

THE FATAL FLAWS OF CHARISMANIA – Fatal Flaw #7: Failing to distinguish the Critical Difference Between Water Baptism and Spirit Baptism (Part 7 of 8)

The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome from Corinth in A.D.58. At that point, the transition away from the sign gifts of the apostolic era and toward the norms of the structural phase of the building of Christ's church, was reaching a point of completion. This explains why there is no admonition to the believers in Rome for practicing the sign gifts. Even Paul makes reference to his own apostolic ministry in Romans 15:17-21, marked by such signs and wonders, as an already accomplished fact. On the other hand, Paul does make reference to a "baptism" in Romans 6:3-4, that has been confused with baptism by immersion in water. This is actually a profound description of the spiritual baptism mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:13, which every believer receives at the moment of conversion, and its critical importance in our Christian life.

"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, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

What follows in Romans 6:5-11 is the application of Romans 6:3-4. Water baptism cannot be in view here, since the physical symbol cannot create this profound spiritual transformation described by Paul. The spiritual reality into which we enter, upon our conversion to Christ, can only be generated by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-7). Nevertheless, water baptism is designed to symbolize that spiritual reality being described by Paul in Romans 6. The physical aspect of baptism consists of immersion in water. The spiritual reality expressed in this immersion is our union with Jesus Christ, in His death and burial. Being lifted up out of the water personifies our resurrection into a new life with our Savior and Lord.

In light of all that we have learned thus far in regard to the critical difference between water baptism and Spirit baptism, we must also incorporate this truth into our overall understanding. When we submit to the ordinance of water baptism, we are symbolically identifying with Jesus Christ in His already accomplished death, burial and resurrection. But our submission to water baptism, is also a reciprocation on our part, in response to His identification with us, when He submitted to the baptism of John, symbolic of what He would yet accomplish on our behalf. This is why submission to the ordinance of water baptism can never be viewed as something optional by the believer. Even though water baptism is not a requirement of salvation (1 Corinthians 1:17; Acts 8:25-40; 16:25-31), it is a required act of obedience for every Christian.

This, in turn, establishes an important connection between Romans 6:3-4 and what Paul had previously written in 1 Corinthians 12:13,30. The baptism of Romans 6:3-4 is one and the same with that of 1 Corinthians 12:13. In addition, when the apostle mentions in 1 Corinthians 12:30 that "not all speak in tongues," can that in any way be construed as a rebuke to those who did not manifest this sign gift? Of course not! The very opposite is true. He says what he does in v30 for the express purpose of disassociating the gift of tongues from the baptism of the Spirit. Isn't it also significant that by the time that Paul writes his second letter to the church at Corinth in A.D.57, that there is no mention at all, in regard to the issue of speaking in tongues? Is this due to the fact that the Corinthians had learned their lesson from Paul's admonitions about the proper practice of tongues in his first epistle? Perhaps. Or, is it more likely, that the manifestation of tongues was beginning to cease in Corinth, as Paul told them it would in 1 Corinthians 13:8?