



IS BAPTISM JUST A  
SYMBOL?

**“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”**

**ROMANS 6:3-6**

**“In the wider context of Romans, I think it would be a mistake to say that water-baptism is the means of our being united to Christ. In Romans faith is the means by which we are united to Christ and justified. But we show this faith—we say this faith and signify this faith and symbolize this faith—with the act of baptism. Faith unites to Christ; baptism symbolizes the union.**

**An analogy would be saying, “With this ring I thee wed.” When we say that we don’t mean that the ring or the putting of the ring on the finger is what makes us married. No, it shows the covenant and symbolizes the covenant, but the covenant-making vows make the marriage. So it is with faith and baptism.”**

**-John Piper, July 20, 2008**

# SYMBOLIC?

- The typical analogies used to explain away the power and purpose of baptism sound very clever, but are simply not supported by the Bible. Nowhere does it say that baptism is merely symbolic, or that it is simply an outward manifestation of the faith/grace that has already happened.
- On the contrary, scripture clearly makes a big deal about what baptism *actually* does to a sinner:

# BAPTISM...

- Puts us *into* Christ and *into* His death (Romans 6:3, 1 Corinthians 12:13)
- Saves us (1 Peter 3:21) and clothes us with Christ (Galatians 3:25-27)
- Remits our sins (Acts 2:38) and washes us (Acts 22:16)
- Makes us disciples (Matthew 28:19)
- It is *through* baptism, not faith alone, that we are buried with Him (Romans 6:4) and then raised up (Colossians 2:12)
- Is *not* a superstitious or magical ritual (1 Peter 3:21)

**“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.’ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ So then, those who had received his word were baptized...”**

