

Christ Rescued Me From the "Church of Christ" Pt. 2

By Larry Wessels

Bible Text: Romans 10:3, Galatians 1:6-9
Preached on: Wednesday, April 8, 2020

Christian Answers of Austin, Texas
9009 Martha's Drive
Austin, TX 78717

Website: www.biblequery.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/christiananswers

Chapter 7.

Heartbreaking providences. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep, seek thy servant for I do not forget thy commandments," Psalm 119:176. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit," Psalm 34:18.

Outside the church, I continued to live like any other lost sinner or so-called carnal Christian. Although I was still considered religious by the world, my life was void of any true power to live godly and since no one from church ever wanted to talk about the Bible outside of church, I became perfect prey for the Jehovah Witnesses who did, consequently I studied with them once or twice a week for four years, after all, they too had sprouted from the Stone-Campbell restoration movement so I found out that our religions had a lot of things in common such as free will, arminianism, moralistic humanism, works salvation, extreme legalism, an aversion to the Holy Spirit, ignorance concerning the Trinity, etc., but of course, I still found no solid spiritual foundation to cling to. Subsequently the sense of darkness in my life kept growing at alarming proportions, especially after nine years of marriage and four sons later when I found out their dad was having an affair with another man's wife. I truly didn't understand how God could allow me to be so hurt, betrayed and rejected. Although I knew I was far from perfect, I thought I was "close enough" by "doing right," staying in church, praying, reading the Bible and loving my family, and I thought I had repented for every sin I could think of and yet I was further away from God than ever so I wondered what in the world God wanted from me, even after doing all that I could to save my marriage, it still failed which puzzled me considering how I thought God was supposed to reward my "good moral behavior."

I was so confused, heartbroken and lost that I became even more rebellious against God. That's when carnal human logic mixed with self-righteous indignation became activating forces that plunged me even deeper into darkness. My transformation began with changing my wardrobe and replacing all of my modest clothes with more worldly seductive clothes. One underlying cause may have been to get revenge but the main reason was to try to be someone I wasn't for the "old me" had gotten hurt. I felt another blow like that would kill me so I was determined to never be hurt again by becoming a heartbreaker myself only to end up even more brokenhearted. Although I still kept up the

appearance of being "religious" by day, I once again became a "dancing queen" by night, gathering crowds around me. So when the boys would go to their dad's house on the weekend, I started going to nightclubs and even tried to numb my emotional pain by experimenting with alcohol for the first time in my life only to be disappointed for it did not help at all and was just "not my cup of tea." But since "keeping up appearances" was what really mattered in the COC, it helped me to justify my actions and my anger.

COC sermons encouraged me to think that I was better than my ex-husband and his new mistress all because I was "religious" and they weren't. I also became so driven by selfish ambition that I appeared successful from a worldly point of view for I really seemed to have my act together on the outside. Although it was a messed up kind of survival mode, it seemed to work for me for a while.

I was still heavily involved in the COC teaching Sunday school and raising the boys on my own while working as a medical housekeeper until I found a way to get the boys out of daycare which kept them sick all the time. By painting my first mural at the medical center, I started a small commissioned mural art business and portfolio. Soon after, I was able to enroll in college full-time so that I could have the flexible schedule I needed with the boys. The problem was that I had to maintain a certain grade point average in order to keep my grants and scholarships which put me under extreme stress and took time away from motherhood, but the church pumped up my pride and self-esteem by singing me praises for such an undertaking, never mind that I was losing focus on my original intent to spend more time with my children. Worldly success was what really mattered. I had to look good on the outside and appear to be superwoman so I carved out a whole new image for myself, new hairstyle, new look, new figure, and a new attitude, a worldly self-confidence.

I appeared to be at my peak in talent beauty and brains from a worldly point of view, but I remember being cut to the core by Jesus' words, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Matthew 16:26. I began looking in the mirror and wondering who I had become. It was as if I was living a double life. No matter how together I seemed to be on the outside, I was dying on the inside and the boys were starting to sense it. I, too, sensed an impending doom but instead of turning to God, I started to run from him in rebellion for I did not trust him. Then one weekend I even ended up in New York City which was totally out of character for a little country bumpkin like me, yet I tried to take my fill of worldly company, fancy restaurants, art galleries and sightseeing to escape the emptiness I felt inside, but I kept sensing that God was going to catch up with me like he did Jonah.

The sense of doom was so severe that I started having thoughts of throwing myself off the tour boat into the Hudson River, yet by God's mercy I made it back to land. Then suddenly I heard a loud voice penetrating the darkness of my mind screaming, "Repent." I turned around and there was a street preacher with Bible in hand looking straight at me. As a small town girl, I had never had such an encounter. Time seemed to stand still as my conscience was blasted with one blow after another. At first I thought, "Surely God is not just singling me out," so I looked around to see how many others were stopped in their

tracks and incredibly enough I noticed it was just me. I felt so offended that everyone else seemed to be able to get away with everything yet I couldn't even get away with what I perceived to be "just one little rebellious streak" against God. Hundreds of people all around me seemed to be so caught up in the hustle and bustle of the world that they didn't even seem bothered, yet I was cut to the heart by the thought that no matter how far I ran, I could never completely escape God and though I was finally able to move on, little did I know then that I would treasure that moment forever because God was catching up with me.

After years of trying to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders from a devastating divorce, deep darkness and rebellion against God, I was running out of diversions. All of the housework, yard work, homework, artwork, church work and every other work to distract myself were all having an accumulative effect. It was all taking an unbearable toll upon me and I knew that I could not keep it all up for very much longer, but instead of whole-heartedly turning to God, I was determined to fulfill every worldly desire before I died, yet my plans got frustrated when I became so shaken by that street preacher so that I got down on my knees in a motel room and began crying uncontrollably. I begged God to forgive me for trying to run from him and I begged him to get me back home safe with my boys despite all the pressure to try to make up for their dad's absence.

After a turbulent air flight that almost scared the life out of me, God answered that prayer, so when I got back home, I slowly began to distance myself from my worldly friends and took a long hard look at my life and the direction I had been going. I began to realize that it was a miracle of God that I wasn't kidnapped or sold into human trafficking or something, after all, I was stalked in New York by a guy in a black suit with a black briefcase. It occurred to me that I could've ended up like an ancestor of mine who had also been an artist, she had sunk into a deep depression and instead of turning to God, she left her family and went to New York to pursue her artistic fantasy of opening up another art studio only to be found floating in the Hudson River. So I was very thankful to make it back home, yet little did I know that I'd be plunged into even deeper waters.

COC leaders made it a point to tell me that if my ex-husband didn't divorce his mistress and reconcile with me, he'd go to hell. They made it painfully clear that if I didn't live a life of complete loneliness and leave the door open for him to come back, I would cause him to go to hell and myself too, so I pleaded 1 Corinthians 7:15, "If the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases." But I was told that didn't apply to me because I had complicated things by dating before the divorce was final, even though I was previously encouraged to. As a painful consequence, my mind plummeted to the depths of despair. Spiritual anguish overcame me and manifested in paralyzing panic attacks, severe clinical depression, a complete nervous breakdown, chronic adrenal fatigue and what my doctor thought to be the beginning symptoms of MS. I was at the end of my rope physical, mentally and spiritually. Although I had begun to desperately look outside of myself for relief, God kept me from finding any help or relief in friends, doctors, psyche meds or psychotherapy which all seemed only to make me worse off than ever.

After a lifetime of never having blessed assurance, never being able to trust in the weak Jesus our church falsely depicted, never knowing the true Jesus, never being able to live up to all that was expected of me, never being able to handle a life of perfectionism and condemnation, the thoughts of impending doom kept coming to my mind with even more force. I was no longer able to eat, sleep or do anything but vomit uncontrollably. I would quietly do it in the bathroom sink to keep the boys from worrying about me because they would get so insecure and clingy when they knew I was sick, but I finally got so severe that I had to keep a "puke pan" for lack of a better term, with me at all times, even when I drove, even using it during doctor visits and counseling sessions. I even had to keep it in my college backpack so I could use it for stomach acid while taking finals in the hallway. It was like having the worst case of flu imaginable but with no end in sight.

So landed in the hospital several times that year while an elderly couple from church would take the boys in, but after the last hospital stay, I was still so unable to function that the couple recruited another lady in the church to take me in for a few days because my family was still shunning me while supporting my brother who was threatening and harassing me due to his experimentation with drugs and satanism, and my ex was flaunting his mistress so I was also suffering due to the sins of others. I was so thankful for help but the COC's performance based approval produced legalist fear if we didn't "behave" well enough, so the boys and I were under constant pressure to act perfect even in the midst of such crisis.

No one in our church or family wanted to talk about God outside the church or about the impact of divorce on the boys or the spiritual struggles that I was going through. Though I was already carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders with constant waves of nausea, even heavier burdens were being put upon me as I was told to try harder, be stronger and do better, but it was as if a switch had been turned off in my body and mind to keep me from ever attempting such feats again. I became so weak that I was barely even able to walk. I got down to skin and bones and looked like death, yet I couldn't bear the thoughts of leaving my boys without a mom, so with nowhere else to turn, I began to desperately seek God for help and suitably I was led to Bible passages that seemed to speak directly to my brokenness such as, "When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up," Psalm 27:10. "For thy master is thine husband, for the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit and a wife of youth when thou was refused, saith thy God, for a small moment I have forsaken thee but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on thee, saith the Lord my Redeemer," Isaiah 54:5-8.

