

## Identity II (paragraph format)

(Birth versus Performance)

By Rene P. Brown

Man's ideas about relating to their god usually revolve around having a performance which will please him, whoever god might be. Regardless of whether it is Islam or Buddhism or Hinduism or native religions, man's idea is to so walk on the earth as to please the god he has set up in his own mind. Performance in his own strength as a way of pleasing the god is at the center of those religions. But Christianity is about a relationship based on faith, not performance. Yes, we believers desire to please God, but it flows out of our love for Him, and His love for us. It is not to gain anything from our God, but a loving response to Him.

Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, never intended His relationship with man to be performance based as a means of righteousness. It was always to be based on FAITH. (Rom 4:3 RSV) "For what does the scripture say?" Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. It had nothing to do with performance. In fact, Abraham was a liar and endangered his own wife by lying in Genesis 12:13-19 to Pharaoh. He did it again in Genesis 20:2 to Abimelech. Also, he passed on the iniquity to his son Isaac as he lied in the same way in Genesis 26:7.

In spite of this sin, Abraham was righteous because righteousness was imputed to him based on his faith. It was not based on his performance, that is, lack of sin, as he indeed did sin. From the context it seems obvious that God loved Abraham and Isaac his son and also Jacob, his grandson. The basis of the relationship was faith, not their actions. Jacob was a schemer, a cheat, a thief, and yet, he believed God, and it was also reckoned to him as righteousness. Abraham did nothing to justify himself. He merely believed God, and God received that faith and in turn reckoned righteousness to Abraham. Abraham is the father of all who have a faith relationship with Yahweh, the God of Israel, our Creator, that is, a relationship not based on works but on faith.

Most of the church understands that our righteousness is based solely on the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, who died on Calvary on the cross for our sins. Through this one act, God was reconciled to the whole world. 2Cor 5:18-19 (RSV) "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

The entire basis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ rests on the structure that man could do nothing to save himself, that God had to do it all for him. It was because of one simple reason: Man in his fallen, sinful, sinner identity could do nothing that would please God enough to allow God to fellowship with man, any man. Nor could his sins be forgiven. There was no performance by man involved in this provision which God made for man's salvation.

Now when a man believes on the name of the Lord Jesus, accepts His sacrifice to wash away his sins that man is justified in the sight of God entirely because of what Jesus did. All man can do is to trust in God that God indeed has made that provision for our salvation. Rom 10:9-10 (RSV) "because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved." Eph 2:8-9 (RSV) "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup>not because of works, lest any man should boast." Eph 2:5 (RSV) "even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)," Even our faith is a gift of God!

Now we have been born anew by virtue of our faith in the blood of Jesus that was shed for our redemption on the cross of Calvary. (John 3:3 RSV) "Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."" Rom 5:1 (RSV) "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rom 5:18-19 (RSV) "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. <sup>19</sup>For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."

Let us look at what happened on the cross. First, we know that Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. This shedding of blood took care of all my sins that we would ever commit - past, present and future - all sins. But the shedding of blood did not take care of our primary problem: The sin nature we had inherited from our forefather Adam. Adam's sin nature was passed on to all his children (Jesus' Father was God so He did not inherit this nature of Adam). As long as we have this sin nature dwelling within us, we will surely sin. Yes, they are covered by the blood of Jesus, but what we would like is to not have to sin anymore. So the first half of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that all our sins are forgiven by virtue of His shedding His blood on the cross.

Now we come to the body side of the cross. Jesus did not just shed His blood; His body died. And when He died something else happened: We died with him! Rom 6:3-7 (RSV) "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into [immersed into\*\*] Christ Jesus were baptized into [immersed into\*\*] his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into [being placed into His\*\*] death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For he who has died is freed from sin." [\*\*Notes inserted by author.] What is this "sinful body" that is destroyed? It is the sin nature we inherited from Adam. We normally think about water when we see the word baptism but the Greek word "baptizo" first means "immersed". Thus we can be immersed into Jesus. Water baptism is a picture or representation of what has happened spiritually to us when we were immersed (placed into or baptized into) Jesus. Water baptism represents physically what the Holy Spirit did spiritually in placing us into Christ Jesus. In the same way, we were also baptized into the body of Christ spiritually as in 1Cor 12:13 (RSV) "For by one Spirit we were all baptized [immersed\*\*] into one body [not in water but in the body of Christ\*\*] -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

The key issue is this: The "old man" or "old self" of Romans 6:6 which is the sin nature we inherited from our forefather Adam died when Jesus died on the cross. Eph 2:3 (NNAS) "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath [sin nature\*\*], even as the rest."

Since we were "in Christ" then whatever happened to Jesus happened to us also. When he died, we died. The "old man" with the nature of sin died on the cross with Jesus. Rom 6:8 (RSV) "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Col 3:3 (RSV) "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Since we are obviously alive today, many look at this, and say it is "positional truth" (whatever positional truth is!). Here is my question: Do we believe the bible or do we not believe? If we believe the bible, then something of me died when Jesus died.

Since I was not there in body, it could not be this body I live in. No, it was something that happened in the eternal (or spiritual) realm where there is no time. (This the realm where God dwells.) In the eternal realm I can easily die on the cross. If I am in Christ, whatever happens to Him happens to me also. So something happened in the eternal realm.

