

Born Again (Part 4)

How Does God Regard Us?

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This is going to be my fourth sermon on "Born Again," and hopefully I can wrap things up here and answer some questions that have come up, and clarify some things as we go along. One of the things I want to clarify at the beginning of this sermon is that there is a misunderstanding that somehow or another the Bible is simple. The Bible is *not* simple. It says of itself that it is a mystery. If it is so easily understood, why is there so much confusion, especially in the world, as to what it says?

We are going to begin in Deuteronomy 29:29. This is one of those memory scriptures that are good to keep in mind.

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Here is an admission from the Bible itself that there are secret things. Those secret things pertain to what God is working out. That verse also mentions that God reveals, and those revealed things belong to us. But even when they are revealed, brethren, this does not mean that they are completely understood. There is a *beginning* of understanding.

Now we are going to go to the New Testament and see a verse along this line.

Colossians 1:26-27 The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This particular mystery that God has revealed to the church, which He of course did back in the days of the apostles, is that Gentiles would be added to the church. In other words, salvation was not going to be solely an Israelite blessing from God, but the church was going to contain Gentiles within it.

We are going to go back to Matthew 13. This is the chapter with all those parables in it. As we go there, just remember that since God has revealed about the Gentiles, that is no longer a secret thing. The church has had it revealed to it, but here Paul was talking about it, and he was revealing more details of that to those people at that time.

Matthew 13:10-11 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."

We see something kind of interesting here, and that is a definite indication that some people are blessed with the revelation of a mystery, and with other people it is withheld from them. That is very clear.

Matthew 13:12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

So Jesus Himself states that there are mysteries to the kingdom of heaven.

William Barclay, who was a Presbyterian minister and commentator, gave one of the better definitions of this word "mystery" that I have seen. If you want to check it out you may find it in Volume 2, on page 64 of his Matthew Commentary. He said, "To us a mystery simply means something dark and difficult and impossible to understand [That is the common understanding of the word *mystery*], but in the New Testament time it was the technical name for something which was unintelligible to the outsider, but crystal clear to the man who had been initiated." A mystery was a technical word or term with a definition that was revealed. Verse 12 is important in this regard.

A biblical mystery is not only difficult on its surface, but Jesus adds in verse 12 that it must be given by God in order for even those to whom He is revealing it to understand even elementary aspects of some doctrine. Other doctrines may require a lifetime of study to thoroughly understand. That one I just gave you is an interpretation of His statement—"For whoever has, to him more will be given." In other words, the initial revelation is not the end of completely understanding the mystery that is being revealed. It is just the beginning.

God's Word is deep, and it is complex, and just because God reveals a truth to us does not mean that is the end of our responsibility to study. And if we do study, more will be revealed. That is Jesus' promise on this subject. In other words, God does not reveal His mysteries fully to every person equally, and all come to understand gradually. Let me give you an illustration.

When you went to school in the first grade, and then you passed at the end of the school year, did you quit going to school after first grade was over? No, you did not. You went on. You passed on to the second grade, and in the second grade more broader and deeper understanding was added to what you learned in the first grade. And then in the third grade again more and deeper understanding was added, and again in the fourth grade, and on and on. That is exactly the way it is with God.

He reveals something, but as He reveals it, we only get the basic understanding of the mystery. Then more will be added to what we have been given if we diligently continue to seek God and His way. The revelation of a mystery is a process that begins with a simple understanding, and then progresses on to a much deeper understanding as well. So there is further need to continue studying, because something can always be added to what we already have. In many cases, when we begin to understand, we have only scratched the surface.

It is clear that the truth regarding whether God intends us to understand "born again" or being "born from above" or merely impregnated and within the womb of the church cannot be determined solely from the definition of *gennao*, or for that matter all from John the third chapter. We have to look at the whole picture. When we begin to get more and more added to what is in John 3, then it begins to take on a depth that maybe we did not really understand when we first began.