While I tried to cling to those words for dear life, the holiness of God and the worth of heaven began to come upon me like a fiery force that could not be shaken for I felt that I had lost all hope of attaining it. As a heart-rendering result, I was losing the will to live but I was too afraid to die. After weeks of not being able to eat, sleep or barely even keep water down, the paralyzing fear of hell constantly flooded my mind with horror. I got weaker and weaker as my conscience became so wounded at the realization of how bad sin really was, an eternal offense against the eternal God with eternal consequences. I was

so heavy-hearted and weary of my life all I could do was cry out to God for mercy from a heart truly broken over sin, for I knew I deserved hell. At that point, I began to give up on ever being able to repent enough or be good enough. I realized that I had nothing of eternal worth to commend myself to God, not even my good works because I finally realized that I could never do enough good to make up for a single sin or failure in my life.

Then all of a sudden, a fiery dart penetrated the depths of my soul with the thought that I may have been predestined for hell. Instantly, I was so struck with horror and broken in spirit that I began to feel as though my sanity would break. With faintness of heart, I dreadfully gave myself up to God to do whatever he willed to do with me as I hung in doubtful suspense. Then it was as if all the strength in my body and mind began to melt away, ready to sink into hell forever. In such distress of soul, I seemed past recovery and bound for eternal torment. It was as if I was being crushed into the ground by the weight of sin as I fell into the depths of despair.

I painfully accepted the fact that I lacked the perfect righteousness I so desperately needed to enter God's holy presence and by remembering Scripture, I realized that the curse that had been pronounced upon me by the moral law of God could never be reversed by anything I did, so all I could do was pray the most intense prayer of my life and I distinctly remember it like it was just yesterday. "Dear God in heaven, I have tried everything I know to do to try to be good enough and I just keep failing. I can't do it. I can never be good enough to get to heaven. I know that you are God and I know that you are holy and good, so that if you see fit to send me to hell, I know that you are just and I have no choice but to submit to your righteousness and judgment. I know I deserve to be in the fiery depths of hell for eternity, yet even though I know that I have no hope of heaven, I will still serve you anyway because you are God. I will serve you for nothing in return. Even if I'm predestined for hell, I will serve you as long as I live for there is nothing else."

Immediately, it was brought to my mind remembrance of the Savior. I remembered the name of Jesus. Though I had heard it my whole life from behind the pulpit, I had never been able to trust in him due to all the lies that were preached about him. Almost simultaneously, memory of the words "believe with the heart," Romans 10:10, was brought to my mind and at that moment, my life seemed to hang by a thread at the very mouth of hell for I knew I didn't have that kind of heart faith. I was completely undone. I had no rest, no peace and no hope unless Christ rescued me.

It began to dawn on me that no one from the church ever even once mentioned the name of Jesus to me during their routine brownie point visits. When I would try to explain my spiritual struggles and lack of faith, I was met with complete complacency for they were totally unfamiliar with such dealings from God. So as miserable comforters, they would only say, "Where there's a will, there's a way," and they were not talking about God's will. Our beliefs gave them no reason to direct me to Jesus as my only hope, all they could do was encourage me to believe in myself and my own fallen will to "do right."

As a result, I realized that I was actually losing all faith and hope in our church's "do more, try harder" moralism that placed such a low value on Christ by implying that we could overcome sin with self-effort. For the first time in my life, I began to highly esteem Christ for I realized that my self-effort was futile means of overcoming sin and that I could never be good enough to deserve heaven. Despite being on the verge of hell with inexpressible anguish in my soul, the name of Jesus gave me a ray of hope. I was beginning to get a glorious glimpse of the worth of Jesus and the worth of faith in him. Little did I realize I was being drawn to Christ by God's grace through the means of prayer as I pleaded with all my heart, "Dear God in heaven, if Jesus is real and if he is truly the Savior, please give me faith in him because your word says he's the only way to heaven and believing in him from the heart is the only way to be saved. I realize from reading your word that he's my only hope but I know that I'm not able to believe from the heart like I'm supposed to. I realize I need faith in Jesus to be saved so would you please give me this faith if it be your will? And if you allow me to keep living, please heal me for the boys' sake. I realize they need me now more than ever. Please help us, Lord. Please rescue me. I ask in Jesus' name. Amen."

Unlike many of the outlandish "altar call" stories that are told in some circles, I didn't have an uncontrollable laughing spell, end up in a trance under a church pew, or get pressured into a false profession of faith. My emotions were not hijacked by mood altering music playing in the background or by emotionally charged prayers being vocalized over me. Instead, after that night alone with God in intense prayer, I just left my soul in his hands and he kept gently drawing my mind to his word. Everything I read led me to realize how much I need to believe with all my heart in Jesus' ability to save, so I continued to constantly plead for God to give me that kind of heart faith because I realized I was completely at his mercy. I prayed that he would help my unbelief for I knew I had only head knowledge of Jesus (and it wasn't even the true Jesus of the Bible). I didn't fully realize it then but I needed to know the true Jesus who is able to save all who truly come to him to be made holy, Hebrews 7:25.

Amidst all of my struggles, it also began to dawn on me that no one in the church seemed to manifest a living faith in Jesus for they never talked about him or anything he had done in their lives. What became even more striking to me was that it didn't even seem to bother them, whereas I was tormented with the realization that I didn't have that kind of faith. I was so stricken with grief and mental anguish over sin but instead of being directed to Jesus, I was looked upon as just having an overly sensitive conscience that would easily be fixed by stricter focus on "doing better," and when I struggled to make it clear that I couldn't, I was severely reprimanded yet I knew there was nothing I could do but seek God so I kept using the means he provided (prayer and his word), hoping his promise was true, that those who truly seek him will finally find him, Deuteronomy 4:29.

So along with my "puke pan," I started taking my Bible with me everywhere I went, even holding it to my heart all night while trying to sleep. Every thought of my mind, every desire in my heart, and every ounce of my strength that I had left was directed to God for mercy as I began to flee to Christ for refuge so that I could lay hold of the hope that was set before me in God's word, Hebrews 6:18. The ability for me to even plead for mercy

was a mercy in itself. It was proof that God was not leaving me to myself in false religion. Though I could not fully comprehend it at the time, God's goodness in my brokenness was that he was breaking my former religious pride so that I could begin to see how fallen I was from his glory and how I needed Jesus to rescue me. For the first time in my life, I knew I was not able to pull off "my part" of salvation. I began to realize that the only part I had ever pulled off was all of the sinning. Even all of my good works were dead without Christ. I knew that only he could do all of the saving or else I would be lost forever.

After a lifetime of apprehensions toward Christ and the gospel, I could no longer believe the COC's lies that had set forth a way of salvation and sanctification that only led to a miserable end. It had shipwrecked any possibility of true faith with a different Jesus and a different gospel, a Savior who couldn't really save unless I cooperated enough. I could no longer try to believe in a blood atonement that only covered some sins, not all sins, such as my treacherous sin of unbelief, an atonement that couldn't actually atone and a Redeemer that couldn't really redeem unless I redeemed and reformed myself first. Thankfully, God was not giving me over to such profane lies for I could no longer even attempt to believe such absurdity. Instead, he kept directing me to the truth by driving me to the light and testimony of Scripture where Jesus is presented as a complete Savior. He began opening the Scriptures to my mind in small increments here and there just when I needed them.

As my spiritual struggle with demonic assaults and God's chastening continued to rage on in a battle for my soul, all the gospel songs that we would sing in church also began coming to my mind in small increments as they were actually written, not as they had been filtered and watered down behind the pulpit. I even began waking up through all hours of the night with gospel songs in my heart. Although I could barely even speak, I was being taught to make melody in my heart to the Lord, and when I realized from Scriptures that it was God who was giving me songs in the night (Psalm 42:8; Psalm 77:6; Psalm 149:5; and Acts 16:25), I was encouraged to keep waiting upon him as he kept bringing me to the end of myself where all I could do was pray constantly that he would grant me the faith I so desperately needed in order to truly believe in the Jesus represented in the Bible and in our old gospel songs, the Jesus who wasn't just a potential Savior but the real Savior, Matthew 1:21, the Savior who didn't allow any that he died for to perish in hell, the Savior who actually saves actual people rather than just making everyone hypothetically or potentially "savable," the Savior who actually rescues his people. "I will seek that which is lost and bring again that which was driven away and I will bind up that which was broken and will strengthen that which was sick," Ezekiel 34:16.

Chapter 8.

From the frying pan into the fire. "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption," 2 Peter 2:19.

After days and days of suffering that seemed to stretch on for eternity, God strengthened me enough to get back home to take care of myself and the boys again which was nothing short of a miracle. To help the muscle twitches, weakness and pain in my legs, I had to constantly monitor my stress levels and avoid all processed foods, but a stress free life with four rambunctious little boys was next to impossible. I could not let them down for they required a tremendous amount of energy and attention, so I began to experiment with different kinds of smoothies to try to keep my strength up because dystonic tremors used up so much of my energy, I developed hypoglycemia from chronic low blood sugar which was actually making the tremors worse and contributing to my nausea and loss of appetite. It was a vicious cycle that I couldn't break out of until God gave me the wisdom to force myself to drink a health smoothie every two hours, however, until then, I continued to discretely throw up in the bathroom sink with the water running to keep the boys from worrying and feeling insecure. I had to be strong for them but the silent suffering was so painful that I'd often wonder if God would ever come through for me, heal me and give me the faith I needed in Jesus. I would also constantly grapple with the dark thoughts of why God would allow such intense suffering. It was as if God had put me on a "forced fast" to keep my mind stayed upon seeking him.

