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BORN GUILTY

The Bible tells us that when the first man, Adam, sinned, sin entered him and he died spiritually, as God had warned. From that moment on, he had a new nature on the inside of him. Spiritually, Adam became a child of the devil.

The Bible also tells us that it was only when Adam's nature became polluted by sin that he began to reproduce and that he did so in his image and likeness. In other words, Adam's corrupt nature has been passed down to every succeeding generation.

This explains why no human being can enter into God's holy presence as he is, because his nature is corrupt. He too has a sin nature, the nature of the devil, on the inside of him.

This being the state of mankind, we needed another Representative; someone to pay the penalty for our sin and give us a new heart. That is exactly what the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, did through His redemptive work on the Cross. Jesus had no death in Him. Through the Virgin Birth He did not inherit the spiritual sin nature of Adam.

Adam and Christ Contrasted

The comparison between the influence of Adam and the Lord Jesus as representatives of humankind is powerfully demonstrated in chapter five of the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans. He says:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even

over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

(Romans 5:12-15)

Paul says that sin was in the world before the written Law of Moses was given, but it was not counted as sin because there was no law to transgress. God does not condemn a person for breaking a law of which he has no knowledge.

But even where sin was not imputed, death reigned nevertheless. This is because death had come into the world as the result of Adam's sin and became a universal experience, affecting even those who broke no specific and plainly stated command as Adam did.

To put it another way, God held each individual guilty through Adam's sin, because Adam acted as the head and representative of the whole human race. Therefore, when he sinned, all humanity sinned in him, and when he was pronounced guilty, all humanity was pronounced guilty.

This may appear unfair, but God's plan of holding each individual guilty because of Adam's sin is much more merciful than if each person had had to stand for himself. If that had been the case, each of us would have done exactly what Adam did. We would have sinned and there would have been no hope. But whereas the first Adam stood as our representative, the Second Adam could also stand as our Representative.

Moreover, the Apostle Paul goes on to demonstrate how "*the grace of God,*" and "*the free gift of righteousness,*" that comes through Jesus, is much greater than the condemnation that came through our first representative. He continues to the very end of chapter five to make a comparison between these two:

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the

grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.

(Romans 5:15-17)

If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

(Romans 5:17-20)

Made even Clearer!

From the above Scripture verses we can see once again that it is not our own individual acts of sin that make us a sinner. Paul says that believers are made righteous through faith in Christ independently of their actions in the same way that all were made sinners through Adam's one sin.

Dear reader, it cannot be emphasized enough. Human beings are lost and separated from God today not only because of the sins they commit, but because of what they are on the inside. The real problem lies with the heart of man. In the Gospel of Mark we read:

For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these things come from within, and they defile a person.

(Mark 7:21-24)

Even if an individual could somehow limit all physical manifestations of wrong-doing in his life, he would still be guilty before God through his desires and thoughts. Jesus said:

You have heard it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

(Matthew 5:27-29)

Therefore, it does not matter how benevolent, religious and refined a person is outwardly; he cannot stand in the presence of God as he is because his nature is wrong. In order to be saved he needs someone to not only pay the penalty for his sin, but to give him a new nature. Jesus made this crystal clear to the religious leader Nicodemus when he came to inquire about his salvation. The Gospel of John records His words:

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit."

(John 3:3-7)

Here Jesus told Nicodemus that all his religious activity, important as it was, was not enough; he must be “*born again.*” In other words, the New Birth is the only way to true reconciliation with God. It is also the **key that unlocks all the promises of God** recorded in His Holy Word. This was a bitter pill for the religious people of Jesus’ day to swallow and it is still that way for religious people today.

THE JEWISH DILEMMA

Before we go on to explain in more detail what Jesus meant by the New Birth, I feel it would be helpful to give you some information on the Jewish expectancies in Jesus' Era concerning the coming Messiah.

Nicodemus' reply to Jesus could mean he believed the Lord was speaking of a natural birth, or it could mean he interpreted Jesus' words to mean a moral reformation.

For example, the religious leaders of Jesus' day were very much aware of the promises concerning a New Covenant for God's chosen people. The numerous Old Testament passages that speak of this New Covenant mention three important promises to Israel:

1. The regathering of Israel (*Deuteronomy 30:1-6; Ezekiel 11:16-20, 37:11-14; Jeremiah 23:1-8*).
2. Their cleansing and spiritual transformation (*Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:37-41; Ezekiel 11:19-21, 36:25-28, 37:14-15*).
3. The reign of Messiah over all Israel and over the whole Earth (*Isaiah 2:2-5, 11:1-10, 35:1-10, 65:17-25; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 14:9, 16-17; Psalm 24:7-10, Psalms 45, 72, 110*).

