

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

by

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Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

Chapter I

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

Over the years much has been taught concerning the subject of water baptism. I want to focus your attention on this subject, and in so doing, ask you several questions concerning the act of water baptism that, when correctly answered, will change your life.

1. What does water baptism mean to you?
2. Did you understand what you were doing when you were water baptized?
3. Has water baptism had any tangible effect upon your life?
4. To you, is water baptism a religious ritual, or a weapon that belongs in your arsenal as a believer?

In this book, these four distinct questions, along with several other key questions, will be answered. When given the opportunity, their content, if acted upon, will change your life as they have changed the lives of many thousands of Christians.

During the last nine years of ministry, I have asked the above four questions to so-called “mature” Christians who have taught on the subject of water baptism and who have even conducted water baptism services. Surprisingly, I have heard many different answers to these questions. This is truly a shame because the writer of Hebrews tells us in chapter six of the same book, in verses one and two, that water baptism is one of the main ingredients that make up the doctrine of Christ.

Hebrews 6:1-2, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God. Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”

Notice that the writer of Hebrews, when describing the doctrine of baptisms, places the word in the plural, not in the singular - “baptisms,” not “baptism.” Clearly then, there is more than one baptism, even though this doctrine is contrary to the teachings of a large portion of the body of Christ.

The reason for this division in doctrine is simply because some people look at two particular Bible verses and use these verses as the cornerstone, or foundational scripture, to build their version of the doctrine of Christ, rather than to use the Apostles’ doctrine which has its origin in Hebrews 6:1-2.

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The following scripture verses have caused much division within the denominational structure of the body of Christ:

Ephesians 4:4-5, “there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

It has never ceased to amaze me that there are people upon the face of this earth who can take these two words, “one baptism,” and use them to divide the body of Christ on a doctrinal level.

Unfortunately, this doctrinal division eventually progresses to a division of fellowship in the natural, especially when there is no strong supportive scripture to back up their theology. Their building material is some “revelation” that they believe the Holy Spirit has given them, which can only be backed up by some typology or, as is better known in religious circles, “shadows and types.

A good defense attorney or prosecuting attorney will tell you that you need more than circumstantial evidence in order for a law case to stand under scrutiny.

Seducing Spirits

Actually, I don’t credit these people with such divisions. It is a seducing spirit working through a puffed-up self-opinion (commonly called “pride”) that develops this type of self-appointed theology. The Bible calls this the doctrine of devils.

When I dissect these two verses in Ephesians 4:4-5 to weigh up their Scriptural content, the only conclusion that I can come to is that if everything were to be taken literally, the majority of the body of Christ would have to repent and join the Jesus Only Movement, or one of the other sects that have their origin in these two Bible verses.

Literal or Figurative?

You do not have to be a Bible scholar to work out that there is but one body, but *many different parts* to that one body, just as there is one nation of Israel with twelve different tribes.

There is one Spirit in title, the Holy Ghost, but the Bible also calls the angels, ministering spirits. Likewise, what about Revelation 5:6b where John writes that he saw the Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth? I am not going to even attempt to explain the spirit world in this book, as it would take up the whole book and then some!

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There is also one God, but what about the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? And there is one faith, but many levels of faith. And there is one baptism into the body of Christ through immersion in the blood of Jesus, which is spoken about in Ephesians 4:4-5.

But one must also ask, what about the baptism in the Holy Spirit that happened on the day of Pentecost? Or the baptism of water that Jesus commanded His disciples to perform in Matthew 28? To believe that there is but one baptism, the student of the Bible would have to delete great portions of Scripture in order to make such doctrine work.

Actually, this type of person can be likened to a backyard mechanic or handyman who disassembles an object to fix it, and when he puts it back together, it works (but for how long is the major question). Much to his surprise, there are a lot of “unnecessary” pieces left over, so he throws them in the garbage and forgets that they even once belonged to the object.

My friends, you cannot have this same attitude with Scripture and expect to receive an accurate interpretation that will change people’s lives to be all that God meant them to be. All too often, people study the Bible in much the same way that they would dine at a restaurant. They will order a meal, eat what they like, and then leave on the plate what they dislike, to be trashed. This attitude should not be taken with the Word of God!

Eat the Whole Lamb

When the Lord instructed Moses concerning the Passover Lamb that the children of Israel were to sacrifice in order that the firstborn of each household would be safe, He told them that they should take the blood and strike it on the two sideposts and over the upper doorposts of the houses where they were to eat the lamb. Then He told the Israelites that they had to eat the *whole lamb*. This meant they had to eat the head, the feet, and the “innards!” Not one part of the lamb was to be left over. Friends, the lamb represents the Word of God.