Although it was difficult to have to drink all of my meals in order to survive and take care of the boys, God gave me the will to live, yet no amount of veggies, vitamins, herbs or sardine and fruit smoothies could ever completely heal me. Yes, I said sardine, if that gives you any idea of how desperate I was. Unrelenting sickness, heartache, spiritual struggles, and the conflicts of going through a major theological transition on top of everything else were turning my life upside down. The devil, my own flesh, and worldly influences were constant companions that would toss me to and fro as to which way to go in my sad condition.

Some very insensitive remarks would also come my way such as the suggestion that my struggles stemmed from my missing church on some Sunday nights even though I was deathly sick and exhausted, so around that time I really began to ask a lot of questions in the church, especially after becoming convicted over some of the lyrics in my rock-n-roll music that I wanted to start replacing with Christian music. I asked some COC leaders if it would be okay for me to listen to Christian music as long as it was just in the privacy of my own home. The answer was an unequivocal, no. I was told that worship can never be accompanied by music no matter where it takes place or it would be a sin. So I asked if I was better off just sticking with the music that had bad lyrics at home and the answer was, yes. This was so shocking and confusing to me. It seemed so contradictory that the church would discourage and even condemn gospel music, yet encourage something with bad lyrics instead. I couldn't believe my ears.

Such incidents were just the starting point of many to follow which I would file away for further analysis once I got out from under such spiritual bondage. Things were just not adding up. But looking back, I realize that if I had been told that it was alright to listen to gospel music at home, it would have compromised the COC's legalistic rule of keeping worship music out of the church; since they must have obviously realized that God can be worshiped anywhere, they had to protect their church tradition by saying music can't

accompany worship no matter where it takes place. At this point, I needed to clarify that I personally loved singing gospel hymns without music, especially in a group setting for music can be distracting when it's used to manipulate emotions or when it drowns out voices which are both common abuses today, but it's a peripheral issue that salvation should never be based upon which is what the COC system did. It even led to the extreme of protecting man-made traditions at the cost of directing someone against their conscience back into worldliness.

Thankfully, God kept faithfully leading me out of such horrendous darkness by gradually continuing to break down all of my COC conditioning. I began to go through horrific spells of being fully aware that I was so deep in darkness that it would take a miracle of God to bring me out of it, and yet I knew that my only hope of being reconciled to him was through Jesus, so during such intense spiritual torment, I began to often say out loud, "I choose Christ." Sometimes I'd even be driving down the road when a song like "Highway to Hell" would play on the radio and I'd be compelled to turn it off and say out loud, "No, I choose Jesus." Little did I know then that it was actually him choosing me and enabling me to choose him. Little by little he was rescuing me and pulling me out of all the darkness in this world and all the delusions I had previously leaned on so heavily, yet spiritual blindness, ignorance and error were still the devil's playground in my life for months to come as I was still being drawn out of the kingdom of darkness that had kept me bound for so long.

The devil hates losing his captives but God began to give me a strange type of discernment that allowed me to get a taste and feel of how sick evil was. In fact, it was allowed to make me so sick mentally, physically and especially spiritually that my whole body would shake and writhe under the weight of it, and strangely my attention would often be drawn to a certain pagan object in my house that would make me feel so sick that I'd have to throw it away before I could get any relief. For instance, one item that began to make me sick was a picture I had taken with Deepak Chopra, one of Oprah Winfrey's gurus at one of his seminars on "Quantum Healing." I had treasured that souvenir but could no longer stomach the sight of it, so I ended up throwing it in the garbage and immediately I began to sense relief in my spirit.

After that, I began to throw away many New Age books I had collected over the years, even though they blended so well with the self-help philosophies of the COC theology. Simultaneously, I kept sensing that something was terribly wrong with our religion, so after asking many unsettling questions, the open contradictions and obscure answers left me with no choice but to write a letter to my church leaders letting them know that I was going to visit other Churches of Christ to see if I could find answers I was looking for. To say the least, that did not go over very well. My resignation was met with complete resistance and hostility instead of compassion and concern. My children and I were heavily harassed by condemning letters and condescending visits from the church. My 12 year old was even sent a letter stating that he'd better get his mom to come back to church or be in danger of hell. We were told that we had to be joined to them as members or be lost. Acts 9:26 was even used to try to support that theory. The church also only recommended one other COC out of all the dozens of others in our area (we are infested),

but when I chose a different COC that was not hand-picked by them (one that happened to have a kitchen), I was officially excommunicated with a nasty letter that had all the elders' signatures on it (except for one brave soul that stood against such abuses of authority), which served to convince me even more that something was terribly wrong with our theology that would lead to such prideful actions.

So that was the "straw that broke the camel's back," so to speak. Although I continued to visit other COC's, I never again joined any of them for I found that they all had the same basic theology. But then I unknowingly ended up in yet another branch of arminian theology. Out of such a deep spiritual hunger for God and his truth, I started watching televangelists. As a consequence, I began to seek the kind of church that I thought they portrayed, one that at least seemed alive and not dead as a door nail. Little did I know that I was being led into the same trap that so many find themselves in after leaving the COC. "From the frying pan into the fire." I went into the neo-Pentecostal word of faith movement which initially seemed to be the answer to what was missing in my life.

God's great mercy and patience with me during my spiritual pilgrimage from the COC was incredible, for like most who make an exodus from the COC, I embarked on a journey where I ignorantly entered upbeat, mainstream megachurches where the true gospel was replaced with the healthy, wealthy and wise prosperity gospel. Biblical counseling was replaced with self-help humanistic psychology. True worship was replaced with repetitive "Jesus is my boyfriend" music. True prayer was replaced with "positive confessions" and New Age "contemplation," and true conversion was replaced with wild subjective experiences and free will decisionism. What I really found to be interesting was that their only major problem against the COC was that it was not into their false tithing doctrine, music in the church, hyper-grace, the charismatic gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, etc. because like all other popular modern sensations that move the masses, the main focus was always on shallow issues, the exact same arminian roots as the COC. They just added on a different set of "how-to" studies, conferences and seminars on "doing better" or "trying harder" at this, that and everything for extremism is the name of the game in any false religion where one legalistic hangup is just exchanged for another.

Though most exit the COC because of its spiritual void and extreme legalism, many are often surprised to find that there are pitfalls in the opposite extreme as well. There's never a balance in arminian circles because their theology is contradictory and inconsistent. That is why they often have a subtle mixture of both legalism and license to sin, so it's no wonder that I met up with many other ex-COC members on my pilgrimage who were also free-floating from cult to cult just as I was searching for answers.

It was in those circles that I also got hooked up with arminian witch doctors (of course they don't confess that about themselves). Some were Amish, some COC, and some word of faith etc. Despite their differences, they all still had the same basic theology at the root of their practice with the added feature of pantheism, the false belief that God is an impersonal "life force" that flows through all things, rocks, trees, plants, people, and would have to include the devil whether they realized it or not. It's the main philosophy

behind every healing therapy that claims to utilize "universal energy" which they blasphemously refer to as the Holy Spirit when it's actually "the prince of the power of the air," Ephesians 2:2. Be redefining God as an energy that can be hindered by "negativity," healing charlatans claim to have the positive power to detect and remove "negative interferences," through the use of dousing tools. These channeling tools range from their own hands to pendulum rocks, sticks (as in water witching), radionic devices that diagnose mineral deficiencies, or whatever can be used like a Ouija board to seek out hidden knowledge.

In a similar way, the COC performs a type of "water witching" when it comes to baptism by implying that one can channel Christ through water and cause him to save by going through the baptismal formula. By believing one has to "contact the blood" in the water, one can easily be led into viewing baptism as a ritual similar to Catholic Mass where a priest claims to "transubstantiate" or transform the physical elements of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus. Although the COC denies an actual physical contact with Jesus' blood and confesses that Catholic Mass is satanic, its doctrine of baptismal regeneration still dangerously implies the same kind of errors which is one reason it's headed back to Rome.

It was no wonder that I was so vulnerable to deeper levels of the occult, but thankfully God gradually began showing me through his word that he cannot be channeled or called down from heaven to enter anything including baptismal water. His word reveals that he is not in everything and doesn't approve of everything. He is omnipresent yet transcendent and not part of his creation, 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7-16; and Acts 17:24-28. God is a personal Spirit being and not an impersonal "energy force" that's subject to manipulation and change. He offers a personal relationship with us through his Son Jesus Christ who suffered, died and rose again so that sinners can receive God's mercy and have eternal life.

Chapter 9.

Pragmatism. Threat in the cornbread. "Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men, and they counted the price of them and found it 50,000 pieces of silver," Acts 19:19.

Other common phrases for modern pragmatism are "whatever works for you," or "to each his own," and its rising influence upon society is causing men to buy into it literally. Its sick motto is that "the end justifies the means" or "whatever produces positive results must be the truth," which portrays God as a tool that humans can use to secure their own ends. So if obeying the true gospel of Christ isn't what "works," so if obeying the true gospel of Christ isn't what "works," then an alternative is chosen, and since the COC system didn't have the true Jesus and the true gospel in the first place, it made us even more vulnerable to "alternatives," and that's exactly what the New Age offers, after all, many alternative doctrines and therapies appear to be good just as the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden appeared good at first, Genesis 3:6, because according to Scripture the devil loves to pose as an angel of light by getting people to believe "the energy" working

behind certain doctrines and so-called "therapies" is God, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, but such counterfeit light is nothing more than divination or witchcraft. Examples, Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Jeremiah 14:14; Hosea 4:12.

