

Born to Win

Water Baptism #2

by Ronald L. Dart

Sometimes it takes a while to mess up your life. Sometimes you can do it pretty fast. And the odd thing about it is how terribly hard it is to turn it around, and how often we make the *same* mistakes *over and over* again. There's a *reason* for that, you know. It's not just that our *lives* get messed up. It's our *minds*. You know, someone once told me that the mind is like a closet that you never clean out. In fact, I was sitting listening to a workshop, a seminar by a psychologist once, and he was telling a group of us that everything that goes into your mind stays there *forever*. It never leaves. That was a little hard for me to believe, but as he proceeded to explain the whole procedure to me, I became increasingly convinced that that's really true. You can't really get anything out of there. The only thing you can hope to do is to attach new stuff to it, as it were—to rearrange it, to put stuff in different slots, and to maybe try to deal with some of the stuff that's there better than you did before. But it made me think of something Paul wrote. It's found right at the beginning of the 12th chapter of the book of Romans. He said,

Romans 12

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¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

² And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [...]

Now, the stuff about presenting my body to God is one thing. When he comes along, though, and tells me that I should be transformed by “the renewing of my mind”, he's told me something I want to hear. He's told me that I can *do something* about all that stuff that I've put in this closet we call a brain—that I don't have to actually just let it sit there and mess up my life forever, that I actually can change it. I can transform it. I can maybe make it into something that it wasn't before.

Now, what's Paul talking about? Actually, what he's talking about, in a way, is this clutter that begins to build up in our mind and the deterioration... Now, when I say the “deterioration” of the mind, I don't mean that you become insane. I don't mean that your mind doesn't *work* anymore. What I'm talking about when I say “deterioration of the mind” is the deterioration in morals and standards and associations that we make between things—to where we no longer really think *straight* about straight things.

You go through life basically unaware that you are the object of an ongoing campaign for your mind. Every time you sit down to watch a television sitcom, the producers of those sitcoms are trying to entertain you *and* they are trying to *change your mind*. Now, I will own up very quickly to the fact that a lot of the things that they're trying to change in our minds *need* to be changed. I have felt for a long time that television has had far more to do with the change in racial attitudes in our country than anything *the government* has ever done. Take, for example, the old sitcom *All in the Family*, which you can sometimes pick up on classic television or Nickelodeon. It's a real classic example of where someone—a television producer and a set of writers—came together with an idea, and they put together a situation comedy that allowed us to laugh at some of the things in our lives that *desperately* needed to

be changed. They showed us how ludicrous bigotry really is. They showed it to us in the character of Archie Bunker. This is a man *we don't want to be like*. We were willing to laugh at him, and in the process of laughing at him we see this is not something I want to be. We don't much want to be like "Meathead" (his son-in-law) either, or his daughter, or his wife. So why did we watch? Well, we watched because it was funny, and it was entertaining, and because we all saw just a little bit of ourselves—our own bigotry—in the characters. And it changed a lot of attitudes toward bigotry in the country, and it was *time* for a change.

So when I say that these people are trying to change your mind, I'm not meaning that in a bad sense. We forget, though, that there's an awful lot of things that people are trying to change our minds about that we ought to pay a little more attention to. We forget that this is a government of the people, and that the government is *us*; and that whoever gets access to our mind, and changes *our mind*...well, now, that's the person who's really in power.

So from situation comedies on television, to novels, to movies...oh yeah, to people like me who talk to you over the radio, *we are all trying to change your mind*. And in the midst of all this clamor for your attention and for your mind, there is a great evil persona we call "the Devil", and a terrible destructive principle that the Bible calls "sin". These are *also* engaged in a *battle for your mind*.