What we are headed for here is this: We have to learn how God looks at every subject in the Bible, and as we come to understand and agree with the way *He* looks at things, what His mind is on any given subject, then we are coming to have the mind of God. One of the things we really need to do

regarding this "born again" or "born from above" subject is to ask: How does *He* address His children? This is because the way He addresses His children is the way He looks at it.

Let us go to II Peter 3. We are going to continue to add ammunition to this idea that everything in the Bible is simple. It is *not* simple.

II Peter 3:15-16 And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

On this subject that we are covering here right at the beginning of this sermon, this is very, very, interesting, very revealing. Peter was an apostle. Peter spent three and one-half years *personally* with Jesus Christ. Spiritually, he was one of the best taught men ever to walk on the face of God's great green Earth; and yet, here is one apostle (Peter) who is saying of *another* apostle (Paul), that in *all*—meaning that in every one of Paul's epistles—there are things hard to understand, even for an apostle. Peter did not disagree with Paul, but Peter had to work them through to come to an understanding of what his fellow apostle was writing about. And then he goes on to say that people twist the rest of the Scriptures too.

Let us look at this from the standpoint of those who are doing the twisting. Those people may be completely sincere, but they simply do not understand what the Scriptures are saying, but they are still preaching before people. They are writing articles, and so forth, and even unintentionally they are twisting the Scriptures because they do not have the right understanding.

I am here to confess to you that for fifty years I believed Mr. Armstrong's analogy regarding being impregnated and being within the womb of the mother church. Well, I am repenting of that because it is not true. Mr. Armstrong was very sincere, and he was not completely deceived, brethren, because he came up with something that every one of us needed to have, and that was to understand that when we are converted, salvation is not done with. We still have to go through sanctification.

What we are clarifying here is: How does *God* look at it? Does He look at it as a fetus in a womb? I think not, brethren. Mr. Armstrong's "begotten" teaching was correct in one vital aspect there, and it served us well, and that is that justification all by itself is not salvation. After justification we must go on to perfection to the completion of salvation through the sanctification process. Another way of putting it is that we must *grow* in holiness, but the analogy he used of impregnation, gestation in the womb of the church as our mother, and birth into the Kingdom of God was wrong—almost *totally* wrong—because that analogy does not match with the Bible's reality.

The Bible's reality is that it always speaks of us as an adult son of God; not a fetus, but as an adult son, as a child, or children of God. Why? Because biblically, and therefore spiritually, we are not dealing with a human physical birth process, but a supernatural, spiritual God-initiated-and-driven birth.

Turn with me to a very important scripture in this regard to understand biblical teaching. We are going to go to Romans 4. Verse 17 is the key one for us right now.

Romans 4:16-17 Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

"God calls those things which do not exist as though they did." When God said that to Abraham, Abraham was not the father of all of us. He was not the father of any of us. God is calling Abraham a father even though Abraham was not yet a father. God calls things that are not as though they already are. One of the things this does for us is tell us that God is completely positive, that He is confident He can bring His purposes to pass, and so very frequently He speaks of things in the past tense as though they already existed, even though they only existed in His mind.

What we need to learn from this is that God does not always use words normally. He makes technical use of words. Remember what Barclay said about "mystery," that it was a technical word. God makes technical use of words that fit the purpose of the creation *He* is working out. Now a technical word may be a common word, even as mystery is a common word, but its unusual usage fits only the Bible, because it is the way *God* looks at it. You see, this is part of the mystery. The way God looks at things is part of the mystery, but as we continue to search things out, God reveals His mind further and further so that we share in more of the mystery as *He* looks at things.

Let us look at another scripture in the book of Romans. This is a very simple example. Some of the examples that I will give you are more complex than this one, but I want to show you this so that you will understand that God does not always use words, terms, in the same way we might expect.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

What is the unusual word there? It is the word "glorified." Not a single person other than Jesus Christ has ever been glorified yet, but the way God is looking at it, He can bring it to pass. Once He calls you, converts you, and gives you His Spirit, He is sure, that if you will give Him half a chance, He can bring you to glorification. So He looks at it here as though it has already been accomplished. It has not. The reality is that it has not been *yet*, but that is the way *He* is looking at it. Salvation is a process. It is not complete with one creative act, but here in Romans 8:30, in God's mind, it is though it is already done even though it literally is not.