You must consume the Word of God *in its entirety!* You cannot just take what you want, and discard the rest.

Identification or Renewal?

It is my personal belief, through many hours of study and prayer, that water baptism is the key weapon given to the Church for the renewing of the mind. It is not the religious ritual that some churches perceive it to be. Many church leaders teach water baptism to be nothing but a point of identification to the resurrected life of Christ. This is not correct.

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Water baptism is a powerful weapon against the carnal mind. This truth is as much for the evangelical church as it is for the mainline church. Many of the evangelical churches condemn the mainline churches for turning the act of water baptism into a ritual of sprinkling. But they, themselves, have turned water baptism into a dead ritual. A baptismal candidate goes into the water dry and comes up wet and nothing of any spiritual significance happens.

The Reason for John's Baptism

The student of the Bible must not mistake John's baptism for Jesus' baptism. The baptism of John has no relevance to the New Testament Church. Even though John's baptism was a shadow of Jesus' baptism, it was only for the remission of sins, not the forgiveness of sin. The only way sin can be forgiven is by the shedding of blood.

I do believe, however, that those who were baptized by John and released faith in the operation of that baptism, had a window opened in their guilt-riddled soul. This guilt had blinded them from the truth of God's Word, and unless it was removed, they would have never recognized Jesus at the genesis of His ministry. This, then, was the full purpose of John's Baptism.

Any true believer understands that it is faith in the blood of Jesus that brings forgiveness for the sins of the past, present, and future, and releases the individual searching for a true relationship with God into the born-again experience. Faith is the catalyst to salvation. This is not like the baptism of repentance which John the Baptist preached.

The Need for a Line to be Drawn

There is a tremendous need within the body of Christ to have a clear line drawn between the baptism of repentance that John the Baptist performed and the baptism that Jesus commanded His disciples to perform, because both baptisms are quite different. After all, we, as New Testament believers, are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. So, how can our baptism be the same as John's Baptism? When John baptized Jesus, Jesus had only just begun His ministry. He had not yet gone to the cross and completed salvation by His death and resurrection – the very points that we identify within our water baptism.

The clearest line that can be found in the Bible that proves that there are separate baptisms, with different outworkings, is located in Acts 19:3-5. To understand the fullness of these verses, let me give you some background that led up to this event.

The apostle Paul had arrived at a town called Ephesus, with full intentions of evangelizing the city and leaving a group of committed believers behind before he proceeded any further with his apostolic calling. This was the systematic way that Paul evangelized the Gentile population.

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However, much to Paul's surprise, when he arrived at Ephesus he found a group of around twelve people who seemed to be committed to the Lord Jesus. But he could not help but notice that, even though they were zealous for the Lord, they were powerless (I suppose this was like many genuine Christians in the twentieth century). This prompted Paul to ask them if they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Their response was that they did not even know that there was a Holy Spirit. This, then, led him to proceed on with a line of questioning which we will pick up at Acts 19:3-5 (Amplified):

“And he asked, Into what then were you baptized? They said, Into John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, continually telling the people that they should believe in the One Who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus [having a conviction full of joyful trust that He is Christ, the Messiah, and being obedient to Him]. On hearing this they were baptized [again this time] in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Let me ask this question. If water baptism is just a ritual and has no spiritual significance, why did Paul take the time to explain to these folks the difference between John's baptism and the baptism of Jesus? After all, both baptisms are *performed* in an identical manner by full immersion. Not only did Paul take the time to explain the difference between the two baptisms, he actually re-baptized them. It was at this point that they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So, it becomes very obvious by Paul's actions, that there is more to water baptism than just the performance of a religious ritual.

I have also found this to be true. When I teach on the subject of water baptism, I have discovered that, literally, thousands of Christians who have been baptized in their local churches, did not know what they were doing. After hearing this truth concerning water baptism, their level of faith is boosted, and they are baptized a second time. When they come up out of the waters, many are so “drunk” with the power of the Holy Spirit, that they cannot even walk. Others literally cry for hours, as the hurts of the past are dealt with by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, believe it or not, many pastors resist their people being re-baptized. They actually take these re-baptisms as a personal attack, rather than to rejoice in the freedom and the empowerment that their people receive, as they release faith in water baptism.

In the next chapter you will discover that there are two different realms of warfare and that water baptism plays a major part in the warfare of the mind.