So by desperately seeking a cure for my sickness through such avenues, God chastened me even more. After many unfortunate events, horrific experiences, and a near death episode, he had mercy on me and allowed my sense to be exercised so that I could learn to discern between good and evil, Hebrews 5:14, for God's word is a sufficient guide to help us distinguish the works of the Holy Spirit from the works of the devil. For that reason, I was eventually able to part ways with arminian "faith healers," but since those of us who were from the COC never learned the truth about the Holy Spirit in the first place, we were the most prone to that kind of deception.

I can remember only one sermon that focused solely on the Holy Spirit and how he is a divine person of the Godhead. It was when our COC was trying out new preachers to replace the one that had retired. Needless to say, that particular preacher did not get the position. He was seen as being too controversial for the COC system that limits the Holy Spirit to just being the mere influence of the word made effective by baptism, when in actuality he's the divine agent who effectively wields the word like a sword that cuts to the heart, Hebrews 4:12. COC sermons belittled the biblical concept of being eternally indwelled and sealed by the Holy Spirit. It was even mockingly asked how he could ever actually enter into a person through the hand or foot, yet it was never denied that the devil entered Judas Iscariot, therefore it was implied that the devil had the power to enter a person but the Holy Spirit didn't. Naturally, the evil spirit behind the COC system never wanted to know about demonic possession even though many of our members showed signs of it, so by having the wool pulled over our eyes, we became even more vulnerable to every wind of doctrine promoted by wolves in sheep's clothing because we were not rooted and grounded in the truth.

So it's crucial to note that our church, like most other modern churches, didn't have a problem with acupuncture, iridology, reflexology, Reiki, bio-energetic assessments, and many other healing therapies that claim to tap into what they call universal "energy" meridians. This forbidden knowledge was meant to get us "into" with out own divinity and help us to "tap into" our inerrant universal "spark of goodness" which demonically displaced God's Spirit and the fact that he only indwells and sanctifies his own. Though there has never been any real scientific evidence to prove significant medical benefit from such, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence which are merely placebo testimonials of those who have fallen prey for such a perversion of the gospel, Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 4:1.

I have a few testimonies of my own about the demonic power working behind such therapies which is why I can now warn others to never underestimate the power of suggestion. It has been the devil's main tool since the garden of Eden. All he has to do is start the process enough to get us to doubt God's truth and exchange it for a lie. By getting Adam and Eve to focus on temporary results instead of the long term spiritual consequences of rebelling against God, they fell for the suggestion to eat forbidden fruit,

and this is exactly how pragmatism works today. It's just the same old lie that's been repackaged which reminds me of the time I went into business with one of those very persuasive "life coaches" to sell a product that they claimed to be a cure-all, but once I started doing my own research, I found out that it was full of cheap fillers with barely any of the main ingredient that was supposed to help people. So I found another product that just had the main ingredient minus all the fillers at the same price. Excited about what I had found, I went back to them thinking they'd surely rather sell this instead for they acted like they really wanted to help people. Little did I know then that I had gotten into what's called a pyramid scheme, so to my surprise they told me that it would be crazy to stop selling the flawed product because they were making a fortune off people, and when they saw how shocked I was, they tried to convince me that it wasn't really dishonest for if people really believed it helped, then it would.

All that a peddler of pragmatism has to do is convince gullible people that something works and they will experience a major placebo effect, the question is would they still buy into it if they knew they were just being tricked into thinking it was working? Sadly many would because they'd rather exchange the truth for a lie as long as they get some temporary results. This is described perfectly in Isaiah 30:9-10 where it says, "This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord which say to the seers see not, and to the prophets prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits," and that is why the iconic detox foot pad scam is so highly promoted by arminian charlatans. Similar to the foot pad scam exposed in 2008, it has fooled many. One can only imagine how cheated many feel after finding out they have spent tons of money to soak their feet in electrode corrosion, and it can happen to anyone, especially the sick and vulnerable ones who have been through the wringer by the medical establishment. But having been there myself, I can honestly say the biggest concern isn't the money people are being duped out of but what they're being duped into spiritually.

Thankfully, God's word is loaded with biblical insight into what we need to look out for. For instance, 1 Timothy 6:20-21 helped break the spell in my own life by warning me that I should be "avoiding profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so-called with some professing have erred concerning the faith." Like evolution, I realized many healing therapies have no scientific evidence to back up their claims and prove to be fraudulent once they are investigated, and these kind of therapies perfectly fit into the category of "curious arts" mentioned in Acts 19:19. So when we subject ourselves to such, we are actually buying into a false religious system that severely distorts and perverts the biblical concept of God.

The one common thread behind their philosophies is that most draw upon arminian humanism and Eastern religion which both have a free will concept of self-salvation, therefore there's no excuse for rebelling against God by getting involved in such dangerous practices because Scripture has clearly warned us to avoid anything that could put us into direct contact with demons who work behind the scenes to try to make the philosophies behind certain practices seem true, Ephesians 5:11; 1 Peter 5:8. They not only put one at risk financially, mentally and physically, but most importantly spiritually.

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit," Colossians 2:8. Even though "many shall follow their pernicious ways," we must remember that "through covetousness shall they with vain words make merchandise of you," 2 Peter 2:2-3, and I had to learn the hard way.

In those circles, I also became involved in "prayer groups" that took arminianism to its logical extreme which drastically diminished hope in the finished work of Christ. The "energies of prayer" as their preferred Message Bible puts it, was to be exerted by us in order to take dominion back from the devil for their blasphemy taught that God "lost control" over the world when Adam and Eve supposedly handed it over to the devil when they sinned, so our own works had to purge the earth of all evil before Christ would return. They ignored the fact that although Jesus had given his people over to all evil, only Jesus has all power, Matthew 28:18. God still has complete dominion over all things including the forces of darkness, Matthew 6:13; Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 5:11. No one, not even the devil can do anything unless God allows it and when Jesus comes again, he himself will purge the world of all evil, Revelation 19. Until then, God gives his people keys to the door of heaven, Jesus, for the gospel is life to those loosed for heaven and death to those bound for hell, Matthew 6:19; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17.

In contrast, arminianism led to dominionism where man takes charge. No wonder absurd "spiritual warfare" tactics were carried out by self-proclaimed seers, prayer warriors, curse breakers, prophetic intercessors, inner healers, and psychospiritual counselors who would give exhausting legalistic orders to pray in tongues so many minutes a day to make so many "declarations" per day, example, pleading the blood, to put a sign of the cross with "anointed" oil or salt everywhere to ward off evil, or to utilize "specially formulated prayers" that allegedly gave us the power to "speak things into existence," like God to break "generational curses" or to "reverse the curse" of witches who we were always in competition with for we used the same conjured up devices as they did. One "exorcist" even suggested cutting up pieces of "prayer cloths" in people's food to deliver them from demons, but one can only imagine trying to explain thread in the cornbread. But sad to say, it's all par for the course when arminianism goes to seed.

Do it yourself religion is fertile breeding ground that paves the way for being "carried about with every wind of doctrine," Ephesians 4:14. By redefining God as something that can be hindered or controlled by human free will, almost any false doctrine can be implemented no matter how ridiculous. No wonder my grandma used a homemade pendulum (a string tied to her wedding ring) to try to determine the gender of my brother before he was born, and no wonder we were all ignorant of such dangerous dabbling and thought it was just fun and interesting to experiment with. Although false religion can stir religious affections to a fever pitch, it can never save for it robs people of the power of the true gospel and leaves them spiritually bankrupt.

The COC and others like it are rip-off religions with a sham salvation that is theologically threadbare for arminianism is a fertile seed bed for every form of deception that offers spiritual diversions from the sovereign Lordship of Christ and attempts to fill the empty void, but God calls us to repent and trust in Jesus' righteousness alone. I'm living proof

that he still continues to rescue his sheep from all the messes they get themselves into. There is still much more to learn and we need him to grant us the discernment to "abstain from all appearances of evil," 1 Thessalonians 5:22, whether it concerns our health, finances, relationships or eternity. From experience, I know how hard it is to resist religious rackets and false claims when one so desperately needs healing, but we have to learn to "trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not on thine own understanding, in all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes, fear the Lord and depart from evil. It shall be health to the navel and marrow to thy bones," Proverbs 3:5-8.

Chapter 11.

Blessed assurance. "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," Romans 8:16. "That ye may know that ye have eternal life," 1 John 5:13.

As the Holy Spirit kept graciously guiding me to Christ Jesus through faith and guarding me from all the COC's false interpretations by directing me deep into what Scripture conveys, I was finally able to start resisting the devil's lies. For the first time in my life, all the pieces of the puzzle started to come together as God's word shined with power into my heart enabling me to finally perceive its beauty and cohesiveness, 2 Corinthians 4:6. The love that began to well up within me for the Lord was so strong I could barely endure the strength of it. I remember being brought to tears when God finally gave me the blessed assurance that he accepted the righteousness of Christ on behalf of sinners like me and that Jesus had been pursuing and rescuing me from slavery to sin and COC lies all along. Though I had been such a burned out, tangled mess of confusion all those years, God had been rewiring me. He had even used sickness to draw me to Christ and to keep me in constant communion with him which revealed that they were sanctified afflictions rather than judgments. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes," Psalm 119:67 and 71.

