, many sacrifices involved the killing of an animal.
 - (b) Hence, it is no wonder that the imagery of sacrifice is applied to the significance of Jesus' death on the cross. Eph. 5:2.
 - (c) An extended discussion of the death of Jesus under the imagery of the Old Testament sacrificial system is provided in Hebrews 7:1-10:10.
 - (2) A special case of sacrificial language is provided by the *hilaskomai* word group.
 - (a) There has been a dispute whether to translate “propitiate,” which in English has a person as the object, or “expiate,” which in English refers to a thing.
 - (b) Since both words are no longer common in English, recent translation avoid the debate by choosing “atone” or “make atonement” as the rendering.
 - (c) *Hilaskomai* in classical Greek meant “to placate” or “to appease” an angry person or deity.
 - (d) In the Old Testament, this word group was used to translate, among other Hebrew words, those from the *kipper* family.
 - (i) The Hebrew word means either “to cover” or “to wipe away,” and then with reference to sin “to make atonement” or “to ransom.”
 - (ii) It is the word in *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.
 - (e) In New Testament usage, the *hilaskomai* family of words always has sin as its object. See Hebrews 2:17.
 - (i) The Biblical (Hebrew) idea, without this word, is expressed in Hebrews 9:26.
 - (ii) The noun *hilasmos* occurs with the same meaning of the removal of sin. 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10.
 - (f) The translation of *hilaskomai* as “expiate” rather than “propitiate” does not question God's wrath, only whether the wrath of God is the object of this word group.
 - (g) The debate over whether *hilaskomai* has a personal or impersonal reference in the Bible and whether the elements of God's wrath and punishment are included in the word has obscured the main difference between the New Testament and pagan thought.

- (h) In the New Testament, instead of a sacrifice offered by human beings to God, this word group refers to a sacrifice made by God himself (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:10).
- (3) Some passages use the expected language of a sacrifice offered to God (Eph. 5:2), but the New Testament usage of *hilasterion* and *hilasmos* stands the pagan Greek idea on its head.
 - (a) God is not appeased or propitiated.
 - (b) He himself acts to remove the sin that separates human beings from him.
 - (c) Instead of humans offering the sacrifice, God himself expiates or makes atonement for sins.
 - (i) God performs the sacrifice.
 - (ii) The divine action for human salvation completely reverses the usual understanding of religion and worship.
- ii) Reconciliation – the Language of Personal Relations.
 - (1) “To reconcile” originally meant to “to exchange” and then “to change from enmity to friendship, to make friends again.”
 - (a) It derives from personal relationships, especially secular diplomatic terminology.
 - (b) The word is exclusively Pauline in the New Testament.
 - (c) Paul describes salvation as being brought into a state of friendship with God.
 - (d) Where there was enmity, there is now peace.
 - (2) All of the important elements in the imagery of reconciliation applied to the human relationship to God are found in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.
 - (a) The subject of the action, the one doing the reconciling, is God.
 - (i) God does not need to be reconciled to us; we need to be reconciled to God.
 - (ii) Since our sins against God have estranged us from God, God must take the initiative to restore the relationship.
 - (b) The object of the reconciliation is we human beings. Rom. 5:10.
 - (3) In human relationships, there is often the need for a mediator to effect reconciliation.
 - (a) The mediator between God and humanity is Jesus Christ. 1 Tim. 2:5-6.
 - (b) God effected the reconciliation through Christ. Rom. 5:11.
 - (c) The circumstance in which Christ mediated this reconciliation was his death on the cross (Rom. 5:6), so God did not count the trespasses of human beings against them (2 Cor. 5:19).
 - (d) The theme of Jesus ministry was “peace” (Acts 10:34-36).
 - (e) That peace was primarily between God and humanity (Rom. 5:1), but the context in Acts 10 would have had relations between Jews and Gentiles near the surface if not the primary point.
 - (f) That theme of peace between Jews and Gentiles becomes explicit in Eph. 2:14-15, 17.