In one of my previous sermons on this subject, going through Matthew 13 especially, and Matthew 25, Jesus obviously used the terms "Kingdom of God," "church," "family," and "house" interchangeably in certain contexts despite the fact that they literally have specific different meanings.

Literally, a house is not a kingdom. A house is not a church. A house is something people dwell in. That definition can be expanded, but the context of Matthew 13 clearly proves that what I am saying here is right and true within that context. Jesus did this in order to show us that in those contexts those terms are truly synonymous for each other for His purposes as *He* did there in Matthew 13 and Matthew 25; thus, as God sees things, the Kingdom of God is indeed the Family of God. It is indeed the house of God. It is indeed the church of God. This is all technical use according to His purpose.

Members of God's family make up, comprise, the Kingdom of God. Now because of this, brethren, this is why Philippians 3:21 tells us that we already have citizenship in the Kingdom of God. We are already ambassadors for Jesus Christ, representing the Kingdom of God even though the physical reality of the Kingdom has not yet arrived in its fullness. It is here in the family, in the church, but not yet in its fullness. What is the solution here? The solution is, as we are studying, for us to always consider: How does God look at us?

The responsibility that He gives to us in His Word—the duties, the commands—is based upon how *He* perceives us. It is very clear that He looks at us as His already-adult children, already part of His Family Kingdom, and this is the spiritual reality, and that is what is important.

Now I am going to go back in thought to the last few moments of my previous sermon in this series when I said at the end of that sermon, "Our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God truly begins after we have received the Holy Spirit from our Father in heaven." I then, a moment or two later, said that our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God required that we spiritually walk to the Kingdom of God. But brethren, I said this right in that sermon, "A fetus, by analogy, in the womb of the church cannot walk." Rather, God speaks to us through His Word as adult members of His family, who are at the same time disciples of Jesus Christ.

A disciple is a learner, a student who is a follower of a certain discipline. As adult disciples, we are perceived as fully capable of judgment and making choices. This is our responsibility. We are to make judgments, and then make choices. We are given responsibilities on which we are to use our God-given free moral agency to voluntarily carry out by faith.

The next day or so I was thinking of the tail end of that sermon when it dawned on me that there are great many things commanded of God, besides not being able to walk, that a fetus cannot do. Think along with me. Can a fetus voluntarily exercise its will to listen to instruction or obeying the commandments? Think of a baby in a womb. Can a fetus do such a thing? God commands you and me to do it. A fetus cannot do that. Can a fetus remember God's command to walk in love, to be humble, kind, and merciful? God requires that of us.

Can a fetus hunger and thirst after righteousness, let its light shine before men, be patient, redeem the time, and walk in the spirit? Can a fetus work with God in spirit and truth? Can a fetus work out its own salvation, pray without ceasing, be thankful always, and fellowship with fellow fetuses? The Bible says that eternal life is to know God. Can a fetus grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ? No, brethren. A fetus cannot do a single thing that we are commanded to do except live at the expense of another, always dependent, never independent.

Let us add to this. Is not God's love out-going concern for others equal to self-concern? A fetus' sole concern, if it even has one, is incoming for its own survival. Can a fetus live by faith, watch, be alert, and become converted? Can it lay down its life as a living sacrifice, and glorify God in so doing? A child of God is required to serve God and his brethren while preparing for the Kingdom of God.

Brethren, this is just an ever-so-brief list of things that a fetus cannot do, and it already ought to tell you something about the "begotten" analogy. It does not work. It does not fit the way God perceives us spiritually. It immediately breaks down because it does not fit the reality of us being a co-worker with God, as Paul clearly points out in II Corinthians 6:1. A fetus cannot co-work with anybody or any thing.