Chapter 2

Understanding Warfare

The Scriptures clearly define two realms of warfare against the devil. The first battlefield is found in Ephesians 6:10-12, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

It is quite evident that the warfare described in the above scripture is against principalities and powers, which are fallen angels that went with Lucifer then he rebelled against God. Fallen angels are different from demons, because demons are earth-bound. The Bible says that demons *walk*, they do not *flu*, through desert places. So, this warfare described in Ephesians 5 is against the rulers of the darkness of this world that are in heavenly places. Therefore, this warfare deals specifically with the princes of darkness that have the task of creating abnormal events within the atmospheric world around us.

You see, a demon seeks to oppress men (there were a thousand of them in the man that had the legion in him), while a fallen angel seeks to oppress a nation or a city. This can be confirmed in the Book of Daniel, chapter ten, where Michael the Archangel, had to do battle in the heavens with the fallen angels that were over Persia and Greece.

Battle of the Mind

The second realm of warfare – and the one that we will deal with in this book – is still against the evil one. This battle, however, is not against the principalities that are found in the heavenly realm. Instead, this is a battle against the ground troops, the demonic forces that have the task of developing heresies in the mind of humanity that will blind them to the reality of Christ and all that He purchased for them personally.

Second Corinthians 4:4 confirms this line of thought concerning this second battlefield. The apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth informing them that the god of this world, that is the devil, has blinded the minds of them which believe not. He writes, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

The question that often comes into the minds of many Christians is, “How could Satan blind my mind so that I could believe a lie?” The answer is found in First Timothy 4:1, where Paul says, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith,

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giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”

In this verse it is quite obvious that the words “spirits and devils” are in the plural and not the singular. Therefore, it is not Satan himself who is blinding the minds of humanity, but rather his demon spirits. It is his demon spirits that do his ground work here upon the earth, and the weapons they use are enticing philosophies with a scriptural foundation that has been taken out of context. This is why the Bible warns the believer in First John 4:1 to, “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.”

My friends, just because you receive some spiritual revelation from the Word of God does not necessarily mean that it is the Holy Spirit who is speaking to you. After all, if a demon knocked on the door of your mind and said, “Hi, I’m working for Satan and he has sent me to destroy your life. I’m going to begin with your marriage, progress to your finances and end my run by destroying your health. Would you please cooperate?” Of course, you would not! You would tell him to get far away from you, or in plain English, you would tell him to go to hell where he belongs!

This is why when a demon comes to spin his web of deception over your mind, he says, (just like he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, or when he tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness), “Hi. God here, and I have a special truth to reveal unto you.” Then he will give you a “special foundational scripture,” and even though you may have read that scripture one hundred times before, you have never seen it like you are seeing it now. The excitement of seeing this scripture in the light of this “new revelation,” blinds you to the fact that it has been taken completely out of context.

This is how solid doctrine is undermined by these seducing spirits. A seducing spirit is a lying spirit that has the task of implanting a seed of heresy into the mind that will lead you away from the foundational truths that are complete in Christ. Then, after you have accepted this new revelation, this demon will proceed to build a vain philosophy in the realm of your mind that will lead you away from Christ and make you the prisoner of this “new-found truth.”

These philosophies then become the strongholds that need to be pulled down – as is found in Second Corinthians 10:3-5, the foundation scripture to the warfare of the mind: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh, (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds), casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Notice that this type of warfare is not fought in the heavenlies. It is fought in the mind of the believer. “Pulling down strongholds” refers to casting down vain imaginations that have been

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implanted into the realm of the mind through projected thoughts by demonic forces. These demonic forces will reinforce their handiwork by confirming their thought patterns through natural channels such as parents, friends, or even mentors, through words of confirmation.

As a minister of the Gospel for fifteen years, I have been a witness to the fact that many Christians are entangled in the extremes of various doctrines, such as *spiritual warfare*. They attend all night prayer meetings to scream and yell at the devil, in a desperate attempt to bring revival to the Church.

Some Christians have even gone so far as to rent airplanes so they can get closer to “the strongman” in the heavenlies. I ask you, “How dumb can you get and still breathe?” The truly sad truth is that while these people are caught in this type of deception, there is a church in the same city *that* is experiencing revival by simply doing what Jesus asked them to do: by preaching the Gospel.

When I moved to Hyde Park, New York, a well-meaning group of believers called me on the telephone and asked me to join their prayer meeting to pray for revival. They informed me that they were doing some very intense warfare in the heavenlies and could use my help. So I asked them how much growth they had experienced in their churches since they started this warfare. There was silence on the other end of the phone, and then their spokesman became very defensive and replied, “Brother, sometimes it takes years to break through.”