- (i) The reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles to God occurs in the one body of the church (Eph. 2:16).
 - (ii) Reconciliation with God is the basis for reconciliation among human beings.
 - (iii) The bringing of Jews and Gentiles into one body overcame the major religio-cultural barrier of the ancient world.
 - (iv) No modern animosity offers a greater barrier to peace and unity.
- (4) Reconciliation transforms human conduct in the present.
- (a) In Christ we become the righteousness of God.
 - (b) For the practical consequences of reconciliation in conduct, see Colossians 1:20-22.
- (5) The reconciliation begun on the cross is not completed.
- (a) What was inaugurated in Christ must continue until the final resurrection (cf. Rom. 11:15).
 - (b) Hence, there is now a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18), conducted by the ambassadors of God who bring the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19) to those who are entangled in sin.
- iii) Redemption – The Language of the Market Place.
- (1) The language of purchase is explicit in 1 Cor. 6:19-20.
 - (a) Paul likely has the slave market in mind (cf. 1 Cor. 7:23).
 - (b) Other passages use the same ordinary word for a commercial purchase to describe God's ownership of his people (2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 14:3-4), specifying the blood of Christ as the price of the purchase (Rev. 5:9).
 - (2) The word "redeem" literally means "to buy back," and the Greek noun for redemption that was used for buying back a slave or a captive, is used for the "redemption from transgressions" (Heb. 9:15) "that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24; cf. 1 Cor. 1:30).
 - (3) The "ransom" family of words (*lytron, lytroo*) was especially used for buying back those who were captives, whether by armies, pirates, or brigands.
- iv) Justification – The Language of the Law Court.
- (1) The average person in the Greek world had much more direct experience with the law courts than does the average person today.
 - (a) Any person, not just a professional lawyer, could argue cases, and many more disputes were settled in the public assemblies of citizens than is true today.
 - (b) Justification was a legal or forensic term, meaning to be declared righteous.
 - (c) English prefers "righteousness" for the noun and "justify" for the verb, while the words come from the same root in Greek.
 - (2) Paul is the author who makes the greatest use of the language of justification, and for him the verdict of God is declared in the unique fact of Christ crucified and risen (Rom. 4:25).
 - (a) Paul often associates justification with faith. Philippians 3:9.

- (b) Paul's emphasis on justification by faith occurs primarily in Romans and Galatians, that is, in a context defending the reception of the Gentiles into the church without requiring them to submit to circumcision and other requirements of the law of Moses.
- (3) Justification by faith, in the sense of human faith, is not absolutized in the way it often has been in Protestant theology.
 - (a) Rather, it is a way of universalizing the gospel, for the response of faith is open to all, Gentiles as well as Jews.
 - (b) There had to be another principle of justification available to all in the new age that welcomed Gentiles.
- v) Victory – The Language of Warfare.
 - (1) God's action in Christ is described in the military imagery of a victory won over the forces of evil that hold humanity in their power (Co. 2:15).
 - (a) The verb translated "triumphing over" means primarily "to lead in a triumphal procession," referring to the practice of Roman armies to celebrate a triumph after defeating an enemy.
 - (b) The same verb occurs in 2 Cor. 2:14, where Paul describes God as leading us in triumphal procession, or perhaps "causes us to triumph."
 - c) Military victory overcomes the evil powers; justification overcomes law and guilt; redemption overcomes slavery to sin; reconciliation overcomes hostility and chaos; sacrifice overcomes the need for appeasement.
 - i) Whether one thinks in terms of the temple, personal contacts, the marketplace, the law court, or the battlefield, God is at work.
 - ii) Each image of the atonement emphasizes what God did: he makes the atoning sacrifice, he reconciles, he redeems, he justifies, he wins the victory.
 - iii) In all respects, God is triumphant.
- 2) The Human Response.
 - a) Faith.
 - i) The importance of faith.
 - (1) The basic human response to God's saving action in Christ may be expressed by and is summed up in the word "faith."
 - (2) The fundamental importance of faith is expressed in several passages. Heb. 11:6; Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:8.
 - ii) Faith is produced by the preaching of the gospel of Christ.
 - (1) How does a person come to believe?
 - (a) General Protestant doctrine derived from Augustine and passed on through Martin Luther and John Calvin, teaches that God predestines those who will be saved and gives them faith by direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
 - (b) The opposite of this teaching is the secular view that faith is an arbitrary attitude arising from a person's own irrational, perhaps superstitious decision.
 - (c) The Biblical explanation is neither of these alternatives.
 - (2) Saving faith comes by hearing the word about Christ (Rom. 10:17).
 - (a) The word of God is associated with power (*e.g.*, Heb. 1:3).

