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## Inheriting a New Nature

### John 3:6

**Intro:** Let's review what we've discovered in our study of John's 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter so far. Nicodemus has come to Jesus in the hope of engaging in a conversation about spiritual things. Jesus is not interested in any small talk or theological debate; He cuts right to the heart of Nicodemus' problem – his need for salvation. Obviously, Nicodemus was an **accomplished** and an **intelligent** man, but neither of these were enough to meet his greatest need. As great as they are, they don't rise to the standard of what's acceptable for entering into an eternal relationship with an eternal God.

Now, in broaching this subject, Jesus begins with what is familiar: He associates human salvation with the universal experience of human birth except here He refers to it as being "**born again**." Tho Nic is familiar with the concept of physical birth, this is a **term** that he fails to recognize. Jesus clues him in to the fact that the **source** of this new birth must be found only in God, just as Adam's life originated from God. He also provided Nic insight into the **means** by which this new birth occurs in the human heart – by the **water** of the **Word of God** and the power of the **Spirit of God**. God implants faith in the heart of man and fertilizes it with the incorruptible seed of the Word, which contains life; then by the effectual working power of the Holy Spirit, spiritual life is **conceived** and **new birth occurs** in the heart.

The correlations between physical birth and the new birth are striking but they do not end there. Physical birth always involves **travail** on the part of another. Very rarely is the baby in pain at birth. No, someone else is footing that bill. It's the same with spiritual birth. Jesus Christ had to suffer in **travail** on the cross so that we could be born into God's family. In a lesser way, Christians who are concerned for the souls of the lost have to **travail** in prayer and witnessing in order to lead others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (**Gal 4:19**).

Physical birth involves **life** and spiritual birth from above involves **God's life**; not just life from God but the life **of** God Himself! Human children inherit the nature of their parents (for better or worse) and so does the child of God. We are given a **new nature**, become "**partakers of the divine nature**" as Peter says (**II Ptr 1:4**). Nature determines appetite; this is why the new

Christian suddenly has an appetite or a desire for the things of God. The word life appears in John's Gospel 36 times. The opposite of life is death and the person who has not trusted in Christ as their Savior does not have God's life, that eternal life. Nor can they experience the abundant life that God desires them to have.

Physical birth involves a **future** and so does the **new birth**. When a baby is born, they literally have their whole life in front of them! Have you ever seen a new born arrested? Of course not! They can't be arrested because they have no past! It's the same way with the new birth. When you are born again into God's family, the Bible says you are born "**again to a living hope**" (1 Ptr 1:3). Why? Because your sins are forgiven and forgotten by God; they have been paid for and cast away as far as the East is from the West. Your future is now bright with a **living hope**.

The new birth is amazing and it is filled with many wonderful spiritual benefits that will directly affect the physical life. But, if you've experienced this new birth then you are well aware of the great conflict it brings into your life. Namely: if the new birth is so great and the benefits are so wonderful, why do I still struggle so much with sin? Why do I find myself so often failing to pursue the new spiritual appetite I have received and instead, satisfy the lust of the flesh?

The next verse in our text (6) will shed some light on the **reason** this state of affairs exists in the believer's life. This verse does more than deliver mere facts about the **new birth**; it provides us **principles** for living out this **new life**.

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**6 – flesh** – The reason given here for the conflict in the believer's life should be understandable to anyone with an elementary knowledge of genetics. Like produces like. Dogs give birth to puppies – not kittens. Cats produces cats, apples trees...ants...people produce people. With this reality in mind, what Jesus is saying is: the natural man can only produce that which is **natural to man**; which, as a result, is **sinful**. Man can produce **nothing** spiritual. On the other hand, that which comes from God produces only that which is characteristic of God - **sinless** and **eternal**.

If we're to properly understand the Lord's statement, we must first understand the terms He is using. What is **flesh**? Currently, the word is used to refer almost exclusively to the fleshly parts of the body, sometimes

even synonymous with “skin.” But this isn’t what it means biblically. In the Bible, “flesh” refers to the entire individual—body, soul, and spirit. After the fall of man it now refers to the individual as he or she is **motivated** by their sinful nature.

How was this word 1<sup>st</sup> used in the Bible? (**Gen 2:23-24**) When Adam said, “They shall become one flesh,” he wasn’t only talking about a sexual union, although that’s certainly part of it. He’s saying that the man and woman were to be united **body, soul, and spirit**, becoming what we might call **one organism**. Thus, at the very beginning of the Bible the word “**flesh**” is used to indicate the entirety of man’s being.

Some might ask? Why must we have the flesh? Why couldn’t God have created us without this wretched handicap?

In the beginning, God created a physical universe and created man with a physical body to do physical work in this physical world. The physical body is the necessary vehicle by which God’s will is to be accomplished on earth.

We’ve all seen a tug-of-war competition: 2 groups attempt to pull a flag tied to a rope over a line. As long as the struggle is even, the flag doesn’t move much. But, if someone loses their grip on the rope or they slip, then the flag moves to the other side and the stronger team wins. This is similar to human nature before the fall. Adam’s center, his soul, was like the marker. On one side was his **body** with its **appetites**. On the other was his **spirit** with its **consciousness of God**. God made Adam so that his **spirit** would **dominate** his body. The spirit was supposed to determine the course of Adam’s walk and growth. But when Adam sinned, his spirit died. Thus, man has been led around by the appetites of the body (**flesh**) ever since. The most tragic result of this is that even the **proper** functions of the body have been completely debased and the true nature of humanity has been irreparably distorted.