I then declined the invitation to join their prayer meeting, and out of curiosity, their spokesman asked me how ai was going to turn around the desperate situation of the church I was pastoring, if I was not going to join them in prayer. So I told him that I thought I might start by preaching Jesus as the answer to man’s problems – just like Philip the Evangelist did in Samaria. And if that worked, I might even try to pray for some sick people and see whether or not God would heal them. You know, friends, it still works today, just like it did in Samaria!

The sad fact is, that these same folks are still doing their warfare, and they are experiencing “revival by subtraction.” If only they would realize that the doctrine that they are holding to only produces conflict in their own lives. Before too long, there is an enormous amount of pressure on their marriage, their children become uncontrollable, their businesses start to fail and their families go into financial difficulties. Soon they are overwhelmed with personal problems that seem to multiply. This all happens while they are fighting for the freedom of others. This takes place because they have neglected to win the warfare in the realm of the mind by successfully reprogramming their own mind to line up with the mind of Christ.

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New Covenant Keys

Many Christians have not yet discovered who they are in the New Covenant, the agreement made between God and man that was established nearly 2,000 years ago on the cross of Calvary. Therefore, “they are destroyed through lack of knowledge.”

When confronted with principalities and powers or manipulated by circumstances, they have a very limited understanding on how to overcome them by the many (reported by theologians to be the sum total of 8,886) promises that were established through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The two major keys to winning the battle of the mind are, first of all, understanding the tri-unity of man and secondly, understanding the mind. In the next chapter we will look at both of these keys.

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Chapter 3

Created Triune Beings

Friends, we will always have a limited understanding of the battlefield that is fought in the realm of the mind unless we come to the full knowledge that we are triune beings. First Thessalonians 5:23 states, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be reserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We may look at ourselves in a mirror and judge ourselves by our outward appearance and not realize that we have a spirit, created in the image of God, or that we have an intellect, programmed by the five senses – touch, taste, hearing, smell, and sight. This limited view of ourselves produces an imbalance in our growth to manhood or to womanhood.

Some may exercise their body to build a trim physique, then buy nice clothes and think they have arrived at the perfection of manhood or womanhood. Others may over-educate themselves by concentrating on philosophies of life and become wise in their own eyes, but neglect their body and spirit. Others may exercise their spirit man by fasting and prayer and neglect their body and soul, and become so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. The real key is for the body and soul and spirit to grow together in balance.

Proverbs 11:1 declares, “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight.” This “balance” cannot take place unless we are fully aware that we are a triune being, created spirit and soul and body.

Understanding the Mind

The mind can be likened to the thermostat control of an air conditioner. Once the control is set, say at 65 degrees, the unit will do all it can to meet the demand placed upon it by the thermostat. Even if the unit is placed on a bench in the back yard of your house, and the outside temperature is 100 degrees, the air conditioner will still try to bring the temperature down to 65 degrees. The motor of the air conditioner does not have a mind of its own. It does only what it was made to do.

In the same way, the flesh of man does not have a mind of its own. The soul, or the mind of man, is the thermostat control of the body. When set, the body will do everything it can to fulfill what the mind has demanded of it. If the mind becomes convinced that the body has cancer, the body, in submission to the soul, will do everything necessary to fulfill the demand of the mind.

I personally witnessed this in my mother’s life. She never smoked or exposed herself to any

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known cause of cancer. No one in our family line had died from cancer. Yet she had a phobia that she would die of cancer, and she did die of cancer! This brings clarity to Job's statement, "The thing that I feared hath come upon me."

The mind is the most complicated part of our being. It has never been programmed to its full capacity – in the negative or in the positive – since the fall of Adam (except for Jesus Christ, of course). When left to itself, the mind produces a negative or a positive nature, depending on the atmosphere of its surroundings. The mind has a hunger that needs to be fed. As the body needs digestible food to produce energy, the mind needs knowledge to form a personality.

A newborn baby needs more than milk to survive, it also craves knowledge. The body and spirit are alive, but the mind or soul is empty, seeking knowledge in order to form a personality. This all happens in the early years of our lives. Once the mind has formed its own unique personality, it becomes difficult to change that personality because the mind has its own built-in defense mechanism.

This defense mechanism is referred to by psychiatrists or psychologists as the "guard of the mind." Once the mind has formed a set personality, this "invisible guard," or "defense mechanism" will edit all intake of knowledge, only allowing to enter the mind that which is non-threatening to the newly formed personality. It has become fascinating to me, over the years of studying the mind, to watch this defense mechanism kick in. When the mind is being told something that it does not want to receive, it will act like a rebellious child.