One does not become in the image of Jesus Christ completely contained in a womb, but rather in real time, occupied with hands-on activity as an already-born-into-the-family adult child of God, living His way of life right on through the sanctification process. So it is very helpful to understand that being "born again," or "born from above" is not a natural process as physical birth is. It is a supernatural, divine intervention which Paul described in II Corinthians 5:17 as a new creation.

The Bible shows us that spirit beings are not born. They are created by God Himself. We are a new creation, and we are going to be spirit beings. Spirit beings are created. Now did not Jesus say that angels neither marry, nor are given in marriage? They are spirit beings. They do not marry, they do not have intercourse, they do not give birth to children.

Brethren, each and every one of us has divine intervention accomplished in us, called into God's family, and each one of these continues to the filling out of a new race of beings. I kid you not. God is creating a new race of beings—His spirit sons, way above angels, because His sons are going to be God-beings as He is. A whole new race is being created.

There is a pattern for this. Adam and Eve were the beginning of the *human* races. Adam and Eve were not born by natural processes. They were the beginning of a new race of mortal physical beings, and each one of them was a new creation, and that is what *we* are. Each one of us is a new creation.

Please understand that in this case, the word "birth" and "born" are only used to indicate a beginning. You can look up the word "born" in the dictionary, and you will find that it is a beginning. This is one of the reasons why Jesus so quickly rejected Nicodemus' physically-oriented reply to His statement, "You must be born again."

Nicodemus was not being confrontational. He was simply ignorant of what Jesus was teaching about [being born again]. I want you to make a mark in your mind. His answer, his response to Jesus' "You must be born again," was that he immediately gave evidence by the way he replied. He interpreted it as a birth, not a begetting. It was a birth to Nicodemus. He interpreted *gennaō* as a birth. It was a new beginning.

No birth is mentioned in I Corinthians 15. That is where the resurrection information is given, because the beginning had already occurred following baptism and the laying on of hands. By the time the resurrection will have occurred, the mind will have already been changed to God's satisfaction, and all that remains is for the body to be changed to spirit to match the spirituality of the mind.

John 1:29-34 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

I want you to notice that John announced Jesus' arrival to a group of people gathered around him, and then strangely said, "I did not know Him." Let us look at that. He obviously knew Jesus as a man who was his cousin. He knew where Jesus was born, and where He lived, and because he was of the

same extended family, the mysterious events surrounding Jesus' birth were also well-known to him. Now what he did not perceive about Jesus was the fuller extent of Jesus' importance to God's spiritual purpose, and in order to grasp this, God gave him a specific sign.

Matthew 3:13-14 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

What in the world did John mean there? In John 1, he said he did not know Him! He already knew something about Him—enough to respect Him so highly that he said, "I need to be baptized of *You!*"

Matthew 3:15-16 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

Pay particular attention to verse 15 where Jesus said, "for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

We are baptized for the remission of our sins. That is one of the reasons. We are also baptized as preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit. That is right, and it is good, and I think most of us understand that, but I would like you to consider Jesus. Did Jesus have to be baptized for the remission of sin? No, because He did not commit any sin. Did Jesus have to be baptized for the receipt of God's Spirit? No, because He was God from birth. Remember, the angel said, "Call His name Immanuel," which means, "God with us." He already *had* the Holy Spirit. Therefore Jesus' action here, His conduct, was setting an example of what *we* must do as disciples and followers of Jesus.

At that same occasion of Jesus' baptism, God gave John the dove sign, and at the same time opened to John's understanding the awesome importance of His cousin's place in God's order of things. In other words, He filled his mind with it—with the overwhelming gratitude and awe of who this was standing before him. Jesus really was God in the flesh. It may have been a fact to him before, but once God fully opened his mind to it, it must have hit him like a ton of bricks. "Wow! This is my Creator standing there, and He is my cousin." What a humbling thing that must have been for him.

Let us apply this to you and to me. Jesus did not have to do these things. He was fulfilling all righteousness. He was going through the steps as an example to you and to me of what we, as a disciple of Christ, have to do in order to become a son of God; not a fetus of God, brethren—a son of God. We have to be baptized, and then we are prepared for the receipt of God's Holy Spirit. [When Jesus was baptized] that was the exact moment when God chose to send His sign to John the Baptist in the form of the dove, and that is when *we* receive the Spirit of God, and instantly, like Jesus, become a son of God.

