

## Chapter 1

### *Games Christians Play*

*Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Acts 7:51.*

Several years ago psychiatrist Eric Berne wrote a fascinating book titled *Games People Play*. With tongue-in-cheek, he described certain delightful diversions people seem to enjoy - such "games" as "I'll try to help you" - (providing you don't get better!) or "I'll look for work" - (providing I don't have to find a job!).

"Patients often play a game with therapists called 'help me, but don't cure me'," Berne says. "Often what they mean is 'I don't really want to be cured but I will let you make me a better neurotic!'"

It would be great fun to write a book called *Games Christians Play*, describing such games as "Jesus doesn't love you when you hit the kitty cat," which mommies could play with their three-year-olds!

This book could recommend that churchgoers play "courtroom." (If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?)

It could describe people who play a game with God called "You can save me" - (as long as You don't change me!).

It could detail a game some Christians play with the devil called "spiritual darebase" - (see how close you can come to temptation without actually sinning!).

Such a book could even carry a large appendix containing helpful hints for Christians ("Twenty-three surefire excuses for skipping prayer meeting," or "Thirty-nine ways to witness without leaving your easy chair!").

The book would not be complete unless it included one of the oldest religious games of all - the "secret salvation" game. A few Christians still play it. The idea of this one is to see if you can go a lifetime without telling anyone that you have salvation.

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Under the rules it is quite all right to say, "I hope I will be saved someday," or "I am working hard to get rid of enough bad habits so I can be saved."

The main point of this game is never to confess to anyone that you have eternal life right now. You may sing "Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It!" - but you dare not say so.

Another very popular game in Christendom today is called "baby with the bathwater." This one is similar to the previous game. The difference is that here you must never EVER say that you are "baptized with the Holy Spirit." If you do, you must go immediately to Fanatics' Fringe or Charismatics' Corner!

A master gamesman invented this one, and it has been easy for him to find players. No one wants to be branded a religious fanatic. The idea of this game is to keep people away from a genuine spiritual experience by inventing an undesirable counterfeit. Thus the baby gets thrown out with the bathwater, and nobody wins. Except the fiend who made up the game! This is a great tragedy, for after the cross, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the most important yet most neglected doctrine in all Christianity.

One author - who studied in detail what Christ spoke about to determine His favorite topic - once wrote, "Christ, the Great Teacher, had an infinite variety of subjects from which to choose, but the one upon which He dwelt most largely was the endowment of the Holy Spirit. What great things He predicted for the church because of this endowment. Yet what subject is less dwelt upon now? What promise is less fulfilled?"

For all too many Christians, the same lamentable uncertainty that steals away their assurance of salvation also shadows their appropriation of the Holy Spirit by faith. They sing with great fervor, "Baptize us anew with power from on high." Yet if you ask the average Christian today whether he is baptized with the Spirit, he will look surprised and say, "Why, of course not - I am not a charismatic!" Or perhaps he will say, "Well, I hope to be someday," or "I am working on getting my life together so that I can be sometime."

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As surely as Christ made eternal life possible by His death on the cross, He also made the Spirit-filled life possible for the Christian right now. To deny these great gifts from the throne room of heaven is to be deprived of both peace and power.

Believers may feel that it is a great insult when some choose to reject Christ's atonement. Yet they may be grieving His great heart of love fully as much by ignoring - or rejecting by default - the filling of the Holy Spirit.

The great evangelist Charles Finney once said, "Christians are as guilty for not being filled with the Spirit as sinners are for not repenting."

The work of the Holy Spirit includes far more than many Christians realize. To bring us to and through the new birth is one part of His work - as Jesus made plain to Nicodemus. And this mighty miracle of the Spirit's power is recognized by a baptism - the baptism "with water" of which John the Baptist spoke.

But it is sadly possible for a Christian to experience personally the Spirit's power in being born again and yet never experience the rest of what the Spirit is ready to do in his life. For the Holy Spirit is available to do far more for us than to see us through the new birth. This is only a part of His work. How appalling that so many of us either don't know or don't care that He is also available to fill us with supernatural power to witness and to overcome sin!