Let me give you an illustration. Many Christians bounce into church full of life, being very talkative to their friends. They will even participate enthusiastically during the praise service – until the gospel message starts to challenge their lifestyle. At this point, the guard of the mind awakens and begins to reject the input. They are then overcome by supernatural sleep.

This supernatural sleep can also occur when these people are reading or meditating on the Word of God either in church or in their quiet time at home. They also have no ability to remember Bible verses or key principles from a sermon. They are unable to read a complete chapter of the Bible and retain its full content. Yet they have no trouble remembering street names, birth dates, or even what a movie or novel was about. They find that the positivity of God's Word cannot find an inroad into their mind, and yet they have no trouble remembering the negative aspects of the Bible.

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Personal Testimony

At this point I would like to share with you my personal revelation of water baptism that the Lord gave to me. This revelation changed my life.

One night the Lord awoke me out of a deep sleep and Colossians 2:11-12 kept running through my mind. I reached for my Bible and the only translation I could find was my Amplified Version. This is what this scripture says, “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, but in a (spiritual) circumcision (performed by) Christ by stripping off the body of the flesh (the whole corrupt, carnal nature with its passions and lusts). (Thus you were circumcised when) you were buried with him in (your) baptism, in which you were also raised with him (to a new life) through (your) faith in the working of God (as displayed) when he raised him up from the dead.”

As I meditated on these verses, First Peter 3:21 came to my mind. So I turned to that scripture, “And baptism, which is a figure (of their deliverance), does now also save you (from inward questionings and fears), not by the removing of outward body filth (bathing), but by (providing you with) the answer of a good and clear conscience (inward cleanness and peace) before God, (because you are demonstrating what you believe to be yours) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

After reading these scriptures, an explosion happened in my mind, and for the first time, I received an understanding of water baptism, even though it was still very limited. I then asked the Lord to give me a deeper understanding. I went back to sleep and the Lord gave me a dream of the Israelites being delivered out of the land of Egypt. In the dream, the Israelites came out with total freedom, only to find that not too long after their miraculous deliverance, their previous oppressors came after them.

This same principle is at work in many Christians’ lives today. They receive a miraculous deliverance when they are saved, only to have their previous oppressors come back upon them after a short time.

Then, in my dream, the Red Sea opened up and the Israelites walked through on dry ground and their oppressors were drowned in the waters. As the dream progressed, I saw an actual circumcision taking place. As I watched this operation, my dream kept changing to a brain with a cloudy white skin being peeled back from around it. When I awoke I was very puzzled by what I saw.

Several days later, while talking to a Christian psychiatrist from the local psychiatric center, he told me about the breakthroughs that they had experienced with some of their patients. He went

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on to explain, that by the use of subliminal recordings, the audible music on the tape distracts the guard (“a built-in defense mechanism”) over the mind, thereby allowing the subliminal message to penetrate the mind. Then he said, “If there were some way to completely disarm this defense mechanism, our successes would be much greater.”

At this point, the full revelation of water baptism hit me. I went straight home and had my assistant baptize me again. This time, with the full understanding that when I went under the waters, God, by his Spirit, was going to perform an operation on my mind, to destroy the guard, allowing the new life that was purchased by the blood of Jesus to fill my soul.

When I came up out of the waters, there were no sky rockets or great revelations, but from that moment on, supernatural sleep disappeared. I was now able to take a scripture and hold it in my mind for days at a time, just as if you were to smell a rose and then walk away – its fragrance would linger in your senses for a time.

I could read a whole chapter in the Bible and hold it in context. Someone could ask me days later what a sermon was about that I had listened to, and I could virtually repeat it to them word for word. I have since gone on to earn two doctorates, which is a miracle, because prior to my re-baptism, I suffered with dyslexia, a learning disability.

I have had the privilege of baptizing thousands of people in my own crusades, and on several different occasions, Rodney Howard-Browne has flown me into his crusades where I have had the privilege of baptizing 500 to 600 people a night. Every week I receive many testimonies from people who have experienced the same changes to their lives that I have personally experienced.

Creating a Sterile Environment

Having received water baptism for the circumcision of the heart – the surgery needed to open up the mind – it becomes time to engraft, or sow the seeds of change, into the now open mind for the purpose of renewal. It is now essential, just as in any surgical theater, to have a sterilized atmosphere, so that no foreign matter that could cause infection may enter the exposed area during the operation.