You know, it's a little frightening. Here I am. I'm sitting back in my recliner. I've got my feet up, I have a cup of coffee by my chair, and I'm all laid back and relaxed. And now I find out that there's an *absolute war* going on—a spiritual war, if you will—*for my mind*. Now, this may seem strange to you, but *by far and away* the most destructive influence on and in your mind is *sin*. Just take your imagination for a minute: let's take the Devil out of the picture. Get rid of the slaving jaws of evil and let's just leave man—neutral, ordinary man, and the neutral, ordinary world around him. Will wine taste just as good without the Devil? Well, sure it will. You get a really nice bottle of a good French claret and it's going to taste the same whether the Devil is around or whether the Devil is not around. We all know that, don't you? Now, will the little buzz that you get from a few beers feel just as good without the Devil? Well, of course it will. Will the jokes be funny without any help from the Devil to make them funny? Oh sure they will. We'll get a little bit light in the head, laugh, and everything will be just fine. Will your neighbor's wife be just as attractive without the Devil? He's not her makeup artist. He's not the one that designs her clothes and picks them off the shelf. *She* is. And so will she look just as good? Will sex be just as much fun without the Devil? *Sure, it will*. And I don't know why people seem to think this, but they seem to think that if there were no Devil—if we didn't have this terrible, evil force in the world somewhere—that we wouldn't have people slipping in the back door of his neighbor's house, and having sex with his neighbor's wife, and all those nasty things that ensue on the heels of that. Well, we need to think about that a little bit. There's a proverb; it's found in Proverbs 6; it's verse 27. It asks this question:

Proverbs 6

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²⁷ Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?

²⁸ Can one go on hot coals, and his feet not be burned?

Well, you know, it's familiar enough to those people: you go pick up some fire...they had fires around them, live fires. That's how they kept their houses warm. So you grab up a bunch of coals and hold them to your bosom, are your clothes going to get on fire? Sure they are. Can you walk over them and your feet not be burned? Of course not! He says,

Proverbs 6

AKJV

²⁹ So he that goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent.

Now, there's an old idea that somehow the only reason sin is sin is because God said so. In other words, God could just as easily have said, "Thou shalt commit adultery", as to have said, "Thou shalt *not* commit adultery." In fact, there's an early edition of the English Bible that says precisely that. It's called "the Wicked Bible" because the typesetter accidentally left the word "not" out of the Seventh Commandment. But listen to that passage again.

Proverbs 6

AKJV

²⁷ Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?

²⁸ Can one go on hot coals, and his feet not be burned?

What this is saying to you is you get burned, not by God, you get burned by *the hot coals*. It's the adultery that messes up your life, not God. And sin, when it gets into your mind, acts...well, it acts in many ways like a virus of the mind: It starts rearranging the wires and rewriting all the programs.

You know, nearly everyone by now has heard of computer viruses that get into a computer system, and they start replicating themselves and changing data. They can fill up your hard drive completely, and your computer crashes and goes nowhere. What sin does is change your standards. Sneak in your neighbor's back door and commit adultery with his wife and the process starts. You got away with it. Nothing terrible happened. You didn't get caught. But then you have to *lie* about it. And when you start lying, your standards of right and wrong have to get rearranged. You have to explain these things, folks, *to yourself*. When you do something that is wrong, and you don't repent of it and admit it and turn around, you have got to explain it with yourself; because you may not have to live with your wife, you may not have to live with your husband, but when you get up in the morning, you jolly well are going to have to get up and live with *yourself*, right? And so you've got to find ways of explaining what you have done. One thing leads to another and corruption sets in.

You know, I can't think of a better illustration of this than what happened in the Washington scandal we've come to call "Monica-gate". The president of the United States engages in an illicit sexual dalliance with a White House intern. Well, sin loves company, so the young lady talks about it. And then she talks about it some more. And then, you know, since sin does love company, some sins from the past, they catch up with us and then they also love company and come calling. And so in order to keep the things from getting together, the president has to lie about it, and then he has to lie some more. And then all of *his friends* have to start lying about it. You know, I remember when this was all on television every night, every night, every night. And I would sit there and I would watch these people *trying their best* to believe the president when, deep down inside of themselves, something was saying, "No, he's lying. You know he's lying." And yet they felt *compelled* to try to find explanations. You know, I know how that feels. I mean, I can see what they were doing. I knew what they were going through with.

Well, the president had to lie some more, and his friends had to lie some more, and his lawyers have to protect the lie; and before you know it, the entire government of the United States is involved up to the hip in the sins of a handful of people, and sin is messing up everybody's head—big time. So when Paul comes along and says, "Be you transformed by the renewing of your mind", this is something I want to know more about.

So Paul tells us we ought to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind", and he's speaking *quite literally* when he says that. There is a process called *conversion*. Now, a lot of people seem to think, judging by their conversation, that conversion takes place in an instant of time, like Paul was converted on the road to Damascus [Acts 9]. No, not really. Conversion is a lifelong process. It is a change, and it *starts* with baptism. It doesn't *end* there. Peter, in his sermon on that first Christian Pentecost, said to the men around him,

Acts 2

KJ2000

³⁸ [...] Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, [...]