This mighty infilling of the Spirit is also marked by a baptism - the baptism "with fire" which John the Baptist said Jesus would make possible.

Undoubtedly it is God's intent that as soon as we have been born again through the Spirit's power, we begin immediately to experience also the fullness of His power to help us witness and to grow. For both physically and spiritually, birth must be followed by growth.

Yet, tragically, many Christians - possibly through misunderstanding or ignorance - are like the believers Paul encountered in Ephesus.

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These men had been baptized with water, but to Paul's question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" they responded, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Like a destitute farmer, unaware that under his fields lies a fortune in gold, they had been living far beneath their privileges. But that was now to change, for "when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them."

Jesus Christ did not die only that men might have forgiveness of sin. He also sacrificed Himself that men might begin sharing immediately in His very nature and sonship. He did not die only that men might be born again, but that they might also go on from there to really *live* again - to experience an unprecedented power to live God's love in the world.

The Saviour did not die that believers might be legally pardoned - only to be put on ice until He could return someday to restore His image in them. He died that every Christian might be ignited by the Holy Spirit and begin at once - through this transforming, supernatural Presence - to take on the characteristics of divinity! He died that men and women might share in His sacred task of revealing God's love to the world. He died that you and I might begin to share in His divine nature right now!

The significance of Christ's sacrifice is indicated in Isaiah 53:12. When taken literally from the Hebrew, the first phrase reads, "therefore will I divide his portion with the many." The priesthood and sonship of Jesus is the sacred heritage He has given to be shared among His followers. This He did to equip them to take His place - to be His representatives in this world.

No vain philosophy, no dry intellectual theory, no milk-toast, pie-in-the-sky, namby-pamby, don't-upset-the-apple-cart system for nominal believers - this thing called Christianity. Instead, it is a far more radical and revolutionary force than even most modern believers imagine. The religion of Jesus Christ is nothing less than an omnipotent, transforming power.

That radical element in Christianity which once aroused the world's hatred toward believers seems no longer to be present

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in the church. This would strongly suggest that the baptism by fire is being virtually ignored today. No longer is it especially unpopular or dangerous or costly to be a Christian. And that is a very great shame.

The Christians in the early church were no particular threat to the powers of evil - until the day of Pentecost. Then every devil in hell began to tremble at the thought of dealing with the weakest of the saints. Talk about “power to the people!”

If only Christ’s disciples today could see themselves as God sees them! If only they could live up to their true spiritual potential! If only they could rise to their privileges!

An old Indian story tells of a brave who discovered an eagle’s egg. He placed it in the nest of one of the village chickens. The eaglet hatched with the brood and grew up with them. In time he learned to scratch busily in the dirt for seeds and bugs. He learned to pull worms from the ground and to cluck and cackle. Like his fellows, he was easily alarmed by any imagined threat. He flew only with a brief, awkward thrashing of wings and Hurry of feathers - and then only a few feet above the ground. After all, that is how chickens are supposed to fly.

Years passed, and the bird grew old. But one day he chanced to look up from his continual scratching in the dirt and saw a most magnificent creature floating effortlessly above him in the cloudless sky. Riding with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, it soared above the high mountain ridges with hardly a beat of its strong, golden wings.

“What a beautiful bird!” he remarked to one of his neighbors. “What is it?”

“That’s an eagle - the king of birds,” the chicken clucked. “But don’t give it a second thought. You could never be like him.”

So the eagle put it all out of his mind and went on scratching away in the dirt. He died one day, still thinking he was a chicken.

God has promised believers that they may “mount up with wings as eagles.” Every spirit-filled Christian may lead an exciting life of excellence, splendor, and promise. How sad that

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so many believers scratch around the chicken coop when they could be riding the mountain crests!

Any religion that does not lift people up - that does not make them into something more than they ever dreamed they could be - is a counterfeit. A Christianity that focuses only on clearing up a legal sin problem, offering the believer nothing more until the second coming - a Christianity concerned primarily with correct belief and accurate theology - is a system having the form of godliness but denying the power of it.