At the moment I realized these truths, I finally whole-heartedly believed Jesus had truly saved me. Needless to say, Jesus became precious to me as I perceived a peace in my soul that he had always loved me with an everlasting love and that I was his forever. By the Lord giving me such strong consolation, I was finally able to know true supernatural and eternal "joy and peace and believing," Romans 15:13, without a terrifying fear of losing my faith and ending up in hell. God saved me because Jesus is perfect, not because my faith, repentance or knowledge of his truth was perfect. God confirmed and confronted me in the truth that he had graciously delivered me from such paralyzing doubt and spiritual blindness. I was so thankful that he had revealed the true Christ of Scripture to me and that he had been building my faith in him all along though I was unable to generate a single ounce of it myself. The Comforter came and bore witness with my spirit by graciously revealing to me through his word that Jesus died for me so that I could be granted the special grace of saving faith and repentance for my heavenly Father had been drawing me to Jesus all along.

God saved me and made his word effectual in my life for the Holy Spirit accompanies the word and renders it productive in those who belong to him, in those who have been granted faith which is the operation of God, not the operation of humans. It is God who gives the increase, 1 Corinthians 3:6, and it was God who revealed to me through expositions of his word that he had enabled me to pray for faith in Jesus and he showed me how he had been answering my prayers all along. He was the one showing me how bad sin is, how it affects every faculty of our being, and how I was completely helpless without a Savior so that I could truly be humbled, and after I had suffered for a while he gave me a strong consolation of his mercy by settling, strengthening and established me so solidly in the faith of Christ and the true gospel that he came to bear witness to, 1 Peter 5:10. He revealed to me the true Savior, the true Jesus of the Bible, how he prays for those the Father has given him and how he loses none of them because his intercession for them can never ever fail, Luke 22:32; John 17:9; and Hebrews 7:25. God showed me that Jesus only intercedes and pleads his blood for those who he came to shed his blood for, John 10:15, those given to him by the Father, John 17:6 and 9. "For he shall save his people from their sins," Matthew 1:21.

Those who perish in unbelief are not his sheep because the sheep he laid his life down for can never perish in unbelief, John 10:28-29, because they have the "faith of God's elect," Titus 1:1. That's when the fear of hell completely left me. By having the true Jesus revealed to me, I was finally able to trust such a trustworthy Savior who was actually able to save me to the uttermost despite a natural inability to "cooperate." I no longer have reason to despair of his goodness and mercy for he showed me that salvation is not based on my own goodness but only on his, and his knowledge does not come by man's wisdom. Through his word, he revealed to me the true gospel, how the true Jesus of the Bible was a propitiation for his people's sins, those God has chosen out of every tongue, tribe and nation, not for the Jews only which is why the word "world" is used to describe who he died for. Example, 1 John 2:2. He was their substitute, 1 John 4:10. He died in their place. He bore their sins and took them upon himself, Isaiah 53:11; 1 Peter 2:24. He bore the wrath of God upon himself for their sins so that his righteousness could be accredited to their account, 2 Corinthians 5:21. He paid their sin debt in full so that they'll never have to pay for them in eternal hell, Hebrews 9:26. This cannot be said for the whole world or else all would be saved. This is why it is such a miracle that God has chosen to save any for none deserve to be.

God also gave me the discernment to know what faith wasn't. Sincerely believing something doesn't make it true. Faith in a religious system of works or faith in a religious system of license to sin is not saving faith. He opened my eyes to the fact that doctrines of men had kept me from realizing that I needed to pray for faith and the sufficiency of Jesus' righteousness to save me, renouncing my own self-righteousness and my own delusions of false security in sin. My faith was not to be in a decision I had made, decisional regeneration, or in baptism, baptismal regeneration. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "A man who knows that he is saved by believing in Christ does not when he is baptized lift his baptism into a saving ordinance. In fact, he is the very best protester against that mistake. Because he holds it, he has no right to be baptized until he is saved."

True regeneration precedes genuine repentance and faith for these gifts of grace are what the Holy Spirit works within, not what he responds to. God showed me through his word that a spiritual coming to Christ is not a physical act. "Whoever shall confess me before men," Matthew 10:32, is not a call for public action in order to become a Christian, it is rather the natural outworking of a true Christian whose nature has been supernaturally changed from enmity against God to love for God and hatred toward sin.

I was finally enabled to read God's word apart from the COC's violation of certain texts that gave them the sense of works being the process whereby we become Christians. For instance, I could finally read John 15:8 to mean exactly what it means. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples." Fruit-bearing is the evidence of salvation, not the process that causes one to become a Christian. I could finally read Romans 10:13 to mean exactly what it says. "Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Not the COC's addition of baptism, how one calls up the name of the Lord which had discouraged prayer. I could finally read 2 Peter 2:1 and see that the word "bought" there had nothing to do with Jesus' saving blood purchase but rather alludes to the fact that God's sovereign Lordship is over all people, even unsaved false prophets and teachers that slip into the church. He even "bought" the temporary deliverance of many reprobate Jews from Egyptian slavery, Deuteronomy 32:6. It was also a comfort to realize that Jesus took upon himself the sins of every one of the spiritual descendants of Abraham and not a single one can ever be lost, see Hebrews 2:9, 16 and Hebrews 11:18.

The Holy Spirit also opened my mind to the truths of Scripture so I could see that faith is not "energy force" that can be tapped into or worked up in our own power, for only he can change the heart and enable us to truly believe, repent and live for him (true Holy Spirit regeneration). The Lord "gives us an understanding that we may know him, that is true and that we are in him, that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life," 1 John 5:20. By being given the knowledge of who the true Christ really was, I was so taken with the love and mercy of God that I could barely contain myself, and he had begun this work in my by first showing me how bad sin corrupts our very nature so that we can't rightly respond to the Gospel unless God intervenes, grants faith, repentance and the ability to follow Christ, Romans 6:17-20; Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; and 2 Thessalonians 3:2.

By experiencing the merciful working of God upon my soul, I finally realized that God helps those who can't help themselves. Examples, Isaiah 64:6; Luke 18:10-14. When I had been at the lowest point of my life, I realized it was then that God had been directing me to Jesus as my only hope of salvation. I didn't realize I was eternally secure at that time but once one trusts Jesus as their only hope, they are truly born of the Spirit, regenerated and transformed at that very moment, John 1:13. Their lives are not perfection but headed in that direction from then on in progressive salvation, holiness and discipleship and he showed me that's where I had been headed all along. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new," 2 Corinthians 5:17.

I finally had blessed assurance of salvation. It was a miracle to finally be able to believe that Jesus is a complete Savior who didn't need my help in getting the job done and that I am complete in him, Colossians 2:10. He did it all from start to finish and by being so fully convinced, I became so content and satisfied in Christ that I was willing to endure any hardship for him. Though the natural tendencies of the flesh would always remain this side of heaven, I was no longer dominated by sin, wildly swept along with the world or driven by perfectionism. I no longer felt defined by appearance or performance. Jesus revealed to me that the world's approval is actually a terrible sign of God's disapproval for he said, "Woe unto you when all speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets," Luke 6:26.

I took such comfort knowing that I no longer had to be consumed with externals for Jesus is my Sabbath rest, Hebrews 4, and he speaks these words to all who truly seek refuge in him, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light," Matthew 11:28-30. I also learned that those who continue to live in an unbroken pattern of perpetual sin "according to the course of this world," Ephesians 2:2, are also those that Hebrews 6 and 10 speak of for by their own self-righteousness and/or by becoming desensitized and hardened to sin they imply his sacrifice wasn't enough to save them or conform them to the image of Christ. Many also show by their legalistic works that they believe they must contribute to what Jesus already declared "is finished" and/or their lifestyle shows that they have no God-given power to prove their claim. They even think lightly of past sins with no desire for Jesus to free them from their ongoing slavery to sin and worldliness. Either way, they are unchanged.

Although the Bible states that "there remains no more sacrifice for sins," Hebrews 10:26, they imply there is by trying to appease God with their own works rather than trusting solely in Jesus as the once-and-for-all perfect sacrifice, or they make excuses by exploiting the truth that "no one is perfect," implying the merits of Jesus' sacrifice can't effectively change anyone. False professors of faith either imply that God's grace isn't enough to make them holier or they imply that God's grace isn't enough to save without works being added to the equation. I learned that both license and legalism are two sides of the same heretical coin. Those who are truly saved "have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him," Colossians 3:10. "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit," Romans 8:4. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love," Ephesians 1:4, that Christ may be glorified in us. Without these evidences that true regeneration has taken place, there can be no blessed assurance but only a superficial false security that makes excuses for sin rather than grieving over it, fighting it and pleading for mercy through Christ. Christians can never reach sinless perfection this side of heaven but by God's grace they will have a tender conscience that will cause them to wage war on sin rather than to rest easy in it. "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity," 2 Timothy 2:19.

God leads his people in paths of righteousness for his name's sake, Psalm 23:3, "Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God," 2 Corinthians 7:1, learn that the ability to truly "cleanse ourselves" is the fruit of the work God accomplishes in his people for the "blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin," 1 John 1:7. "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus into all good works," Ephesians 2:10, so we can draw near in full assurance of faith with a clean conscience for he is faithful, Hebrews 10:22. He transforms people for his name's sake and for the sake of godliness so that they cannot continue in a perpetual pattern of sin, they can no longer in good conscience join in false religion or stay in once they learn the truth, they can no longer in good conscience sit through heretical Bible studies for he calls them out; though it takes them a while to discern the leading of their Savior, once they do they will not be led by another spirit, John 10, they'd rather suffer "without the camp bearing his reproach," Hebrews 13:13. God is jealous of his worship and commands that it not be mixed with false religion. "For thou shalt worship no other God for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God," Exodus 34:14. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" 1 Corinthians 10:21-22.