**ACTS 2:38**

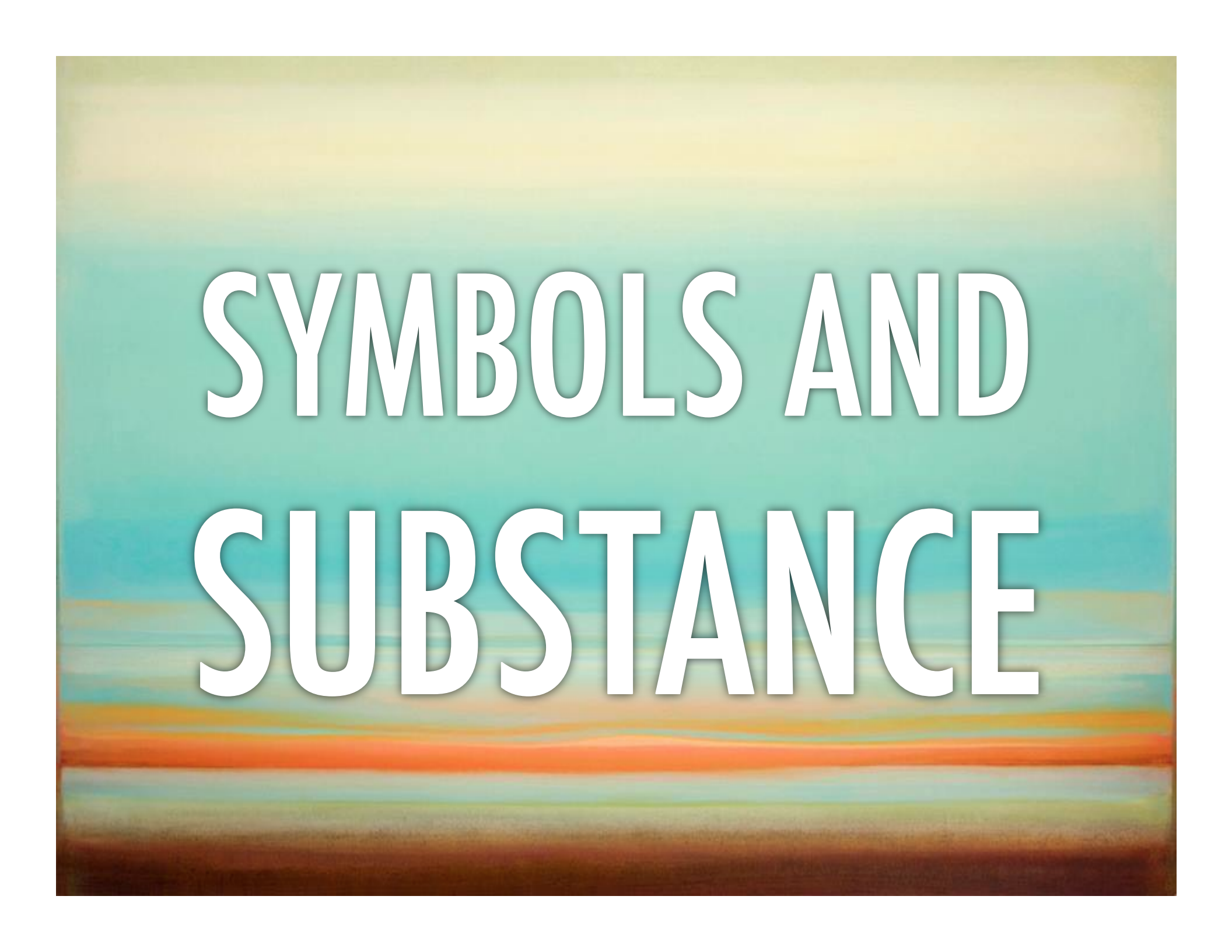
# THE *EIS* ARGUMENT

- The Greek word *eis* can be translated to a number of English words, depending on the context. “In”, “into”, “for”, “unto”, “on”; a preposition usually used after verbs of going, motion toward, in the vicinity of, or with a purpose toward something (as in, “in order to”).
- The argument is often made, however, that in some cases our English word “for” can be understood as “because of something” (as in, “I got this award *for* my perfect grade”).
- However, this argument has some glaring problems...

# THE *EIS* ARGUMENT

- Context helps determine the use of *eis*, not our own preconceptions or what we want the text to say.
- Since *eis* can be used in different ways, it is good to let other scriptures clarify Acts 2:38 for us. And based on the verses previously cited, the NT repeatedly indicates that baptism plays a necessary, operative, functional part in the process of salvation.
- Baptism is *never* seen as an afterthought or a tag-on in the scriptures, but as a culmination (Acts 8:26-39).





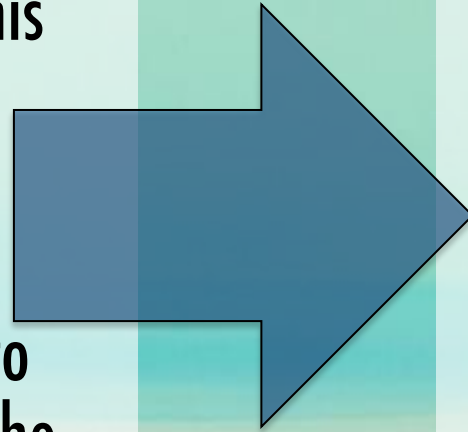
# SYMBOLS AND SUBSTANCE

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- The OT is filled with physically tangible objects and events that are, nevertheless, merely symbolic of NT, spiritual things (8:1-6, 9:8-9). It flips our expectations to be told that the tangible is symbolic of the spiritual (circumcision, temple, crown and throne, sacrifices, priests, kingdom, etc.).
- Two OT events correspond to baptism in a symbol/substance relationship. First, 1 Corinthians 10:1ff refers to the baptism of the Israelites into Moses through the Sea. Second, 1 Peter 3:18ff is a reminder that Noah and his family were only saved *through* the water.

# SYMBOLS

- The Israelites had to pass through the sea and the cloud to be saved from Egypt. This symbolizes freedom from slavery through Christ (Romans 6:8, 15ff).
- Noah's story corresponds to baptism. It is symbolic of the salvation that comes *through* the ark/water. The ark was "for" their salvation, not because of it.



These two stories are the symbols, and baptism is the substance. It is not symbolic, but functional. It is a divine ordinance that actually results in forgiveness of sins.

**SO, IS BAPTISM JUST A SYMBOL OF OUR UNION  
WITH CHRIST, LIKE A WEDDING RING?**

**OR IS IT THE UNION ITSELF?**

**ROMANS 6:4-5**