This transforming power that makes genuine Christianity such a revolutionary force has as its source the baptism so often ignored - the baptism with fire. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

To take full advantage of all that God offers, one needs to experience both water baptism and fire baptism. If conversion is being made into a new creature with the legal right to fly, becoming Spirit-filled is the flying! It is no accident that a bird - a dove - is the symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

Jesus was understandably anxious to return to heaven when His work was finished here on earth. But some are puzzled as to why He only ministered here for three and a half years. "Why did He go back to heaven so quickly?" they ask. "Why didn't He at least stay until He was fifty or sixty years old and do more preaching and healing?"

Actually, it is remarkable that the Saviour stayed here as long as He did. He would doubtless have preferred to finish His work in three and a half months. True, He did not want to leave His followers behind, but He was very anxious to return to His Father quickly so that He could send the Holy Spirit to begin a whole new powerful ministry to His people.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." The dictionary says the word expedient means "conducive to an advantage." And what a marvelous advantage the coming of the Comforter has been to every believer since!

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Jesus had come to reveal to the world the truth about God. His mission was to reveal the breadth and intensity of God's love in startling and remarkable ways. Yet in His humanity He was limited to being in one place at a time. His eagerness to return to heaven was prompted by the knowledge that His sacrifice on the cross had opened the way for a very great miracle. Now any believer could have the Holy Spirit living in him - just as the Spirit had dwelt in the Saviour!

The way was clear for something to take place that Christ cared about passionately. Now God's love and character could be lived out, not just through one solitary life, but through hundreds, thousands, millions of lives!

Each Christian could now take up Christ's own high and holy mission. Each believer could begin - through the indwelling of the Spirit symbolized by the baptism with fire - to partake of the divine nature as Christ had. This would bring the truth about God and His love before the entire waiting world.

Ultimate privilege! Humanity could now become the very home of divinity! "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Christ certainly existed before He took on human form as a babe in the manger. He created, He loved, He ministered as the divine Son of God. Yet something very special happened when He was born into a human body. He began a very personal, very special, very powerful ministry to the world at that time which could not have been accomplished any other way. Being able to work in a human frame made the difference.

The Holy Spirit too has existed from time immemorial. He has played an active part in ministering to the world. But just as Jesus was born into a human body, so the Holy Spirit needed to become incarnate to carry out His new and special ministry in the world. But whereas Christ reached out to the world from within just one human body, the Holy Spirit would now reach out through many! The Holy Spirit was incarnated at Pentecost. Some of the best and most exciting good news of Christianity is that the Spirit now lives in every believer who chooses the baptism with fire - who chooses to be filled with Him! "What?

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Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

The day of Pentecost was the dawn of a new age for the follower of God. Never before had such a privilege been extended or such dynamic power been offered. Christians today should celebrate Pentecost with at least as much fervor as they do Christmas. A whole new arsenal of spiritual weapons was then placed at their disposal. What they received that day was a down payment on the heavenly inheritance, allowing heaven to begin here and now for every believer. "That Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest [the down payment] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." The year A.D. 33 was a very good year!

As shocking as it may seem, Christ's death alone - to earn men a legal pardon from the wages of sin - would not have been adequate to accomplish all of God's purposes for the world. If Jesus had gone to the cross, but the Holy Spirit had not come to personally apply its benefits to the lives of Christ's followers, the cross would have been in vain. "The Spirit is given as a regenerating agency, to make effectual the salvation wrought by the death of our Redeemer."

The Spirit was given to apply the benefits of the cross to every believer's life. The Holy Spirit does not provide forgiveness of sin. Jesus did that at Calvary. But the Spirit provides power - power to live God's love before the world and to break through the strongest barriers men and women may erect to keep God out!

The baptism of the Spirit makes Christ's death worth the cost, for it restores to man the purpose of his creation - oneness with God, personal fellowship with the Almighty. Therefore if one does not receive the baptism with fire □ if he does not actively claim the filling of the Spirit by faith he ignores the very blood that won for him the highest and best gift Heaven could bestow.



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With what joy, then, should we contemplate the privilege of providing God the Spirit a flesh-and-blood expression an incarnation in our time.