

## Part 2: The Church is Not the Gospel

In part one, we looked at what the biblical new birth is. It is an informal family-oriented event initiated by one hearing the gospel and believing it. The baptism of the Spirit then takes place apart from any human agency. The Spirit waits for no human formality or authority when He baptizes. In contrast, according to church orthodoxy, whatever the stripe, formally identifying with church membership makes one part of the body of Christ. In fact, the foremost fathers of the Protestant church not only believed this, they believed water baptism by church authorities baptizes one into the body of Christ. Though the documented examples are myriad, we will here enter John Calvin's position into the record:

Baptism is the initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, that being ingrafted into Christ we may be accounted children of God (CI 4.15.1) Hence those who have thought that baptism is nothing else than the badge and mark by which we profess our religion before men, in the same way as soldiers attest their profession by bearing the insignia of their commander, having not attended to what was the principal thing in baptism; and this is, that we are to receive it in connection with the promise, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved"<sup>1</sup>

Nor is it to be supposed that baptism is bestowed only with reference to the past, so that, in regard to new lapses into which we fall after baptism, we must seek new remedies of expiation in other so-called sacraments, just as if the power of baptism had become obsolete. To this error, in ancient times, it was owing that some refused to be initiated by baptism until their life was in extreme danger, and they were drawing their last breath, that they might thus obtain pardon for all the past. Against this preposterous precaution ancient bishops frequently inveigh in their writings. We ought to consider that at whatever time we are baptised, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life. Wherefore, as often as we fall, we must recall the remembrance of our baptism, and thus fortify our minds, so as to feel certain and secure of the remission of sins. For though, when once administered, it seems to have passed, it is not abolished by subsequent sins<sup>2</sup>

When a person believes unto salvation, the Spirit baptizes said person into the body of Christ at that moment via His spiritual baptism, and wherever the belief takes place, and this is final and irrevocable. A person cannot be unborn. Furthermore, intuitively, humanity knows that salvation is an abandonment from who they were to a completely new personhood. This is why people resist the gospel; they are more comfortable with the life and person they know. As the saying goes; "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know." If you have to choose between a familiar but unpleasant situation and an unfamiliar situation, choose the familiar one because the unfamiliar

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<sup>1</sup> The John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion 4.15.1

<sup>2</sup> The John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion 4.15.3

situation may turn out to be worse.<sup>3</sup> No matter how bad our life is, we will often live with it rather than overcoming the fear of the unknown, especially a radical unknown. In addition, people often do not want to give up their sinful desires. This doesn't necessarily mean people believe they will have to put forth an effort to overcome a particular temptation after salvation, again, intuitively, they know its possible that the desire will be taken from them via the death of the former person. Separation from the sinful activity is not the whole issue; they don't want to lose the desire in many cases.

How can knowledge of the new birth be intuitive? The Bible states that the works of God's law are written on the hearts (a biblical idiom for the mind<sup>4</sup>) of every individual born into the world:

Romans 2:12 - For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Not only do men have this inborn testimony, but an outside testimony as well:

Romans 1:18 - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Again, for the most part, people in general know that salvation involves a radical life transformation effected by God. The Bible is clear: this happens at the very moment that one hears God's call with faith and in return calls upon the Lord for salvation. This is not a mere intellectual assent, but a calling upon God to take one's life and replace it with a new one. The Spirit does not wait till the individual submits to the authority of men and their version of Spirit baptism; the notion is absurd. This in turn begs the question, "For what purpose does the saved person need formal religion?" Plainly, he or she does not need formal religion. What they need is God's family which functions pretty much like any other family versus an authoritative institution. Through

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<sup>3</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/Better+the+devil+you+know+than+the+devil+you+don%27t+know>

<sup>4</sup> Thinking takes place in the heart according to Matthew 9:4.

ignorance the saved individual may not even recognize the importance of interaction with God's family, but this doesn't circumvent the reality of it.

Relevant to part one is baptism into a body rather than church membership because a body only has one head. And that one head, which is Christ, as the Bible makes clear, is the ONLY mediator between God and mankind.<sup>5</sup> The point is excruciatingly simple and should completely discredit church in and of itself. Clearly, church represents itself as an additional mediator other than Christ. There is even a formal name for it; supposedly, pastors, or priests, are God's "under-shepherds." Since Christ is referred to as a shepherd in the Bible, and pastors are told to shepherd, supposedly, this must mean salvific authority by God's proxy. It's an absurd leap of logic. In essence, the idea that the Spirit only baptizes through the waters of the institutional church is the church's claim that it is God's salvific authority on earth. Problem is, on that wise as well, Christ made it clear that ALL authority has been given to Him alone and for the express purpose of using the ekklesia to call humanity to repentance, not salvific oversight.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, church orthodoxy will again claim the diversity loophole. "Well, our church doesn't believe the Spirit baptizes into the body of Christ when one joins a church signified by water baptism." Not only can this be referred to as insignificant confusion that doesn't pull the function of the church through time, there are many other evidences that make all churches complicit in being additional mediators other than Christ.

One of many is the church's abject redefinition of the biblical new birth. Again, the simplicity of the charge hides in broad daylight. We hear much more than often, "We are all just sinners saved by grace." In the Bible, a "sinner" is the formal nomenclature for the unregenerate. Though many church attenders don't mean to say they remain unregenerate as "saved" persons; in fact, this is formal church orthodoxy. A cursory observation of church orthodoxy makes any citations on this point a statement of the obvious, but nevertheless,

“ . . . forgiveness of sins is not a matter of a passing work or action, but comes from baptism which is of perpetual duration, until we arise from the dead” (Luther’s Works: American ed.; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955, vol. 34, p. 163).