Jesus warns us about introducing something false along with something true in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-25). In this parable, a man prepared his field and sowed *good* seed in the field. Then while he slept, his enemy – in this case the devil – came and sowed *bad* seed *along with the good*.

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I have witnessed this happen so many times. Christians receive water baptism to neutralize the protective mechanism over their minds and to open up the mind for reprogramming by God's word. So they will systematically study the Bible for hours, and then go and sit in front of a television set, or watch a movie or have a conversation that is contrary to that which they have just been studying. By doing this, bad seed is allowed to be sown along with the good seed.

If the effects of water baptism are to remain successful, you must remove yourself, for a season of at least a three-month period, from all secular programming in order to allow the engrafted word to take root, and to perform the change that it was meant to in your mind. Like any good farmer, you have to purpose what type of crop you want to grow.

So many Christians also sow mixed seed into their field, by trying to read the Bible as they would a novel. Actually, reading it this way is impossible, as the Bible is not even in chronological order. The Bible was not meant to be read from cover to cover, but is meant to be studied systematically, or "line upon line, precept upon precept."

The blueprint for growth in Christ is contained in Second Peter 1:3-10, and is as follows, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."

The Release of the Spoken Word

For the word of God to reach its full potential, it has to be spoken out into the atmosphere, and not just anyone can do this. The person proclaiming it, must have faith in the principles that are spoken.

When a person is shot and killed, it is true to say the bullet killed him. But before this could happen, even though the bullet contained all the power to do the killing, three objects had to come together: the person to pull the trigger, the gun from which the bullet was fired, and the bullet that does the killing. Only when this combination is met, can the bullet reach its full potential.

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Likewise, a threefold combination is required for the release of the spoken word: the person that speaks it, the faith that releases it, and the word that performs the transformation.

Jesus demonstrated this three fold combination when he spoke to the fig tree – destroying it from the roots up, and when he spoke to the spirit of death which was over Lazarus, and when he spoke to the widow’s son being carried in his coffin to his own funeral, and also to Jairus’ daughter who had died. He also demonstrated this when he spoke to the infirmities of leprosy, blindness, deafness, or to the dumb.

These miracles did not happen through some mystical power of mind control. Jesus, full of faith and power, spoke to the problem, and the word came forth out of his mouth; like a bullet leaving the barrel of a smoking rifle and finding the target it was sent to neutralize.

The apostles Peter and John, also demonstrated the power of the spoken word at the gate called Beautiful, when they spoke to the lame man, and said, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give unto thee; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” Because the apostles spoke the word of restoration in faith, the miracle happened.

The origin of this principle of the release of the spoken word was first demonstrated by God in Genesis when He said, “Let there be light: and there was light.” He repeated this same principle eight more times in the creation of the universe. The Bible actually proclaims that God holds the world in place by his word. Jesus proclaims that heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God will never pass away.

For the Christian to become effective in the realm of the supernatural, it is essential to realize the power of the spoken word in faith.

Power of the Spoken Word in Blessing

In the Old Testament there was a saying: “the word has gone forth.” Once the word of blessing had been spoken over an individual, it could not be revoked. We see this in the life of Jacob and Esau. Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, into pronouncing over his life the blessing that belonged to his brother, Esau. Once Isaac had been given the blessing to Jacob, he could not retrieve it and give it back to Esau.

A lot of the problems that we encounter in our lives today, are from words spoken in haste not realizing the power of the spoken word. In times of disappointment or anger, we say many things to each other “off the top of our heads,” releasing a curse, rather than a blessing over each other’s lives.

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

In this next chapter, we will look at “The Church: From Power to Decline,” and discover the truths that Satan had rob from the Church to bring her to a place of dead formalism.

Chapter 4

The Church: From Power to Decline

When you look at the Church from her genesis to this present age, it does not take much study to come to the realization that when the Church was birthed on the Day of Pentecost, her debut was one of great power. However, it did not take many years for this aggressive Church, that displayed such tremendous spiritual power, to decline into dead formalism.

This should come as no surprise to the student of the Bible, because the prophet Joel, in Joel 1:4 prophesied that this very thing would happen, when, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, he said, “That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.”

The picture that Joel is painting here is the decline of solid, practical Bible truth. He sees this in his mind’s eye as the stripping away of the foliage by an insect at the various stages of its growth, and likens the decay of this tree to the Church. He sees the decay starting with the palmerworm, the very beginnings of the insect. At this stage of the insect’s growth it eats very little. As a matter of fact, you would hardly know that the palmerworm had been eating any of the tree, if you did not know that you were looking for.