Another way to illustrate this is to see the human spirit as the jet engines on a 747 cruising at 35K ft. The human body is the fuselage, the soul is the pilot. When the jet engines are running, the body of the jet is an asset because the wings keep the plane aloft and the other parts help it to fly. But, if the engines cut out, the body immediately becomes a liability because it makes the plane too heavy and then gravity takes over. This is what **the flesh** means. It means to be dominated by the body without the ongoing

thrust of the spirit. It means there's going to be a crash.

This describes the natural state of every human that has ever been born. There is no shortage of verses that bear this truth out be we'll just look at one: **Rom 3:10-12**. This truth is undeniable but the natural man doesn't care for it. Most people spend most of their lives trying to improve the old nature. Just go to a book store (if you can find one) and take a look at their self-help section: it's extensive! Most folk want to make themselves better people which may make life more bearable for others, maybe even themselves; but from God's perspective, nothing has changed.

It's like painting a pump that draws from a well with bad water. Sure, a painted pump looks better than an old rusty one. You can elevate the pump, decorate it; install a gold handle. You can write a poem about it, build a monument in honor of it but in the end, it's still over bad water. No amount of embellishments will ever alter the fact that it can only produce bad water. But this is not the only thing Jesus had to say.

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**Spirit**— we must understand that man's condition is totally depraved and cannot be improved by his own efforts. Reformation will not make him a fit subject for God's kingdom. There's **no** evolution from flesh to spirit. Man needs a **new nature** that will produce a life that pleases God and is fit for the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus is referring to in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of His statement: that **born of the Spirit** is **spiritual** in **nature** and **remains** spirit. **New birth** is a **permanent** thing that produces a permanent change in the believer's life, making them fit for God's kingdom.

But this still doesn't solve the conflict. What happens to the **old nature** (**flesh**) when a person is born again? They get a new nature, sure; a new spirit. This new spirit is the offspring of the Holy Spirit (**God**). But what happens to the old nature? What happens to the desires of the flesh? Some believe that the old nature is eradicated; some, that it is transformed. We know this isn't true because our text denies it: that born of flesh remains flesh. The Apostle Paul had a new nature but he also recognized that he had an old nature that was bad (**Rom 7:15-20**). The answer to the question is that the old nature remains with us and it struggles against the new nature. The new nature can do no bad while the old nature can do no good. So, in the believer's life, there will always be a conflict, a struggle, a war!

I realize this may sound a bit discouraging. Maybe you thought all your struggles were over when you became a Christians and now you're singing along with Karen Carpenter: "We've only just begun..." If this is you, don't despair.

Don't think just because you still have an old nature that you are resigned to a life of sin with the old nature calling all the shots. Not at all, in fact, you've been given a new nature precisely so that the old nature can no longer dominate.

Ok, so how do we achieve such a victory? How do we keep from crashing and burning under the weight of the flesh?

**1<sup>st</sup>)** The Bible exhorts us to *consider our old nature as dead*. In one sense, this is not the case – as long as the body lives, the old nature is present. But, in another sense it is true. God tells us the power of the flesh was broken at the cross and thus, He considers it a dead issue in the believer's life. In light of this truth Paul exhorts us to consider our flesh as dead because of Christ's work (**Rom 6:10-11**) and commands an even more drastic step in **Col 3:5-6**. When we're tempted to sin we must acknowledge that the power of the old nature was broken at the cross and ask the Lord to keep it broken and to give us victory over it." God will do this if we ask him.

**2<sup>nd</sup>)** The Bible teaches that we should *feed the new nature and starve the old*. The Apostle Peter alludes to this in **I Peter 2:1-2**. The old nature is a ferocious animal that can tear our Christian lives apart. God has put this animal in a cage where it's considered to be dead, at least where any obvious activity in the believer's life is concerned. So, what do we do now? Are we going to feed the old nature with worldly thoughts and activities until it becomes so strong, it eventually breaks out of the cage? No way! Our job is to starve the beast in the cage and indulge the new nature with the things of God. This is done primarily thru Bible study because it's only with a greater knowledge of God's truth that the Christian becomes stronger. The spirit must be given preference if it is to dominate our life.

**3<sup>rd</sup>)** The Bible tells us that if we *walk in the Spirit* (live in) we will not *fulfill the lust of the flesh* (**Gal 5:16**). What does it mean to "*walk*" in the Spirit? It's mainly a matter of our *deepest determinations*. It is something we each must choose to do & deliberately do – on a daily basis. But here's the thing: God tells us that He has restored to the believer that desire for spiritual things that was lost at the fall. If God has restored it – let's determine in our

hearts to make good use of it! Let's determine to put ourselves in circumstances and environments where the life of the spirit will grow! Yes, let's read the Bible. Yes, let's pray. But we also must determine to fellowship more with other believers for spiritual reasons – to encourage and to be encouraged. This will help us to make more Christ-like decisions in our lives. If we do this, we'll discover that we're increasingly more victorious, and we'll begin to notice the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, kindness, self-control—is growing within us.

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Are you born again? Do you have the life of God within you? Is there a new spring of water within or are you still painting the pump over your old human nature? In order to please God, you must have the life of God inside. 😊