“ . . . Forgiveness of sins is not a matter of a passing work or action, but of perpetual duration. For the forgiveness of sins begins in baptism and remains with us all the way to death, until we arise from the dead, and leads us into life eternal. So we live continually under the remission of sins. Christ is truly and constantly the liberator from our sins, is called our Savior, and saves us by taking away our sins. If, however, he saves us always and continually, then we are constantly sinners” (Ibid, p.164).

“On no condition is sin a passing phase, but we are justified daily by the unmerited forgiveness of sins and by the justification of God’s mercy. Sin remains, then,

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<sup>5</sup> 1Timothy 2:5

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28:18

perpetually in this life, until the hour of the last judgment comes and then at last we shall be made perfectly righteous” (Ibid, p.167).

“For the forgiveness of sins is a continuing divine work, until we die. Sin does not cease. Accordingly, Christ saves us perpetually” (Ibid., p.190).

“Daily we sin, daily we are continually justified, just as a doctor is forced to heal sickness day by day until it is cured” (Ibid., p.191).

In these citations from Martin Luther, we see that "Christians" are not once and for all time forgiven of condemning sin, but that forgiveness for sin that would condemn one to hell must be ongoing, and this forgiveness can only be found in the institutional church. Water baptism, as earlier noted in the John Calvin citations, and designated lawfully to the church according to the Westminster Confession, has an ongoing purification effect as long as one remains faithful to the institutional church.

Hence, the church denies a new birth that forgives condemning sin once and for all time. Faithfulness to the salvific authority of the church results in "daily justification."

Nor by remission of sins does the Lord only once for all elect and admit us into the Church, but by the same means he preserves and defends us in it. For what would it avail us to receive a pardon of which we were afterwards to have no use? That the mercy of the Lord would be vain and delusive if only granted once, all the godly can bear witness; for there is none who is not conscious, during his whole life, of many infirmities which stand in need of divine mercy. And truly it is not without cause that the Lord promises this gift specially to his own household, nor in vain that he orders the same message of reconciliation to be daily delivered to them (The Calvin Institutes: 4.1.21).

To impart this blessing to us, the keys have been given to the Church (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). For when Christ gave the command to the apostles, and conferred the power of forgiving sins, he not merely intended that they should loose the sins of those who should be converted from impiety to the faith of Christ; but, moreover, that they should perpetually perform this office among believers (The Calvin Institutes: 4.1.22).

Secondly, This benefit is so peculiar to the Church, that we cannot enjoy it unless we continue in the communion of the Church. Thirdly, It is dispensed to us by the ministers and pastors of the Church, either in the preaching of the Gospel or the administration of the Sacraments, and herein is especially manifested the power of the keys, which the Lord has bestowed on the company of the faithful. Accordingly, let each of us consider it to be his duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it. Of the public reconciliation which relates to discipline, we shall speak at the proper place (Ibid).

Secondly, the church denies that the new birth actually changes the saved person's state of being. Regardless of what the scriptures say, all things are not new, and the so-called saved person is

NOT a new creature. Church scholars and notable leaders from the past and present state this continually in no uncertain terms. Perhaps the most notable citation is from the father of Protestantism, Martin Luther:

God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong (sin boldly), but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world.

Some contemporary church leaders state it in the same kind of stunning pronouncements. The hugely popular Pastor Matt Chandler stated the following at a large church conference in 2009: "I'm still a wicked sinner in need of the mercy of Christ, in need of the blood of Christ, in need of the cross of Christ...is the gospel presentation on Sunday morning for those who are regenerate or unregenerate? I think the answer to that is 'yes.'" On page 187 of G.C. Berkouwer's work, "Faith and Sanctification," he quotes another famous Protestant to make the following point: "The regenerate man is no whit different in substance from what he was before his regeneration."

Thirdly, in redefining the new birth, the church denies how the new birth changes the believer's relationship to the law. The new birth changes the believer's state of being from one who is condemned to hell by the law, and enslaved to the law, to one who is no longer under the law's condemnation or its enslavement. According to the Bible, the law's ability to condemn enables sin to provoke people to sin through sinful desires. The law which is good, is used by sin to increase sin in the unregenerate. The law can only bring death to those who are under it. Once a person is born again, the old self dies with Christ and is no longer under the law's condemnation. Christ died to end the law, and "where there is no law, there is no sin." This isn't a mere legal loophole, when the believer is resurrected with Christ through the baptism of the Spirit, he or she now loves the word of God because they are a changed person. Once indifferent to God's law, the believer is now free to use its wisdom for aggressive love towards God and others without any fear of condemnation. Yet, because the believer who now has a transformed mind is still in a mortal body where sin still resides, this weakness prevents perfect love. In essence, the believer no longer sins, but rather fails to love perfectly. His or her sins, if you want to call them such, is family sin, but not sin which can condemn the believer to hell. These truths can be surmised by a study of Romans chapters 5-8.

Church orthodoxy denies this biblical construct. Unless one stays faithful to the supposed salvific authority of the church, they have no covering for the "law of sin and death" that true believers have died to. In other words, church keeps "Christians" under law instead of under grace. According to church, "under grace" is a covering for condemning sin via church membership, and not an ending of sin.

Consequently, the church denies the new birth in three ways: it denies that the believer is permanently saved and forgiven of all sin that condemns. It denies that the believer's state of being is changed from sinner to saint, and it denies that the believer is no longer under law and now able to use God's law to love God and others.

This is why church is not the gospel, and when it gets right down to it, church membership is a denial of the new birth. Additionally, it denies Christ as the sole mediator and authority between mankind and God.