This is why the body of Christ needs men and women who are led by the Holy Spirit and are full of faith. Men like Kenneth Hagin, John Osteen, Fred Price, Ken Copeland, and many others too numerous to mention, who will view the tree, or the Church, from time to time – watchmen who will deal with the palmerworm before it turns into a caterpillar that feeds off the new growth of the tree.

However, many of watchmen have been like dumb dogs. They have not confronted the false apostles, prophets, and teachers, the ones who lay the larvae of the palmerworm. These false ministries are powerless. The doctrine they preach is one of harsh judgement that develops into bitterness, criticism, and a discontent that promotes laziness and unfaithfulness toward the true commission of Christ.

For the tragic decline of the Church to take place, the devil had to rob the Church of three foundational truths: justification by faith, water baptism, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. These three truths are based on the blood, the water, and the spirit, and each of these deal with a part of the tri-unity of man.

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

The Loss of “Justification by Faith”

The blood of Jesus brings man into a totally righteous state with God in the spirit realm. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that is the founding principle to the doctrine of justification by faith.

This precious truth was lost when the early Church denied that salvation could be obtained by releasing faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. This truth was then substituted with a “works doctrine” for salvation.

In order to do this, the early Church had to deny such scriptures as:

Ephesians 2:4-9, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for this great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Galatians 2:16, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Galatians 2:20-21, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness com by the law, the Christ is dead in vain.”

Galatians 5:1-4, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

The above are only a few of the New Testament scriptures that the early Church had to deny in order to develop the “works doctrine.”

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

Supernatural Empowerment Lost

The early Church also lost the baptism of the Holy Spirit within the first century after her birth. What happened on the day of Pentecost had become just a historical event that no longer had any relevance to the Church on a daily basis.

Losing this truth deprived the Church of the supernatural strength of God and caused her to revert back to mere human strength. For this truth to be lost, the early Church had to deny any scripture that referred to the power gifts or the revelation gifts. They also had to deny the ministry gifts of apostles and prophets.

Soon, there was no gift of discernment of spirits in operation, just the gift of suspicion. There was no word of wisdom or word of knowledge, but rather the gift of guessing. There was no gift of prophecy to confirm inner direction, only the gift of manipulation through human wisdom, and so on.

The Loss of Water Baptism

The same can be said about water baptism. Water baptism was given to the Church for the circumcision of the spirit. Baptism, by total immersion, was replaced by the ritual of sprinkling, which had no spiritual significance whatsoever. Again, to do this, the early Church had to deny such scriptures as:

Colossians 2:11-12 (Amplified), “In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, but in a (spiritual) circumcision (performed by) Christ by stripping off the body of the flesh (the whole corrupt, carnal nature with its passions and lusts). (Thus you were circumcised when) you were buried with Him in (your) baptism, in which you were also raised with Him (to a new life) through (your) faith in the working of God (as displayed) when He raised Him up from the dead.”

First Peter 3:21 (Amplified), “And baptism, which is a figure (of their deliverance), does now also save you (from inward questionings and fears), not by the removing of outward body filth (bathing), but by (providing you with) the answer of a good and clear conscience (inward cleanness and peace) before God, (because you are demonstrating what you believe to be yours) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Not only did the early Church have to deny important scripture, they also had to deny the analogy of Noah where the righteous were raised to the top of the water, and the unrighteous sank to the depths. And then, of course, there’s the account of Moses and Israel, who passed through the water while the oppressors drowned, and so on.

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

The Power is Available

As you can see, it was the denial of these three, above mentioned foundational truths that caused the Church to decline into a powerless state. The story of Samson can be likened to the Church today. Samson denied God and allowed Delilah to cut off his hair. Samson was still alive but found himself in a powerless state against the enemy that he once ruled over.

Friends, unless the Church comes to at least a limited revelation of the power base that is established within these three foundational truths, the saints will remain in a powerless state.

In the next chapter we will trace the steps of the Church from decline to power.

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

Chapter 5

The Church: From Decline to Power

After the early Church lost the foundational truths of justification by faith, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and water baptism, the Church slipped into a period that history calls the Medieval Times or the Dark Ages.

Restoration of Justification by Faith

It was during this time of darkness, in the sixteenth century, that a learned, young man with a degree in law, by the name of Martin Luther, became hungry for God and joined a Catholic monastery. Luther began to cry out to God in a desperate manner. He fasted and worked to earn his salvation. History records that in his efforts to rid himself of his feelings of unworthiness and to appease God, he even turned to such sadistic measures as beating himself with a whip. But all his efforts still left Luther unsatisfied with his walk with God.