In Jesus' day, most Jews mistakenly believed that the first two aspects of the New Covenant had already been fulfilled. They viewed the return from the Babylonian Captivity as the fulfilment of the regathering, and the birth of strong spiritual movements like the Pharisees as the fulfilment of spiritual cleansing.

All that they had to wait for now was the coming of Messiah to overthrow the Romans and establish His Kingdom.

However, whatever the meaning behind Nicodemus' question, he clearly did not understand the truth about the New Birth and throughout the conversation Jesus had to keep explaining these basic truths to him.

Yet there was absolutely no excuse for this leader's ignorance and there is still no excuse for it today. The New Birth had been prophesied throughout the Old Testament, and that it would come by means of a New Covenant, established through the shed blood of the Messiah.

In addition, the Hebrew Prophets had clearly indicated that the Messiah would come twice. First to be rejected and crucified for His people, both Jew and Gentile, and then a second time to defeat His enemies and reign over the whole world.

Of course, the specific words, "two comings of the Messiah," were not pronounced by the Prophets. The truth was there only by implication. All that the Prophets had revealed concerning the Messiah obviously could not occur in one time frame and one event. There were apparent contradictions which could be reconciled in no other way than by two advents.

For example, some prophecies say He would be, "*Cut off from the land of the living*" (*Isaiah 53:8-10; Daniel 9:26*), and others that, "*He shall see his offspring and prolong his days*" (*Isaiah 53:10*) and reign forever (*Isaiah 9:7*).

Yet neither the rabbis who had studied the Scriptures daily, nor the disciples to whom the Lord had laboured to explain these things to on numerous occasions, comprehended what the Prophets had foretold.

They were so obsessed with wielding great power in a Messianic Kingdom that Jesus' words fell without meaning upon their ears. They wanted the Jewish people to be pre-eminent in the whole

world, but Jesus came to bring New Life to the whole world where *He* would be pre-eminent:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

(John 3:16-18)

Therefore, we have two possible reasons why the Lord's statements about the New Birth were so strange to Nicodemus and many others. First, they believed that the Jewish people already had it all. Second, that is what they wanted to believe. However, the Lord continued:

I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit

(John 3:5-9)

In these Scripture verses Jesus is emphatic in saying that man does not need a moral reformation, but a radical conversion by the Spirit of God; the bringing of New Life to our dead spirit. Now let us see what that means exactly.

FACTS ABOUT THE NEW BIRTH

What is it?

Put simply, the New Birth is a spiritual birth; it means to be born spiritually. From Jesus' words in His dialogue with Nicodemus quoted above, and from other New Testament Documents, we learn many other interesting facts about this beautiful experience. We learn that the New Birth is a very unique, instantaneous, mysterious and miraculous event in the order of an individual's salvation.

It is unique because it happens only once, just as physical birth happens only once. It is instantaneous because it happens the instant you repent from the heart and believe the Gospel that Jesus died for your sins on the Cross.

The New Birth is mysterious because it cannot be seen with the physical eyes, but it is real nonetheless, because we experience the effects of it once received first through faith. As Jesus said to Nicodemus:

You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

(John 3:7-9)

Last, the New Birth is miraculous because it cannot be obtained through human effort – “*of blood, of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man*” – but is brought about solely and exclusively by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit (see also *John 1:12-14*).

The New Birth is also miraculous because we receive a new nature, the very nature of Christ, and become a completely new creature when the Holy Spirit comes to live in our heart. Paul says:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new.

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

What is the meaning of *water*?

There are different interpretations of the meaning of the word *water* in the passage from the Gospel of John quoted previously. Some believe it refers to water baptism. Others see it as a reference to the natural birth of a baby because of Jesus words, “*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit.*” Others see the water of rebirth as a reference to the Word of God, and there are a number of Scriptures that could well support this view. James says, “*He gave us birth by the word of truth.*” Paul declared in Ephesians chapter five that Christ gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse the Church with the “*washing of water by the word.*” Earlier in that same Epistle he wrote:

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

(Ephesians 1:13-14)

Again, in his Letter to the Romans, Paul wrote:

Faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

(Romans 10:17)

Finally, the Apostle Peter says:

You have been born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, through the living and enduring word of God.