So we are not merely an impregnated son, but an already born fully-functioning adult son, even as Jesus was an already fully-functioning Son of God—a Son ready to take on the responsibilities and having much to learn, but enabled now to begin preparations for what is coming in the process God is working out. Now how do I know for sure that we are sons, fully-functioning?

Matthew 11:25-26 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. [Not fetuses. Babes!] Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

This statement is repeated in Luke 10.

Luke 10:21 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

I want you to turn to I Corinthians 3. The author is Paul. He is calling these people "brethren." They are his brothers in the faith. They are possessors of the Spirit of God.

I Corinthians 3:1-2 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able.

They were "born again" babes that Paul was writing to—converted sons of God who were nonetheless immature Christians. But they were fully functioning. They were not fetuses in a womb.

Let us go to Hebrews 5 where we come across some who were further advanced to be sure.

Hebrews 5:11-14 Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil

The people about whom Paul was writing here were babes in understanding. At one time they had been a great deal more mature, but either way we want to look at it, they were nonetheless already born sons of God who were in danger of flying right out of the church, right out of the house of God, and right out of their inheritance because they were not taking care of their responsibilities, their duties before God. So they were losing the Spirit of God that made them sons of God.

Do we understand that when God gives us His Spirit it is called "being born from above," because it is the official beginning? It is the birth of a mind, a heart, that is beginning to think, to perceive, and to judge from God's point of view with a caring, understanding concern that it never had before. It is a heart changed—circumcised—that truly begins living by faith of, and in, the Creator God. The "born again" transaction is entirely spiritual in nature. It *is* the spiritual circumcision that God earlier prophesied of.

Here is another parallel. Even under the Old Covenant, the physical circumcision was done to an already out-of-the-womb baby. The baby was not circumcised in the womb. It was already born, and on the eighth day it was circumcised. Physical circumcision was what made the already-born child a

participant in the Old Covenant. The New Covenant circumcision is not done by the local rabbi. The spiritual circumcision is done by God Himself to an already out-of-the-womb adult, and it is what makes the person a participant in the New Covenant.

No blood is shed, because the circumcision is immaterial and invisible. It is done to the heart. It is of the spirit. It is a new creation, and it takes place entirely in the mind. There is absolutely nothing physical involved in the spiritual birth from above.

There is one clearly distinctive reason why Jesus was surprised that Nicodemus did not understand about being born again, and it is because the term "born again" was already being used. It was current and in use within the Jewish religion, and it had been used for a long time.

When a Gentile wanted to make the Old Covenant and worship in the same manner as the Jew, he came before a rabbi and he was questioned, just like we put you through a baptismal counseling. He was questioned regarding his knowledge and his sincerity, and if found acceptable, he was then baptized and pronounced "born again" by the rabbi because they recognized that a new spiritual life had begun. They knew it! Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You are a rabbi in Israel and you do not understand this?"

Like I said, Nicodemus was not trying to be confrontational. He did not get it because the Jews did not use it [born again] for other Jews. They only used it when a Gentile was baptized. What Jesus was teaching him was that whether Israelitish or a Gentile, everybody has to go through this spiritual circumcision.

Some believe that they have found fault with us "already being in the Kingdom of God" despite around ten scriptures I quoted in the previous sermon in which Jesus Himself used, by inference, the church and the Kingdom of God interchangeably. The response of those who objected used I Corinthians 15:15, which states that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

Brethren, I agree with that statement one hundred percent. Remember, God calls things that are not as though they already exist. Well, I agree with that scripture. It does not contradict our already being "born again" and our already being in the Kingdom of God, being in the family of God, because right at this time we are sons of God as flesh and blood, and adopted as part of His family despite the fact that He is God and we are merely mortal human beings who have not yet inherited the Kingdom.