According to God's word, Paul feared his people might even "put up with" false teachers who proclaim a false Jesus and a false gospel, 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, because it would indicate that their mind has been corrupted and subtly deceived by the devil even if they had so much as simply tolerated such. Paul grieved jealously for his people for he knew that if they turned from the true gospel that he was giving them, they would turn to fatally deceived deceivers and ultimately end up turning from God, 2 Timothy 3:13. Jesus said we cannot serve two masters, Matthew 6:24, we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness, Romans 6:19. There are no lukewarm in-betweens. The same warning is reiterated in 2 John 9-11 which exclaims that we're not even supposed to give deceivers a greeting in a way that would be approving their false doctrine or will be "a partaker of their evil deeds." That's how serious God's pure worship is. Jesus revealed that those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth, John 4:23-24. Thankfully, he rescues his people from all the messes they are born into or get themselves into so that they can worship him in truth.

My own conversion is proof that God's sheep will be enabled to believe in his truth and will be granted genuine repentance so necessary to escape deadly error. Sometimes it's a slow painful process because the doctrines of devils can take time to dislodge, Matthew 17:21. Many kick against the pricks of the heart for a very long time but God has his way for he cannot be hindered by any amount of so-called "free will," Acts 26:14-18. Jesus actively rescues his sheep and doesn't passively allow any to perish, Matthew 18:11-13.

Once the COC's stained lenses fell from my eyes like scales, I was able to devour God's word through the right biblical lens. The Lord led me to such a deep intense study of his word and a profound spiritual union with him in prayer that I was finally able to express heartfelt love and gratitude back to my Savior for all that he had done for me. My conscience was finally purged from dead works so that I could serve the living God, Hebrews 9:14. "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus

Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world," Galatians 6:14. I was no longer driven by legalistic fear and the impossible burden of trying to maintain my own salvation while simultaneously trying to maintain the world's approval, so I was finally able to care for the souls of others. Like the woman at the well who left her water pot to proclaim the true Christ after discovering his ability to satisfy her thirst, John 4:1-42, I, too, left the water gospel that could never quench my spiritual thirst to proclaim the true Christ and to serve him and others from a regenerated heart full of love and peace, for I finally understood and knew the true God and Savior. "Let him that glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me," Jeremiah 9:24.

Chapter 12.

Painful persecutions. "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" Galatians 4:16.

As all of the heavy COC burdens were being lifted off of me, I began to manifest the heavenly power and evidence of the gospel upon my soul by finally being able to love and forgive others, for I myself had personally experienced unconditional forgiveness and eternal peace through Jesus. God's love even enabled me to go to my ex and his wife to forgive them for all they had done and to apologize for how I had reacted to it years ago. I also had been praying for their salvation and sharing the gospel with them every chance I got, even as he was dying of cancer, taking his last breaths, for by a miracle of God's divine providence the Catholic priest didn't show up in time to perform the sacrament of "Extreme Unction" or last rites. I also forgave my parents for disowning me and apologized for rebelling against them. Since I had been strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the knowledge of the true Christ and eternal God, I zealously labored to present him to the conscience of others so that they too could find joy in the truth, but sadly I soon found out that most did not share my enthusiasm.

As I continued to walk in the revelation of God's word with evidence and confirmation from heaven that I belonged to him, it became so obvious in my life that I also became a target for the witch doctors and faith healers I had been involved with. When I shared the true gospel with them and encouraged them to re-evaluate their strange spiritual practices, they singled me out as being demon possessed, while those cheating on their spouses in those circles were still being "prophesied over" as having special spiritual powers which was another real eye-opener for me.

My old friends were also some of the first to notice a change in me once I was strengthened in Christ. When my life was falling apart, they were there but once I found joy and peace in Jesus, they wanted nothing to do with me. Misery loves company but the worldly ungodly mindset that had once united us as friends was no longer there. They resented that I loved talking more about God than the latest gossip or my latest crisis. Some were even offended when I would express my desire to stand for the cause of Christ for they were accustomed to following the crowd and were not willing to give up anything for Christ, and some were just simply annoyed when I would try to get it across that we all needed to make sure we were truly right with God through Christ, for they

were like "been there, done that" and just wanted to go on with their lives and do their own thing. If only they had realized "faithful are the wounds of a friend but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful," Proverbs 27:5-6, but sadly instead of recognizing the true enemy of their soul, they turned on me and so far have remained a reflection of all that I had been before Christ saved and changed me. Though some continued to be "religious," the Bible was the last thing they wanted to talk about unless it was just on a superficial level. Those who are of the world love the pleasures of this life so much more and cannot relate to the severe chastening God often puts his people through to wean them from the world. They resent when old friends are no longer interested in running headlong with them into worldly indulgences, but James said whoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God, James 4:4.

My COC family also began to notice a change in me and most despised it. Since we were taught doctrine contrary to the truth of Jesus satisfying divine justice for the sins of his people, they were shocked and offended to find out that I believed Jesus had done just that for me, so my faith in Jesus' righteousness as my only hope was assaulted with great force and fury, but since they were unable to biblically refute the truth that I shared with them, they resorted to plots to try to undermine my credibility. I was also accused of being prideful for believing I was saved, and even if it had been the case, it was all still a meaningless response to the gospel I shared and were such a disgrace on their professed religiosity. Then some who seemed eager to learn the truth were turned against me which resembled the scenario in Acts 13:6-12 about those who were initially open to truth but were turned against it. Even in Acts 17:13, the self-righteous Jews stirred people against the truth and those proclaiming it. No wonder my parents informed me that I was not going to be in their will.

If it had not been for Jesus' words "ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake," Matthew 10:22, I would not have known why I had become a target for such hostility against the gospel of Christ. Thankfully, the shield of faith quenched all the fiery darts as Jesus gave me the strength to endure by reminding me through his word that he experienced the same. Even his own earthly relatives thought he had lost his mind, Mark 3:21 and 6:4. The ancient Pharisees were offended also for like the COC, they didn't want to be justified by Jesus' righteousness alone either for they had faith in their own system of works, so I was not only considered a traitor but I was also treated as if I was completely ignorant of what the COC actually teaches because the veil was still over their eyes making them unable to fully comprehend the heretical implications of their own beliefs. For this reason, most of my COC family on both sides has been cut off from me by their bondage to the church and this is why they have been the hardest to reach, because love for a false religious system is always characterized by antagonism on a personal level towards any who present the truth.

COC adherents often identify their dislike of the Christian message with the messenger themselves, for many who are enslaved to false religion to admit their religion is false seems equivalent to admitting God isn't true, for their system becomes a god to them. This is why it's typical for them to expel and shun those who begin to think independently which can be very frightening to someone who is not willing to give up all

for Christ. This is also why so many remain in the system even when they finally realize it is wrong. "Many believed on him but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him lest they should be put out of the synagogue for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God," John 12:42. Some just didn't want to risk all of the persecution they saw me going through, they cared more about family ties and careers and, after all, it's hard to get and keep a high position and good reputation in an area dominated by a religiously abhorrent power structure if you are the one that goes up against such ungodly conformity, so many stay in the COC even after learning how blasphemous it is against the true gospel of Jesus Christ and Jesus is ashamed of those who are ashamed of him, Mark 8:38, for they "have no root in themselves and so endure only for a time." "Afterward when tribulation of persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble," Mark 4:17. Many care more about people's approval than God's approval and most just simply cannot come to grips with the fact that they've been deceived by false religion. This, however, is no excuse to play the victim for it is voluntary rebellion against God who will still hold people accountable for their involvement and need for repentance.

Ezekiel 18 was also brought to my attention by a COC member who said it proved that we should be able to conjure up faith, repentance and obedience to God in our own power. Of course, those verses came as no surprise since I too had struggled with them and many others when I was in the COC, so I tried to gently get it across that God presents his impossible commands so that we would despair of ever being able to live up to his standards so that confidence in our own self-sufficiency would be shattered in order for us to finally realize our desperate need for the Savior, 2 Corinthians 3:5, but they took it wrong and reprimanded me for giving up on myself and when they condescendingly said that they would pray for me, I asked, "Why bother if you don't believe God has to intervene in our lives?" Eerily one could have heard the sound of crickets for they could not answer.

Ezekiel 2:1-2 makes it clear that God grants his people what he commands for he knows we are helpless apart from his divine intervention. Ezekiel 18 is also a perfect example of how God deals with his people. He commands them to do the impossible. For instance, in verses 30-32, he challenges his people to "turn themselves" and make themselves a new heart and a new spirit. God tells them to do what he already knew they could never do apart from his divine intervention. Even in Ezekiel 3:7, he tells his prophet from the very start that these people would not listen for they were hard-hearted. So I was acted why God even bothered telling his people what to do when he already knew they couldn't do it. I showed them that by reading the whole book of Ezekiel in context, the answer becomes obvious. God did this so his people would realize that they did not have the innate power to save themselves and when his people accused him of being unfair, he revealed even more of his glory by making it clear that he could destroy them all and still be just because like all of us they deserved the eternal consequences of sinning against their eternal Creator, Ezekiel 18:25 and 29. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend at one point, he is guilty of all," John 2:10, but they rejected this great Christian truth and even became psychotic when I showed them that Ezekiel 36 makes it clear that God himself has to grant a new heart and a new spirit.