He was then advised to make a pilgrimage to Rome to find the inner peace that he longed for. In the year 1517 he journeyed to Rome. While walking up the steps of St. Peter's Cathedral and reciting the Lord's Prayer on every step (in an effort to get his grandfather out of purgatory), he began to doubt the methodism used by the Catholic church to gain a relationship with God. After this, as he was reading Romans 1:16-17, the Holy Spirit quickened a rhema word to Luther: "The just shall live by faith."

Restoration Promised

God had begun to fulfill the second part of the prophet Joel's prophecy found in the Book of Joel 2:23-26, "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you, and my people shall never be ashamed."

The flame of restoration began to burn over God's people. But much to Luther's surprise, the Roman Catholic Church did not receive his new-found truth with open arms. Luther was persecuted greatly. Nevertheless, many individual people did believe, and Luther separated himself, with his newly formed followers, from the Catholic Church. The Lutheran Movement was formed and one major foundational truth, justification by faith, was restored to the Church.

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

Restoration of Water Baptism

It was only several years after the Holy Spirit had moved on Martin Luther, that God quickened another truth to three disciples of Luther: Hubmaier, Grebel, and Manz. In their study time, the Holy Spirit revealed to them the truth concerning water baptism by full immersion. Little did these men know that the restoration of this particular truth was going to have a price tag of human life.

With great enthusiasm these three men took their new-found truth of water baptism by full immersion to Martin Luther, only to experience the same rejection from Luther that he had experienced from the Catholic Church.

However, with the same zeal that Luther pursued the truth of justification by faith, Hubmaier, Grebel, and Manz pursued the truth of water baptism. This aggravated Luther to such an extent that he joined forces with the Catholic Church against the newly founded group known as the Anabaptists.

People who sought to be water baptized by full immersion, were, in many cases, tied to stakes in the ocean and in rivers so that when the tide came in, they were drowned. In other instances, they were held under water until they drowned. Nevertheless, just like the Lutherans, the Anabaptists grew in number on a daily basis despite the sadistic persecution they were suffering.

I have witnessed the same resistance to the truth of water baptism even in the twentieth century – especially in the third world countries amongst the Muslims and tribal cultures. You can conduct a revival and have thousands of people verbally acknowledge their faith in Jesus for salvation. But the moment you announce that you are going to have a water baptism service down at the local river, you are met with great resistance from the witch doctors and tribal elders or the radical sects within the Muslim movement. There is definitely a realm of finality in the realm of the spirit concerning water baptism!

Restoration of Baptism in the Holy Spirit

After the restoration of the two foundational truths, justification by faith and water baptism, many minor truths would be restored to the Church before the restoration of the final foundational truth: the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Men like John Calvin, in the year 1528, and John Knox, in the year 1547, gave momentum to the revival of the two foundational truths of justification by faith and water baptism. Then came the Quakers in 1647, followed by John Wesley in 1735, and the Holiness Movement in 1874 that finally led the Church into the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the year 1906.

Water Baptism: Ritual or Weapon?

Every one of these different ministries restored different truths to the Church. The restoration of spiritual empowerment through the baptism of the Holy Spirit first came through a man called Evan Roberts in Wales in the year 1896. Then the revival jumped across the Atlantic to the United States, and it was just before Christmas in the year 1900, when a Bible teacher by the name of Charles Parham delegated an assignment to his students – to research the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

After three days of intensive and independently-conducted study, the students came to the conclusion that the main evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues. This led the students to pray for a woman named Agnes Ozman, and after the laying on of hands, she gave evidence to the baptism of the Spirit by speaking in tongues.

It was then some time later, around the year 1906, in Los Angeles, California on a street called Azusa, that the truth of the baptism of the Holy Spirit really took hold, through a black preacher named William Seymour. Much controversy followed the restoration of this truth, just like the restoration of water baptism, and justification by faith.

When the truth of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was restored, the Church started to flex her spiritual muscles. Soon, many other truths, such as healing, prophecy, deliverance, the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, miracles, and so on, were evident in churches all over the world.

Friends, you do not have to be a prophet to realize that the Church in the twentieth century still struggles over these same three foundational truths. Satan hates them because they are the foundational weapons that Christ gave to the Church to bring her into the abundant life that he purchased for her on the Cross of Calvary. No believer will enter into total victory of spirit, soul, and body, unless these three foundational truths are firmly established in their own lives.