“Remission” means the “sending away” of your sins.

Acts 2

KJ2000

³⁸ [...] and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Well, okay, I understand this forgiveness of sins business, and I understand sending my sins away from me and getting rid of them. But the truth is, *I still know I did all those things*, right? Just because I went under the waters of baptism, and came up and had all my sins forgiven, I haven't forgotten, have I, what I did last week or several years ago? The relationship that maybe you had with your neighbor's wife or your neighbor's husband sometime way back there... You haven't *forgotten* that, have you? You might have until I brought it up, but it's *still in your mind*. What are we going to do about that?

Well, the first thing you have to have is the “want to”. You have to be *sorry* for the life you've lived. You have to *want* to turn it around. You have to make the initial steps to change the way you live. This is called “repentance”. And then you have to go under the waters of baptism. It's the demarcation line of the new way of life, and it makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to come and begin the work of the renewing of your mind. When you've made this step, the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and Jesus Christ *all move in on you*. And they come in with ladders and scaffolding, hammers, nails, paint, new shelves—all this kind of stuff—because they plan to do *a complete overhaul* on you. Whatever it costs. It doesn't matter how much pain it causes you. It doesn't matter what you're going to have to go through. They say, “You want me to come in, you want to change your life, we're going to change your life.” All the wiring is going to have to be rearranged, and all those things that you have done—that you can't forget and wish you *could* forget—have got to be dealt with. They have got to be put in their place. They have got to be arrayed alongside of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the awareness of the forgiveness and the mercy of God. The relationship between these things has got to be straightened out. And this is *work*; it's not *magic*. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans and said,

Romans 6

AKJV

³ Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

⁴ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Now, I don't know if you've ever seen a baptism (or if you've been baptized, you'll already know this), but it's very interesting the way in which baptism is usually done. (And I'm talking about baptism by immersion.) You go down with the person who's going to be baptized into the tank. It may be a river. I baptized a woman in the Red Sea, of all places. And you go down about waist-deep in the sea, and I asked her, “Have you repented of your sins, of the transgression of God's holy and righteous Law?”. And she said, “Yes.” And I said, “Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, your soon-coming King and High Priest?”. And she said, “Yes.” And I called her by her name, and I said, “I now baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” And I put her under the water. She was *buried* in baptism.

Now, fortunately for her, I pulled her back up *out of the water* immediately. She was then raised (symbolically) from death—that like Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, she

should walk in a new way of life. The whole idea of baptism is a *new* life, a *fresh* start, a *clean slate*. And that part of it is the easy part. It's the renovation, the remodeling, that is difficult. Paul goes on to say,

Romans 6

AKJV

⁵ For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

⁶ Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that from now on we should not serve sin.

⁷ For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Now, that's true enough: Dead men don't sin—pretty hard. But I thought Paul's wording was really significant. He didn't say, "Dead men don't sin." He said, "He that is dead is *free* from sin." He said the old body of sin should be destroyed, that henceforth we should not *serve* sin. Again and again in the Bible, sin is presented as a *slave-master*—a destructive, enslaving force—that once you have allowed sin into your mind, it brings you into captivity and makes you its servant. You have to maintain it. You have to protect it. You *lie* for it. You *steal* for it. You do all kinds of things for sin, once it has entered and begun the deteriorating process—the destructive process—of your mind and of your life. Paul said,

Romans 6

AKJV

⁸ Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

⁹ Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over him.

Death hasn't got anything to say to him any longer, because he *died*.

Romans 6

AKJV

¹⁰ For in that he died, he died to sin once: but in that he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You know, it's almost as though sin is out there looking for you like a prison guard with a brace of bloodhounds, ready to take you back. But you're dead. They bring the bloodhounds, they follow your scent all the way up to a hole in the ground, with the dirt filled in and tamped down. You're dead, and you're gone, as far as sin is concerned. And then he says,

Romans 6

AKJV

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Because the fact of the matter is it's always there trying to come back. And the difficult part of this, folks, is because even when we are forgiven of all of our past sins, even when they have gone under the blood of Jesus Christ, *they still exist in our minds*. They are still in there, and they still have to be dealt with. And this is the difficult part for us: the process that God puts us through of getting all that stuff in its place, so that it doesn't come back to enslave you yet again. Paul says,

Romans 6

AKJV

¹³ Neither yield you your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin: [...]