So I then tried to confront them with the fact that God also shows that he is full of mercy and grace by revealing that he can change the most repulsive sinner in order to reveal his glory, and again I went to verses 26 and 27 to show that God tells his people that he is the one who gives a new heart and a new spirit. Even from the get-go God showed them that they'd only have the power to obey his commands once he put a new heart and spirit in them for he wanted them to know that the power was all of him, not of themselves, Ezekiel 11:19-20, for no one has the power within their own fallen nature to do this. But these truths cannot penetrate the minds of those who are still tied up in their legalistic roots. Naturally legalists refuse to give up anything they think they can bring to the table, but Ezekiel is just another reminder of how God's mighty power can triumph over our sin nature and make us partakers of his divine nature. Just as Jesus commanded Lazarus' dead body to come forth, he still commands sinners who are dead in their sins and trespasses to do the impossible, to repent and believe in the gospel and the same power he gave Lazarus is the same power he gives his people to triumph today.

What's impossible for us is not impossible with God. By his grace we must come to him confessing our helplessness, placing our trust in him alone to give us the new heart and spirit we so desperately need to be saved, and we must keep coming to him, praying, reading his word, worshipping and communing with his people until we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he has changed us and that we are forever his.

Thankfully, God helped me through a period of grieving over the loss of the world's praise and approval as I was coming out of false religion, and rather than allowing persecution to draw me away from the gospel of grace back into perdition, God gave me the courage to suffer for his name's sake. He also enabled me to finally put all the pieces together that have kept me from ever clinging to COC lies ever again which had previously shipwrecked any possibility of saving faith in God and Jesus, but there are those who would rather be bound for hell than to believe their religion is false. They'll often even say that they would never worship a God who chooses his own and will even accuse him of being unrighteous for doing so which the Apostle Paul obviously anticipated when he wrote Romans 9:14.

This also happened with the multitude of superficial followers that turned away from Jesus when he let them know that the Father chooses his own and draws them to him for salvation, John 6:65-66, but in order to try to keep from being associated with these surface level believers, the COC takes the drawing hearer and tries to connect it with John 12:32 where it says Christ will draw all men to himself when he is lifted up on the cross, but the COC's interpretation has Christ drawing all men without exclusion which would make the entirety of Scripture nonsensical. The cross does not draw all people for it's a stumbling block for some and foolishness to others, 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. Moreover, the COC's eisegesis, or reading into the text, begs the question as to why all the multitude were not drawn savingly to Christ but only a select few who had been "taught of God," John 6:45. The answer is that Jesus didn't mean all without exception but all without distinction of race, gender, status quo, works, etc., "God is no respecter of

persons," Acts 10:34 and Matthew 22:16, for he chooses his own apart from any earthly distinctions, yet the COC claims the opposite.

Thankfully, God helped me to understand why the COC would always give lip service to God's sovereignty in everything except in salvation of his people. Strangely enough, it had limited God's free will by teaching the absurd impossibility that he "sovereignly" forfeited his sovereignty over human free will because false religion is fine with a surface level faith that follows Christ for his earthly benefits as long as there is a superficial "free will" following that can take personal credit for doing so. That's why its battle cry seems to ever be "we will not have this man to reign over us," Luke 19:14.

"There is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football as the great stupendous but yet more certain doctrine of the sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except upon his throne. They will allow him to be in his workshop to fashion worlds and to make stars, they will allow him to be in his almary to disburse his alms and bestow his bounties, they will allow him to sustain the earth, but when God ascends his throne, his creatures gnash their teeth and when we proclaim and enthrone God and his right to do as he wills with his own, to dispose of his creatures as he thinks well without consulting them in the matter, then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on his throne is not the God they love." Quoted from "Divine Sovereignty," a sermon delivered by Charles Spurgeon, May 4, 1856.

God has gloriously preserved his complete freedom and sovereignty without giving up one ounce of it just because we have fallen from his glory and Jesus is willing and able to save all who truly come to him, then his word to them is this, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves," Matthew 10:16.

Chapter 18.

Fatally false interpretations. "The Scriptures in which some things hard to be understood which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest or twist as they do also the other Scriptures unto their own destruction," 2 Peter 3:16 [mine].

The COC system reads into Bible passages its own erroneous sacramental interpretations. For instance, it claims that the word "and" in Mark 16:16 is a coordinating conjunction which would make the verbs baptism and belief of equal importance, but it commits a negative imprint fallacy here for the verse does not say "he that is not baptized will be damned," but it does say "he that believeth shall not be damned." Scripture never says that one can't be saved unless they're baptized yet it does make it clear that one cannot be saved unless one believes. Example, John 3:18 and 36; John 6:53-54 and 8-24.

When the Philippian jailer asked "What must I do to be saved," Paul answered "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," Acts 16:30-31, and one can only have saving faith if they have been directly regenerated by the Holy Spirit through his word,

not indirectly regenerated through water baptism, Titus 3:5. In 1 Peter 3:20, Noah's family was "saved by water" only in the sense that the reality of their salvation became obvious through the trial of water for they were enabled by God to pass safely through the destructive waters by being in the ark which represented Christ. The word "by" in this verse is translated "through" in the original Greek. The water itself was a means of God's judgment, not a means of salvation, yet the COC could grasp for straws here and say "the ark couldn't have floated without the water," but the fact remains the water itself didn't save or else those outside the ark would have been saved. Peter even says here baptism itself cannot put away the filth of the flesh, verse 21, and a symbol cannot literally purge a guilty conscience, it can only be an outward sign of what's already occurred inwardly.

There is no such thing as baptismal regeneration. Baptism in no way, shape or form effects what it signifies, yet the COC claimed that it does but in reality the ark was a figure of Christ, it was a figure of the true whereas faith was the substance. Today, baptism is a figure of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. It's a picture of the true whereas faith is the substance, Hebrews 9:9, 14, 26 and Hebrews 11:1 and 7. Baptism is the outward response of a conscience that has been purified by faith in Christ and what he has accomplished in the believer who identifies with him in baptism. All who savingly believe in Christ have already been baptized by the Holy Spirit into his death spiritually, 1 Corinthians 12:13. They, like Noah and his family, have passed safely through the waters of sin and death in the ark of Christ. Still, the COC goes to great lengths to exalt man and his own works by performing a play on words that is straight from the Campbellite recipe book. For example, it twists Acts 2:38 to mean that people are baptized "in order to get" remission of sins rather than baptized "because" their sins are already remitted by grace through faith in the efficacy of Jesus' blood, Hebrews 9:22.

The COC teaches that baptism is literally "for" the remission of sins, yet if baptism literally saves, then there would be no need for the COC's "second laws of pardon." This highly spiced dilemma creates a double blind for the COC system that cannot be escaped by any amount of soupy Campbellite wordplay. Baptism is indeed a command but so is "love thy neighbor as thyself," and "be ye perfect," yet the COC has singled out the command of baptism as a means of salvation because baptism is a much easier command to perform but the COC has singled out the command of baptism as a means of salvation because baptism is a much easier command to perform, especially since it's only a one time event. No wonder the spirit behind the COC system slyly slithers in the easy and shady salvation of baptismal regeneration for the shadowy implications of sacramental salvation are an ever so subtle and by doing so it causes an extremely unhealthy and unbiblical obsession with Acts 2:38, making it out to be the whole gospel. No wonder so many COC members have it engraved on their tombstones.

This is why I've included an entire biblical exegesis of this verse in appendix 1 which exposes the COC's unbiblical eisegesis. Interestingly, Matthew 3:11 uses the same Greek word (eis) in connection with baptism in Acts 2:38 and it clearly can't mean "in order to get" repentance, for John told the Pharisees they had to first "produce fruits worthy of repentance" like the Ethiopian, Saul, Cornelius, his family, and thousands of others did in Acts after God had purified their hearts by faith and after God had granted them the Holy

Spirit who spiritually baptized them into Christ, Acts 15:8-9, before they were physically baptized in water to represent what had already been arranged by God the Father, accomplished by God the Son, and applied by God the Holy Spirit. For example, it teaches that Cornelius in Acts 10 was told that he must do something to be saved, verse 6, and it takes this "something" to be baptism, but the context shows that he has already been accepted by God through faith in verse 4, for he had already been effectually directed by the Spirit to fear God, pray and do righteous works, verse 35, who, then, effectively guided him to Christ at the appointed time and effectually moved him to be water baptized as a testimony. So this begs the question: did Cornelius do something to cause God to do all of this? Who moved who? The answer is in God's word. Proverbs 16:9, Proverbs 20:24 and Jeremiah 10:23. Even in Acts 11:16-18, Peter describes what God had done in Acts 10 and there's absolutely no mention of water baptism saving anyone but only of Holy Spirit baptism into the body of Christ through faith, and yet his audience still glorified God for granting the Gentiles "repentance unto life."

The COC says that "God's Spirit is only given to those who in faith obey Christ," so let's carefully evaluate the statement. First of all, they cannot obey Christ acceptably unless they first have the Holy Spirit enabling them by grace through faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please him," Hebrews 11:6. Secondly, it has been demonstrated in earlier chapters time and time again how the COC redefines the biblical term "faith." Remember, to the COC faith literally means obeying the water gospel, whereas the Christian position is that true biblical obedience to the gospel is faith itself. The irony is that if any of the COC's "proof texts" truly meant that baptism obtains remission of sins and repentance, then they would have to confess that no one needed that more than the Pharisees yet John refused to baptize them.