- (b) The power of God that works for salvation is identified with the “gospel” (Rom. 1:16) and more specifically with the “word of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18).
 - (c) The word of God has power to save, but it must be implanted in the human heart (James 1:21).
- (3) The elements of faith.
- (a) The nature of saving faith produced by the word of God may be seen from the example of Abraham in Rom. 4.
 - (i) Abraham is an example of what it means to believe so as to be accounted or declared right, or just, by God, to be forgiven not by works but as God’s gift (Rom. 4:4-8).
 - (ii) This happened before Abraham received circumcision (Rom. 4:9-12) and so demonstrates the principle on which God accepts people (Rom. 4:13-15) and assures that the promises to Abraham are available to Gentiles as well as to his fleshly descendants, that is, to all who share his faith (Rom. 4:16-25).
 - (b) The nature of Abraham’s faith is especially evident in Romans 4:17-25.
 - (i) V. 25 is what Christ did for us – he was handed over to death and raised.
 - (ii) Vv. 23-24 state the benefit for us – we are reckoned as righteous.
 - (iii) V. 22 declares the basis – faith.
 - (iv) Vv. 19-21 are the key to the nature of faith – Abraham was convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.
 - (v) V. 18 states the promise to Abraham.
 - (vi) V. 17 affirms the nature of the God who made the promises.
 - (c) An analysis of faith shows that involves the assent of the intellect, the trust of the emotions, and the obedience of the will.
 - (i) All three elements are in the account of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-9.
 1. Abraham assented to the call of God, trusted God’s promise to make of him a great nation, and obeyed God by departing from all that was familiar in order to go to a country yet to be shown to him.
 2. The essential element is the middle term, but trust presupposes the acceptance of something as true and results in acting upon it.
 - (d) How are these elements involved in faith?
 - (i) Assent.
 1. Faith involves the acceptance of a truth, an intellectual assent.
 - a. Information is given, or a proposition is stated.
 - b. God must first speak; his word is the basis of faith; it is accepted or rejected.
 - c. Heb. 11:6 is not an arbitrary statement.

- d. The only way to receive a revelation is by faith; the only way to know God's will is to believe what he says.
 2. Some statements are so compelling that one is branded as stupid for not accepting them; other statements call for a decision.
 3. Religious statements belong in the latter category.
 - a. Faith is a conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1).
 - b. Religion involves ultimate issues on which one must take a stand.
 - c. A person cannot be neutral about ultimate issues.
 - d. To attempt to avoid the question of God is to make a decision about God.
- (ii) Trust.
1. Out of all the things to which we give intellectual assent, there are some in which we place our trust.
 2. Trust means confidence, taking someone at his word.
 3. Trust is the act in which one may rely on the faithfulness, the trustworthiness of another; that his promise holds and what he asks he asks of necessity.
 4. Trust is where biblical faith goes beyond mental consent.
 - a. It is being fully convinced, laying hold of something.
 - b. There follows an emotional security and persuasion from this commitment to what God gives.
 5. Trusting God:
 - a. Is a complete commitment.
 - i. Trust in God excludes any other loyalties.
 - ii. There is no more trusting in self – justifying, excusing, and attempting to save oneself.
 - iii. One depends of God for all of that.
 - b. Is done in spite of all that contradicts.
 - c. Is a “once for all” act.
 - i. It is not an opinion replaceable by another.
 - ii. It is an ultimate choice.
- (iii) Obedience.
1. Whom you obey is the object of your faith (Rom. 6:16).
 2. Faith and obedience are often combined in the Bible.
 - a. Paul spoke of the obedience of faith at both the beginning and end of Romans (1:5; 16:26).
 - b. The phrase refers to the obedience that accompanies faith or “faithful obedience.”
 3. From the biblical perspective, faith and obedience are equivalent.
 - a. There was no faith that was not obedient, and the Hebrew words of “faith” (emuna) included trust and obedience.
 - b. The antithetical parallelism of John 3:36 is instructive.