(1 Peter 1:23)

These passages indicate that the Word of God is the *seed* that comes into your heart and causes faith to grow. However, any of the interpretations of the meaning of the word *water* in John chapter three listed above, with the exception of water baptism, are consistent with Scripture and do not pose any inconsistencies.

Where does the change take place?

Second Corinthians above says that all things have become completely new at the moment of salvation. This speaks of a change already accomplished and not a process. Through observation we can see that this is not referring to your physical body, even though that is to come.

Neither is it referring to your soul, the mental part of you. If you were not a clever person before the New Birth, you will not be after, unless you allow the Holy Spirit to work on you in that area.

When the Bible says that all things have become new, it is referring to the human spirit, the heart of man. Let us take a look at these components that make up a human being.

Spirit Soul and Body Defined

The Bible makes it very clear that man is made up of three parts; he is a spirit who possesses a soul and lives in a body. Some people confuse soul and spirit as being the same thing, even though the Bible shows a very distinct difference between the two. In his Letter to the Thessalonians Paul exhorts believers to keep their whole personhood in a state of constant holiness until the coming of the Lord:

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Here Paul sees the person as a tri-unity of spirit, soul and body. (see also *2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 4:12, 12:23*). What then is the difference between these three aspects of our humanity? The soul is the middle, emotional part of a person, which includes the mind or intellect, the will and the emotions. Your mind gives you the ability to reason things and understand them, and your will is your ability to make choices and decisions; this ability is much influenced by your thinking and feelings.

The human spirit, on the other hand, is the core of a person, the innermost being, the heart. The Apostle Paul calls our spirit the “*inward man*” (*2 Corinthians 4:16*), and Peter refers to our spirit as the “*hidden man of the heart*” (*1 Peter 3:4*). The human spirit is also the part of us that God communicates to.

Last, the human body is a tent that houses both the spirit and soul, but it cannot take any action without the soul's direction.

As we pointed out in the opening lines of this book, before the New Birth our spirit is dead through sin, and therefore it was impossible for us to have a right relationship with God. But when we are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live in our heart and infuses it with New Life; empowering us to have communion with the Father and walk in holiness.

As we also showed earlier, the New Birth was predicted in the Old Testament. Speaking about it the Prophet Ezekiel says:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

(Ezekiel 36:26-28)

In the above passage there is no distinction between the words *heart* and *spirit*, even though the dictionary might make one. These two words are actually synonymous. This is an example of a device in Hebrew literature known as *parallelism*, where the same thing is emphasized by stating it in two different ways. Another example comes from the Psalms where we read, "*Hear my prayer O Lord, let my cry for help come to you.*" *Prayer* and *cry* are two different ways of saying the same thing and the literary device is used for effect.

How to Appropriate it all

Change is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a true believer. Yet failure to understand that these truths must be appropriated by faith has caused much confusion and disappointment for many Christians.

To overcome this conflict, we need to understand that the spirit realm cannot be seen or felt through the five senses. This does not mean that they are not touched and impacted to some degree by the change that has taken place in our inner being. However, our feelings and emotions are often up and down and are therefore unreliable as a guide.

The only way to discern spiritual truth is through the Bible. The Apostle James likens the Bible to a spiritual mirror that you look into, not to see your physical appearance, but to discern spiritual reality:

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.

But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.

(James 1:22-27)

Let me share with you one commentator's example to aid your understanding of what we are saying. If you want to see that your physical appearance is presentable before leaving home, you do not let yourself be led simply by how you feel. You look in the mirror and trust what you see reflected there and you act accordingly. In the same way, a believer must receive the Word of God and believe what it says, independently of how he feels or how he sees things in the natural realm.

If you do not understand this principle, you will search your middle, emotional part, and if you cannot feel, see or hear what the Bible says about you, you will experience conflict and think

the Bible is very hard to understand or that there is something wrong with you.