To be consistent with water gospel, they would also have to confess that the Israelites were baptized "in order to get" Moses to be their leader rather than "because" he already led them out of Egypt for the same Greek preposition *eis* is used in conjunction with baptism in 1 Corinthians 10:2. The Greek word *eis* "for" or "unto" is to be understood as "because of" or "in reference to" when it comes to biblical ordinances. Take Luke 5:12-14 for example. Jesus literally cleansed and healed the leper before he told them to go through an ordinance "for" *eis* cleansing, "And it came to pass when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy who seeing Jesus fell on his face and besought him saying, Lord if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean, and he put forth his hand and touched him saying, I will, be thou clean, and immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he charged him to tell no man but go and shew thyself to the priests and offer for (*eis*) thy cleansing according to Moses' command for (*eis*) a testimony unto them," Luke 5:12-14. Carefully note that the man's offering did not heal him but was only an external ordinance to testify that he had already been healed. The ordinance was "for a testimony" in the same way baptism does not save but it is an external ordinance to proclaim and testify that one has already been assured of salvation inwardly (by the Holy Spirit bearing witness with their spirit) based solely on faith in Jesus' offering of himself on their behalf.

The same Greek word "for" eis is used in Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for, eis, the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." So Scripture clearly shows that Jesus first cleanses, heals and saves, then a believer is to go through a figurative ordinance "in reference to" what Jesus has literally accomplished in them. Old Testament sacrificial ordinances were "for," eis, thy cleansing in reference to Jesus' future sacrifice of himself on behalf of that person whereas New Testament ordinances are "for," eis, remission of sins in reference to what Jesus has already accomplished on behalf of that person.

Chapter 19.

Baptismal regeneration is a false gospel. "Through thy precepts I get understanding therefore I hate every false way," Psalm 119:104.

So now that we have explored some of the COC's contradictions concerning baptism, let's just briefly go over some more of its assumptions such as the thief on the cross "probably" getting baptized by John earlier, or that Jesus was "probably" preparing Nicodemus to be baptized after the new covenant was established, and the ridiculous assumption that Jesus could only directly forgive sins then because he was still on earth because these false assumption demonstrate how grasping for straws will occur whenever one tries to prove that baptism or any other act saves us. If the thief on the cross was saved because he was earlier baptized by John, then that would still throw a huge monkey wrench into the whole COC system for it admittedly teaches that John's baptism was obsolete after Jesus' death and the thief died after Jesus. Scripture reveals that the two thieves had their legs broken in order to speed up death but not Jesus for he had already died. So the thief on the cross was no longer under the Mosaic dispensation right before he died. Jesus died before the thief so the new covenant was immediate in force upon the thief before he died.

"For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator for a testament is of force after men are dead otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth," Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:16-17. It just goes to show that unless God through his word has convinced a sinner how badly sin corrupts, they won't realize their desperate need for the Savior and will be fooled into believing they can by their own corrupt "free" will choose salvation by doing something. The Apostle Paul clearly warned that we need to be sure that we believe the true gospel, not one that causes a fall from grace into work-righteous legalism, Galatians 1:6-10. Adding requirements other than faith in Jesus' perfect sacrifice becomes works in disguise which is why false doctrines are so tricky. Jesus' blood didn't just make his people savable depending upon their actions, his blood literally saves them based on his work, his grace, his mercy, his will and his choice, John 1:13, Romans 9:16 and 18, Hebrews 9:12.

The true gospel is a call to faith in the righteousness of Christ alone and to full competent assurance in his blood atonement for our sins as our only title to heaven. Baptism is a pure act of obedience that God works in us to do after God has purified and cleansed our hearts by faith, Acts 8:37, Acts 15:8-9, and Philippians 2:13. But if one is baptized in

order to get saved, then it becomes an impure meaningless and defiled work of the flesh that God has no part in. An unregenerate act that attempts to appease God's wrath instead of believing Jesus has already done that for us, becomes a witness against us so unless God first purifies our hearts by faith, nothing we will do will be pure in his sight, Titus 1:15. It is dangerous ground when one tries to go through an outward performance in order to try to bribe God into saving them, for that is an abomination to him.

A fatal blow to baptismal regeneration is that Paul made a crystal clear distinction between the gospel and water baptism in 1 Corinthians 1:17, and he revealed that he begot believers through the gospel, not through baptism, 1 Corinthians 4:15. Yet if we went by the COC interpretation, Paul would be saying that he was thankful that no Corinthians were saved, 1 Corinthians 1:14. As usual, the evil spirit behind the COC system creates an irreconcilable contradiction by promoting baptism as the gospel, but to try to weasel out of this suggests that Paul is just thankful that he hadn't personally baptized the Christians at Corinth because they were calling themselves by the name of the person who had performed their baptism, but this lame excuse makes Paul out to be a tease who tells them that they can only be saved by water baptism but then withholds it from them, so the COC system must answer this question: just how in the world did Paul begot believers in Corinth through the gospel if he didn't baptize them, because Paul clearly stated, "For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel," 1 Corinthians 4:15. Ironically, its characteristic ploy of trying to defend the lie with another lie has once again caught up with it and has proved that the gospel preached was not its watered down "water gospel."

The COC system empties the gospel of its content while preserving its vocabulary. For instance, it gives lip service to verses that define the gospel which is the fulfillment of all righteousness through the sinless life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ, example 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, but then it puts a twist on them by teaching that all of this is to be found in water baptism. The COC replaces the necessity of faith in the sufficiency of Jesus' obedience with the act of baptism which is only a figure or "likeness" of his death, burial and resurrection whereby we identify with Christ and demonstrate what the Holy Spirit has already done literally, Romans 6:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:13. We become children of God by grace through faith, Galatians 3:26, then we can be figuratively buried with him in baptism through this faith which is the operation of God, Colossians 2:12. Once we are born again from above by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness on behalf of sinners, we can then figuratively "put on Christ" in baptism, Galatians 3:27, just as we can put clothes on a baby after its born.

While the COC will deny a literal physical putting on of Christ, it still teaches that one spiritually puts on Christ savingly in water baptism even though Jesus clearly taught that a physical process cannot produce a spiritual operation, John 3:6. But the final blow to baptismal regeneration is where Paul says he didn't receive the gospel from man, Galatians 1:12. This ruins the COC interpretation of Acts 22:16 which claims that Ananias gave Paul the gospel by telling him to be baptized to wash his sins away, yet his zeal for Paul to be baptized was not to get him saved but was to signify that he had already received the gospel from Jesus in person and had already surrendered to him as

Lord, Acts 26:15 and 16. Jesus had already promised to rescue him from the people he was sending him to, Acts 26:16-27, and had already changed his heart from that of a persecutor to a praying man who was given his sight back and the Holy Spirit, Acts 9:6, 11, 17 and 18, for he had already been God's "chosen vessel" to have Jesus revealed in him, Galatians 1:11-16.

So naturally after all of this, Paul would want to finally come clean before the people in the act of baptism to testify to the fact that God had changed him and that his sins had already been literally washed away by Jesus' blood, Hebrews 9:22 and 26. Who wouldn't? Baptism is a beautiful symbolic ordinance to be once enjoyed by all who believe in the sufficiency of Jesus' perfect sacrifice whereas those who say it's a requirement for salvation, mar its beauty by implying his grace and sacrifice wasn't enough. Therefore the person going through the ordinances must know and believe beyond all shadow of doubt that their salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus' perfect righteousness alone as their only hope of God's acceptance or else the ordinance becomes a witness against them.

So why put limits on God's power? He's still performing miracles today every time someone is saved. It's not what we do that saves us but who we have. "He who has the Son has life," 1 John 5:12, and to truly know him is to know and believe his message. One cannot claim to belong to him if they are blindly trusting in a false gospel that renounces the true gospel that he came to proclaim in John 18:37. By placing so much emphasis on baptism, the evil spirit behind the COC system causes its captives to worship an ordinance rather than the God behind the ordinance.

"What Campbellism teaches is that God literally remits sin through an ordinance, hence there is a complete misunderstanding on that part of the Campbellites of the place and purpose of ordinances. The animal sacrifice ordinances could never take away sin, Hebrews 10:11, they were only types and shadows of the Christ who came and actually did 'put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,' Hebrews 9:26. Ordinances furnish us with a representation of the real substance. In the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ, they are not the real substance. Romanism contends that the bread and wine are the real body and blood of Christ just as Campbellism contends that baptism is the literal means of 'contacting the blood.' Both are wrong. They grasp the shadow and miss the substance."

"Indeed it is a true profanation of the truth of baptism to confuse it with the reality it represents in Christ's death and our union with him in the sovereign grace of God that affects redemption, Ephesians 1:7. Not only the action of baptism, the frequent perversion of its meaning leading to a false trust in the rite itself rather than the true and repentant faith in Christ, is one of the greatest 'pulpit crimes' of the entire history of the church."

"Those who make human autonomy and free will definitive of their theology have little consistent basis for avoiding such excuses, but those who rest upon the sovereignty of God and his divine ordination of both the ends and the means, are in a position to do

honor to all of the biblical revelation. A child drawn to baptism out of a desire to be baptized is being put in spiritual danger for the rest of his or her life. Those who have had 'their tickets punched' and have been assured mistakenly of their eternal salvation solely due to something they did, a card they filled out, a prayer they recited, are some of the hardest people in the world to reach with a real message of repentance and faith. It is a pulpit crime indeed to encourage such shallow 'conversionism' that is not born in the heart by a mighty work of the Spirit of God resulting in repentance and faith in Christ."

Larry Wessels. The following is for our viewers who would like to read Lee Ann Ferguson's book entirely through this video presentation. Every page has been scanned and put into this video. If you'd like to read the book onscreen through this video, simply freeze-frame each page, read it, and then move on to the next page until you finish the book. Happy reading.