We are currently only inheritors. Our name is on the list to inherit it. We have not inherited it yet. Do you know why? Because Jesus Christ Himself has not inherited it yet. We are totally inheritors with Him. He will not inherit the Kingdom officially until He comes as King of the Kingdom. We have to wait until He inherits it first, and when He inherits it fulltime, then we, too, will inherit it with Him. When that occurs, we will no longer be flesh and blood because we will have undergone the transformation, the glorification that I Corinthians 15 is explaining.

Brethren, the problem again is that many are still looking at this entire process of born again as being physically oriented. So before that occurs, our mind must become in the image of Jesus Christ, and we have a long way to go before we are thinking and acting as He does. We still have time to submit to all of those commands God mentions in the beginning of this sermon that a fetus in a womb cannot do. Putting those commands into practice in daily life is *the* challenge of sanctification. Now sanctification is that period of the salvation process devoted to growth toward godly purity.

I Thessalonians 4:1-3 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification.

I am going to stop there because he begins to go into a specific area of sanctification.

II Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unless we go through sanctification we will never reach the glory of God.

I Thessalonians 4:7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

Sanctification is the process that brings us to holiness, to being truly one with God.

Obedience to these commands we just saw there in I Thessalonians 4 and in II Thessalonians 2 is what glorifies God. "Practice makes perfect." The day-to-day practice of God's way ingrains His way into our character and helps transform us into the image of Jesus Christ. Being born again and in His Family Kingdom in no way excuses us from the trials of sanctification.

Indeed, brethren, we do not have it made yet. We are far from perfected to be the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 4. Being already "born again" should make those who understand feel the weight of our awesome blessing and responsibility before God much, much more sharply.

All of us must go through this process of holiness. A fetus cannot do this. That analogy does not fit the way God looks at us. He looks at us as adult children who are already born in His family and going through sanctification, being drawn to holiness which God Himself is creating within us. It is our responsibility through this period to yield ourselves to the command that God gives to us in order that we be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Indeed growth in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ is required of us. We surely are to grow. We are to come out of the world. We are being sanctified as God's children, and it is necessary that we do so in order to be prepared for when His Kingdom comes in its fullness.

God looks upon us as already born, already part of His Family Kingdom. We are adopted into His family. It is a wonderful gift that He gives to us, that we being only human beings.

Do you understand the Roman adoption? If you did not understand it, I will give you a very simple explanation. Roman adoption was something that was very common in the Roman Empire in which usually a well-to-do, a well-known, a well-educated people high in government, high in business, or whatever, did. They did this either because they did not usually have a son they felt was qualified to follow them in the family business, or into government, or whatever. So what a family who wanted a child like this would usually do would be to adopt an already-grown child, which in almost every occasion was a young man. He might have been a teenager, but he was not a fetus ever.

They always adopted somebody who had already proved himself, but being a part of a particular caste, and being in the family that they were in, they would never get anywhere, if you understand what I mean. The family that needed the child would propose to the family who had the child: "We want your child. Are you willing to give him up? We will adopt him into our family." It was a completely legal process. No blood connection existed between the families. A member of one family was taken into another family, and the family ties were completely legally separated. This is what Paul had in mind when he said, "God has adopted us."

We are God beings. We are from a completely different family. We were of the family of Satan the Devil, but God converts us, and He brings us into His family. So Paul included this [that] God adopts us into His family. No blood connection. The only thing that is there is the conversion that God has begun. "I want this person in My family," and God then makes the legal maneuvers to make us part of His family, and we now give up the old name, and we take on the name of the God family. We are in it completely, totally, sanctified, circumcised, born-again children of the family of God, adopted, and now we have every legal right to call Him "Abba, Father." So there is a warm family connection as if we were His own children, and we are.

Incidentally, Jesus said in John 8, "If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed." That is what has happened. We have been made free of the encumbrance of our humanity, and it is not already gone either. We are truly free, and free to exercise our will. Hopefully it will be the same as the will of God. We are free to exercise our judgment and our choices to make choices that are in line with the will of God.

We will call this sermon quits right here for today, and so the next time we will cover another aspect of this subject.