- i. The opposite of belief is expressed not as unbelief, but as disobedience.
- ii. The opposite of obedience is disbelief.
- iii. Compare also the equivalence of disobedience and unbelief in Hebrews 3:18-19.
- iv. In other words, faith means and includes obedience.
- c. Human beings as creatures must obey God.
 - i. Some of God's gifts are unconditional (Matt. 5:45), but some are conditional.
 - ii. Illustrations of God's conditional promises are found in Naaman (2 Kings 5) and Jericho (Heb. 11:30; Joshua 6).
4. Relation of faith to its expressions.
 - a. Faith and Baptism.
 - i. Faith saves, but when – at the point of believing, or when the divine condition attached to the promise is met?
 - ii. Baptism is an act of faith, not a work in the sense of Romans 4.
 - iii. As a condition attached to God's promise of salvation, it is not opposed to faith (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27).
 - iv. Faith is the reason why a person is a child of God; baptism is the time at which one is incorporated into Christ and so becomes a child of God.
 - v. Baptism is not a work, either in the sense of merit or of Christian works.
 - vi. One cannot define work in such a way as to include baptism and exclude faith.
 - vii. There is a sense in which faith itself is a work (John 6:28-29).
 - viii. Some have tried to make the work in v. 29 something that God does, but the question of v. 28 that is being answered makes it clear that it is something that humans do.
 - ix. If work is taken to mean something that humans do it is evident that faith is no less a work than baptism.
 - x. Both faith and baptism are conditions of receiving salvation (Mark 16:15-16).
 - xi. The teaching of baptism for the remission of sins is not a contradiction to justification by faith; indeed, baptism for the remission of sins is an expression of justification by faith.
 - xii. Baptism is an act of faith, dependent on the promise of God and a submission to him as the appointed way of claiming the promise.

- xiii. A person can be assured of salvation.
 - xiv. God has given an objective assurance in the condition of water baptism.
 - xv. Human nature seems to require some outward bodily action to express trust and commitment: raising the hand, coming down the aisle, kneeling, or something else.
 - xvi. God has given the objective, outward expression of faith in Christ – baptism in the name of Christ.
 - xvii. If one has enough faith to be baptized, one has enough faith to be saved.
 - xviii. If one's faith is in Christ as Savior, one will follow him in baptism.
 - xix. It is trusting God and his word to be baptized.
- b. Faith and confession.
- i. Faith demands an expression, but how does one express a trusting obedient faith?
 - ii. If faith involves the mind, emotions, and will, the expression of it will involve the whole self; faith is expressed by word and act.
 - iii. The confession made at the time of conversion, evident from the association with salvation and justification, is the theme of Romans 10:9-10.
 - iv. The wording indicates that this is a formal, public confession, a "calling upon the name of the Lord" made in response to hearing the message about Christ (Rom. 10:13-17).
 - v. The confession that Jesus is Lord is made by acts as well as by word.
 - vi. The action of baptism is a confession of faith in the resurrection (Col. 2:12).
 - vii. The act of baptism displays the burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:12).
- c. Faith and Repentance.
- i. The human response to the preaching of the gospel of God's action in Christ is also described by the word "repentance," the importance of which is emphasized in many scriptures (Matt. 3:12; Matt.4:17; Luke 13:3; Mark 6:12; Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19; Acts 11:18; Acts 17:30).
 - ii. Repentance, as it pertains to human relations with God, may be defined as that change of mind or heart, produced by godly grief (2 Cor. 7:8-10), which leads to a reformation of life.

- iii. The fundamental idea is that of turning, or returning; in the religious sense, a returning to one's due obedience to God.
 - iv. Repentance is a change of will in regard to sin; it is the resolve to quit doing evil and start doing right.
 - v. This may be expressed as a change of "mind" or of "heart," but perhaps the strength of the idea is best captured by the word "will."
- b) Baptism.
- i) Importance.
 - (1) Baptism is an expression of repentance and faith, and is itself a confession.
 - (a) The immediate predecessor of Christian baptism was the baptism of John.
 - (b) Christian baptism differed from John's baptism in being associated with faith in Jesus Christ and so administered in his name (Acts 19:4-5; cf. Mark 1:7) and in promising the Holy Spirit as well as forgiveness of sins (Acts 19:2-3; cf. Mark 1:8).
 - (2) Christ's baptism is the foundation of Christian baptism.
 - (a) The usual association of baptism with remission of sins is implied in John's reluctance to baptize Jesus (Matt. 3:13-14).
 - (b) At the baptism of Jesus the Spirit came upon him and God acknowledged him as his Son (Matt. 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-23).
 - (c) So for Christians, at baptism they are acknowledged as children of God (Gal. 3:26-27) and receive the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:5-7; Acts 2:38).
 - ii) Meaning.
 - (1) Confession of faith.
 - (a) Faith is confessed at the time one becomes a Christian, both with the lips and by the act of water baptism.
 - (i) Those who "received the word" about Jesus were baptized (Acts 2:41).
 - (ii) Baptism is a "calling on the name" of the Lord (Acts 22:16).
 - (iii) The reference is likely to the confession of faith made at baptism.
 - (iv) The association with faith in Jesus as the Christ was a distinguishing mark of Christian baptism (Acts 19:4-5).
 - (v) Hebrews 10:22-23 associates confession with the washing with water.
 - (b) Baptism is a pledge of allegiance, an oath of loyalty to Christ.
 - (i) At baptism not only does the candidate call on the name of God, but God's name is called on him.
 - (ii) The words of Matthew 28:19 about baptism "into the name of" occurs in Acts 8:16 with reference to "the Lord Jesus" and in Acts 19:5-6 to "Jesus Christ."
 - (iii) Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians for identifying with party leaders, "Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?" (1 Cor.