To sum up: The Word of God is “*spirit and life.*” It reveals spiritual reality and has documented and detailed what has happened in the spiritual realm. It is the only reliable way you can discern who you are in Christ when you are born again and what He has accomplished for you. The Word says you are:

1. A completely new creature (*2 Corinthians 5:17*)
2. A child of God (*Romans 8:15-18; John 1:12-14*)
3. Cleansed and forgiven of past sins (*Ephesians 1:7*)
4. Joint heirs with Christ (*Romans 8:15-18*)
5. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ (*1 Corinthians 1:30*)
6. Partakers of the divine nature (*2 Peter 1:4*)
7. Justified and un-condemned (*Romans 8:1, 33-35*)
8. Delivered from the curse of the Law (*Galatians 3:10-13*)
9. Saved from the wrath to come (*1Thessalonians 1:10*)

This is just a partial list but enough to see the wonderful salvation God has prepared for you! Let us thank and praise Him daily as we meditate and act upon these amazing promises.

OUR ON-GOING WALK WITH GOD

The Father's goal is that through the New Birth His children are transformed into the image of His Son Jesus, to be what man was before the Fall. Here we must pause to deal with the much-neglected question of sanctification.

Sanctification is not a one-time instantaneous event like the New Birth. Rather, it is a process by which a believer is made holy, set apart from the world's values, behaviours and pursuits. The journey should begin at salvation and end when a Christian goes home to be with the Lord.

Many ministers today present the Cross of Christ in a one-sided way. They speak of its atoning work and all its benefits and blessings to the believer, but not about its fellowship and refining work on each individual.

This neglect has done considerable harm to the Body of Christ. Without the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit Christians do not manifest any character change. Neither do they mature in faith, but remain spiritual dwarfs, mere babes in Christ, with a weak *root system*. Consequently, when trials come they are left in despair and sometimes abandon the faith.

Neglect on the need for holiness in the believer's life has also been taken to extremes; to the point that many believe they can become Christians without abandoning their sinful lifestyles. However, the New Testament writers are clear, we must bear fruit worthy of repentance:

Pursue peace with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

(Hebrews 12:14-15)

Like obedient children do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written; “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

(1Peter 1:14-17)

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication that each of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honour, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

(1Thessalonians 4:3-6)

Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the name of the Lord from a pure heart.

(2 Timothy 2:22-23)

For Just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

(Romans 6:19b-20)

Some people often ask if the process of sanctification is active or passive. In other words, do we obtain progress and maturity through our own self-discipline, or do we leave it entirely up to the Holy Spirit?

Actually, as you will have noticed from the quotations above, the Word of God teaches it is a combination of both. We have to apply ourselves to the task of *crucifying the flesh*. And we do this by walking in obedience to the Holy Spirit. But in the process we receive *His* power to enable us.

Paul says exactly this in his Letter to the Galatians, “*Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*” He then goes on to say what the “*desires of the flesh*” are and the consequences for gratifying them:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before, those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(Galatians 5:19-22)

Similarly, in his Epistle to the Romans Paul writes:

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

(Romans 8:9-14)

Notice again, the “*you*” is emphatic in these verses; we must do our part, but we are not left to eliminate the “*deeds of the body*” on our own. As stated above, we put them to death by the power of the Holy Spirit. Further on in the Book of Romans Paul speaks again of the believer’s cooperation in his sanctification. He says:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

(Romans 8:9-14)

And how do we renew our minds? Obviously through the Word of God. But it cannot purify unless YOU read it.

Probably one of the reasons that most people do not like the subject of sanctification and total surrender to the Holy Spirit is because it can sometimes be a painful process, as the Lord begins to “mould” and “prune” us. The writer of Hebrews confirms this:

Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(Hebrews 12:11-12)

Ending on a High Note

I will finish this book with one last point on the subject of sanctification. It actually has a twofold purpose: To be *like* Christ and to *know* Christ. The New Testament teaches that when we are walking with the Holy Spirit, we will face many trials, hardships, and conflicts from without. What I mean is that Christians will suffer not because they sin, but because they bear the name of Christ.

The most positive aspect of this is that it causes us to know our precious Saviour more intimately. We must not forget that He was tried and tested in every way that we are. The Prophet Isaiah actually describes Jesus as “*a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*”

This is why the Apostle John says that knowing Christ is Eternal Life. He means there is no greater joy than having intimate experiential knowledge of Jesus; it automatically causes praise and awe to arise in your heart for Him. After discovering the

beauty of all this it became one of the Apostle Paul's greatest passions. In his own words:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings, by becoming like him in his death.

(Philippians 3:10)

But if we will not submit to the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to take us down the narrow path, we will rob ourselves of this great joy, both now and in eternity! God forbid.