It's as though you had the choice...which you do.

Romans 6

AKJV

¹³ [...] but yield yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace.

You know, in the context we're talking about here, there is no way that Paul is talking about not being "under the law" meaning that the Law has been somehow done away with. That's not the point. The point of being "under the law" is being under sin, because you're guilty of breaking the law. What it means is we are no longer under the *power* of sin. We're *free*. Paul says,

Romans 6

AKJV

¹⁵ What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

If we were translating that today, he would probably say, "Give me a break."

Baptism is not magic. We could go out, and I could baptize you, and we could put you under the water time after time—until your waterlogged—and not change a thing. Baptism is *only* a symbolic act. When you have really repented of your sins, and gone down in the waters of baptism, and you come up in God's sight, you're clean, you're forgiven, your sins have been washed away...and now *the real work* begins—for God to renew *the spirit* of your mind. There's a passage in Hebrews I think is fascinating. It begins in the 12th chapter, but it's a continuation of the 11th chapter of Hebrews, which people call "the Faith Chapter". It's *all about* the people of God, and their faith, and the things that they went through in order to continue to be obedient and faithful to God. And the writer of Hebrews tells us,

Hebrews 1

KJ2000

¹ Therefore seeing we also are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, [...]

And this is a reference to *all those* people in the Old Testament who suffered *greatly* for God; some of them, he says, were even *sawn in two* [**Hebrews 11:37**]. Having this thing...

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹ [...] let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us[.]

Now, it's really easy to understand what he is saying here if you understand the simple principle that everything that ever goes into your mind goes in there and stays forever. Sin *easily* besets you, and you can turn back to it as easily as you want, any time that you want. What he says, then, is we're going to have to settle in now to run this thing like a marathon. You can't sprint to the wire. You can't go at it

like that. It's going to take some patience, and you're going to have to look to Jesus, who is the author *and finisher* of our faith. In other words, this thing has a beginning, but it has to be finished.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

² Looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ For consider him [...]

“Now, I want you to look at him for a moment.”

Hebrews 1

AKJV

³ For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds.

⁴ You have not yet resisted to blood, striving against sin.

No, no I sure haven't. And when I read something like this, it kind of warns me that I have probably not gone anywhere near as far as I have yet to go in the process of resisting sin. He says,

Hebrews 1

KJ2000

⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him:

⁶ For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.

Here's the story: that from the day we come up out of the waters of baptism, and put our foot out on the trail of following God wherever he's going to take us, the chastisement, the correction, the teaching is almost continuous. And there are times when it is *very* uncomfortable. There are sometimes when it is *downright painful*. Sorry, but that's what we're in for.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not?

⁸ But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.

⁹ Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?

Don't we understand that God is going to have to take hammer, nails, paintbrushes, and everything else, and move in and *work us over from the inside out*? And that this is a lifelong process? It's a process of facing trials, and tribulations, and difficulties—of coming up against tests to see what kind of people we are, to see what we're made of, to see whether we'll stay in there or whether we'll give up and quit somewhere along the line.

Oh yeah, the process of salvation is easy enough in the sense of having your sins forgiven you. But *God* wants a lot more out of you than that. It's not just enough to give you a bath and clean you up. He wants *a son*. He wants *a daughter*. He wants someone that can stand and walk alongside of him. “Our fathers? Well...”

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹⁰ For they truly for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but [God has done everything] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Think about that. It's not *good enough* just to have a washed-up, cleaned-up human being. God wants us to be a partaker of his holiness.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹¹ Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.

Yeah, the whole thing is an exercise. It's a part of the remodeling job that God is doing with us. And he then says,

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹² Therefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees[.]

“Quit feeling sorry for yourself.” Because the process of *the Christian life* is the process of *the renewing of your mind*. And you don't renew your mind by sitting in a chair and staring into space. You renew your mind by facing the world and living it God's way...*no matter how much it hurts*. He warned,

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹⁵ Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

¹⁶ Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

¹⁷ For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

You may not realize this, but the birthright when you come up out of the waters of baptism is that *renewing* process that God is going to do through you. Whatever you do, *don't give it up*.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart, and you were *born to win*.

Transcript of a *Born to Win*
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