1:13, 15), implies a connection between baptism and the name worn.

(c) Act of repentance.

- (i) Baptism is a result of repentance and an expression of that repentance.
- (ii) The baptism of John was a repentance baptism (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 19:4).
- (iii) The people confessed their sins (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5), and John gave specific instructions about what repentance required (Luke 3:7-14).
- (iv) That association between repentance and baptism continue in Christian baptism.
- (v) The people on Pentecost were cut to the heart and wanted to know what they should do about their sinful condition (Acts 2:37).
- (vi) Peter told them to “repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).
- (vii) Baptism is involved in the turning associated with repentance.
 1. Acts 3:19 offers a parallel to Acts 2:38.
 2. Four terms are in both verses: two are the same, and the other two in suggestive parallelism:

a. Acts 2:38	Acts 3:19
Repent	Repent
Be baptized	Turn to God
Sins forgiven	Sins wiped out
Gift of the Holy Spirit	Times of refreshing
 - b. The identity of the first and third items suggests a certain equivalence between the second and fourth items.
 - c. Repentance is the inward turning; baptism is the outward turning, which is followed by a new life of walking in the opposite direction.

(d) Forgiveness of sins.

- (i) The walking in God’s way that follows on repentance and baptism is made possible because baptism brings forgiveness of sins.
- (ii) Better stated, baptism is the appointed time at which God pronounces forgiveness.
 1. Faith takes away the love of sin.
 2. Repentance takes away the practice of sin.
 3. Baptism takes away the guilt of sin.
- (iii) Acts 2:38 states the purpose of repentance and baptism.
 1. The Greek construction is a regular way of expressing an object or goal: “for,” “unto,” or “in order to obtain” forgiveness of sins.
 2. Some have doubted this purpose of baptism and have tried to translate differently, but the grammar will not permit it.

3. Exactly the same construction and wording occurs in Matthew 26:28, and no one would suggest that Jesus' blood was poured out "because of the forgiveness of sins."
 4. He did not die because sins were already forgiven, not was his blood poured out as a symbol of the forgiveness of sins.
 5. There is no doubt that the blood was shed "in order to effect the forgiveness of sins."
- (iv) This teaching of forgiveness of sins in baptism is expressed in other verses by the imagery of washing or cleansing.
1. Acts 22:16.
 - a. The power of forgiveness is not in the water or in the act.
 - b. The power is in God and the blood of Christ; it is received because one calls on the name of the Lord, and it is received in baptism.
 2. 1 Peter 3:21.
 - a. Peter clearly distinguishes the baptismal washing from an ordinary bath and a ceremonial cleansing.
 - b. The difference is made, on the part of the individual, by the verbal commitment and the association with a good conscience, and, on the part of the divine action, by the effect of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - c. There is no magical power in the water or merit in the act itself, for the value comes not from the water but from the intention with which the act is performed.
 - d. The statement is not to be absolutized, but when placed in the total context of the gospel, it remains true, "baptism saves."
 3. Ephesians 5:26.
 - a. The imagery is that of the nuptial bath by the bride (cf. Ezek. 16:8-12).
 - b. The purifying is by water and by word.
 - c. The "word" may be the candidate's confession of faith, the baptismal formula by the baptizer, the preached gospel, or the promise of God.
- (v) Gift of the Holy Spirit.
1. The promise of the Holy Spirit is made to the penitent believer who is baptized. Acts 2:38; Gal. 4:6; Acts 19:1-6.
 2. The gift of the Holy Spirit, as well as the association with the name of Jesus and confession of him is a distinguishing characteristic of Christian baptism.
- (vi) New Birth.
1. Baptism as a new birth is one way of describing what God does at baptism. John 3:3-5.
 - a. The new birth described here is one birth of two elements, not two births.

- b. A lot is said about “born again Christians”; actually, there is no other kind of Christian.
 - c. The way one becomes a Christian is to be born again.
 - d. Those who use this phrase usually mean by it a subjective, emotional conversion experience.
 - e. In the Bible, rebirth refers to an objective act that changes a person’s status and relationship.
 - f. There are two elements of the new birth, despite the efforts of some to dehydrate the rebirth.
2. The new birth is accomplished by God. 1 Pet. 1:3.
 3. The agency of the new birth is the word of God. 1 Pet. 1:23-25.
 4. A parallel to John 3:5 is Titus 3:5, although Titus 3 5 uses a different word with a different conceptual background.
 - a. The word rendered “regeneration” in the NASB and KJV is *palingenesia*, which was used in philosophical literature for the regeneration of the world, hence for a new age.
 - b. This concept of a renewed world is more likely the background of Titus 3:5 than the idea of a physical birth.
 - c. The water or washing, then, is related to the new world, the new age.
 - d. It is accompanied by a renewing that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
 - e. The similarity with John 3:5 is that once more the newness involves two elements, water and Spirit.
 5. Reference to the water precedes the Spirit in both John 3:5 and Titus 3:5.
 - a. It seems likely that these verses speak not of something the Spirit does before baptism, but what the Spirit does in baptism.
 - b. The Spirit imparts the new spiritual life.
 - c. This is something objective.
 - d. The renewing by the Holy Spirit is what God does, not what a person feels.
 - e. The Spirit gives a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26), so that one becomes a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17) who lives a new life (Col. 3:8-11).
- (vii) Death and Resurrection.
1. What John speaks of as a new birth, Paul describes as the death and resurrection of a transformed life. Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:3-11.
 2. Paul and Peter both connect baptism and its saving effects with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Pet. 3:18-22.
 - a. As Christ died, was buried, and was raised, so baptism expresses death from sin, the burial of the old self, and resurrection to a new life.

- b. There is both a negative and positive aspect – a canceling of the old and the initiation of the new.
 - c. The old self that was a slave to sin is crucified and buried.
 - d. God who raised Jesus raises the one baptized to a new life.
 - e. Anything but immersion destroys the symbolism of the act.
3. Baptism is a link between the atonement and Christian living.
- a. The purpose of Paul’s reference to baptism in Romans 6 is to show the inconsistency of a life of sin in one who understands the meaning of baptism.
 - b. To practice sin is to deny the reality of conversion (Rom. 6:11, 12, 14; Col. 2:20; 3:5, 12).
 - c. As a death to sin and a resurrection to a new life, baptism says something very important about the life to be lived after baptism.
 - d. Since baptism means sin is crucified and buried and a new life is raised, this indicates the kind of life to be lived – righteous and not sinful.
 - e. We are to be dead to sin but alive in and for God.
- (viii) Membership in the Church.
- 1. Baptism places one in the church. 1 Cor. 12:13.
 - a. This again is God’s doing, to incorporate a person in the body of Christ.
 - b. Baptism is not just an individual transaction; it is not just an act of personal salvation; it is a community or social act.
 - c. One is now made a part of God’s people.
 - d. The Spirit places the person in the one body.
 - 2. The same thought of incorporation into the church is expressed elsewhere by Paul as being baptized into Christ. Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27-29.
 - a. Since Christ is the body (1 Cor. 12:12), to be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into the body, that is, into the church as the people of God.
 - b. Baptism serves as the act of initiation into the church.
 - i. Any group or organization has to have some act that marks off its members from others, however informal this may be.
 - ii. This is especially true in the realm of religion.
 - iii. Not only does the church need something to identify its members, but people need something they can look back on and say, “At that time I became a Christian, a member of the church.”
 - iv. God has designated something as the decisive act – baptism is the line between the church and the world.
 - v. At that point God adds the person to the church, the community of the saved.

CONCLUSION:

- 1) Baptism provides an objective assurance of having received God's promised salvation in Christ.
- 2) That may lead to the subtle temptation to trust in baptism for salvation instead of trusting in God, his act in Christ, and his word of promise.
- 3) Similarly, there are other things that can become misplaced objects of trust.
 - a) One person may trust his faith as a guarantee of salvation.
 - b) Another may trust in some experience as the assurance of salvation.
 - c) Yet another may depend on doctrinal correctness for salvation.
- 4) As valuable and desirable as these things, or other things that may become the basis of assurance, may be, they must not become the objects of trust.
- 5) There often seems to be a temptation to rely on something else rather than to trust in God's grace in Christ.
- 6) Truly to trust in God includes responding to him in the appointed way.