When Adam sinned, something of him died. This could only have been His spirit which was in connection with God. After the sin, he was no longer related to God. Now he had a sin nature which he passed along to all his children including us. When we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, we were put to death on the cross right along with Jesus. Water baptism represents that truth; it is a picture in this temporal realm of what happened in the eternal or heavenly realm. Let us take time to remember this: In God's realm, the eternal realm, there is no time. Everything is always "now". When Moses asked God His name so he could tell the Israelites God's name in Exo 3:14 (RSV) "God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you. "' John 8:58 (NKJV) "Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."" So the Lord God Almighty is not "Was" or "Will Be" but simply "I AM". He is eternally present!

When we entered into Jesus Christ, we have, in our spirits, entered into His realm. In order for man to have a relationship with God, he must be born again in his spirit or "born from above". (John 3:7-8 NKJV) "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." This is exactly what happened to us when Jesus was raised from the dead. We died when He died, and when He was resurrected, we were resurrected with him - a new man in Christ. This is represented in water baptism when we come up out of the water just as Jesus came up out of the grave. When He arose, we arose into newness of life - a new man! 2Cor 5:17 (NNAS) "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." All this happened in the spiritual realm or eternal realm as that is where our spirits dwell. Our spirits dwell in the spirit realm with God. And in that realm, we are a new creature or new creation through the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

So, now we see that we have a new birth and by that new birth we have a new identity! This new identity has nothing to do with our performance, good or bad. It only has to do with us accepting or receiving the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ, by faith. This took care of all our sins we will ever commit. Then, when we died and were raised with Jesus, our old sin nature, the nature we inherited from our forefather Adam, died, was done away with, is gone forever. We received a new nature in Christ. This nature is what Paul describes in 2Cor 5:21 (RSV) "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Phil 3:9 (NNAS) "and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith," We are also made complete in Him: Colossians 2:10 (NKJV) "and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." We are blameless in His sight: Col 1:22 (NKJV) "in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight;"

We could go on but these scriptures show that we now have the righteousness of God, that we are blameless and holy in His sight. All this is a new identity based on new birth - you were born into righteousness and holiness and completeness! It has nothing to do with performance. You have become holy by virtue of your birth as a new man in Christ.

And you may say: But I am still sinning! I sin every day. That is my performance. This is all true and yet who you are, how God sees you has only to do with your birth, and you have been birthed as a new creature in Christ. When God looks, He sees Christ and His great sacrifice for your sins. Because of that sacrifice, God chooses to only see Jesus. If it were not for that, we would all be lost and in terrible trouble eternally. But Christ paid the price, and we have been born anew. Here is what is important: **WE REALLY ARE A NEW MAN! THE OLD REALLY IS PASSED AWAY!** This is the second half of the gospel!

We can worry about performance until we die, and it will not change anything. We cannot become more righteous than we are right now in God's eyes. Is there a working out of righteousness in this temporal realm we live in: Yes, of course. But even there we can do nothing apart from Jesus. If we could do nothing that would please God to save ourselves, how can we do anything apart from Jesus to please Him in our daily living? God is not interested in anything we accomplish through "self", only what is accomplished through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ working through us. Many Christians are saved, then filled with the Holy Spirit, and really desire to follow the Lord and serve Him but live out their lives completely dominated by "self" will. Many are doing things for God with all their might. They sweat and struggle to serve God and wonder why they are always worn out. It's very simple. God sees it all as performance of "self" in which He has no interest. There is none of God's "rest" in such work.

Across the entire world, every Sunday, sermons are preached to get people to go and get the job done of living a successful Christian life. They are given all sorts of goals, hundreds of things to do and things not to do so that their performance will be good. God has no interest in our performance apart from Jesus! Anything done apart from Jesus living out His life through us is dead works. 1Cor 3:12-13 (NNAS) "Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup>each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." What happens when fire hits wood, hay and straw? It burns up so that there is nothing left! All works done in our strength are dead works of hay, wood and straw, and none of it will pass into the eternal kingdom. All will be burned up.

But you may say: "I helped thousands to be saved, healed, and delivered." Nothing will be taken away from them. That is wonderful for those people. I am sure they appreciate it. But in God's eyes, as for as your works (in your own strength) are concerned, it is hay, wood and straw (dead works) and will all be burned up.

Mat 10:38-39 (RSV) "and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>He who finds his [self or soul\*\*] life will lose it, and he who loses his [self or soul\*\*] life for my sake will find it."

What is this scripture talking about? What is taking up our cross? It cannot be putting the "old man" to death. He died on the cross with Jesus. I am a new man in Christ Jesus. I have a new nature, and have become partakers of a divine nature. 2Pet 1:4 (RSV) "by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature."

The cross is for destruction or killing something or someone. What is it that Jesus wants put to the cross? Simply put, it is our self-life - that life we are capable of living apart from Him being in control. Notice in Matt. 10:39, Jesus speaks of us losing our life. What does He mean? He means that we are to lose our life in Him - that from henceforth we will do nothing apart from Him. When we "lose" our life for Jesus, it means our life is swallowed up in Him, and we are no longer in control. We have become that "living sacrifice" of Romans 12:1.

Look at Jesus' own life lived out in the Father's will. John 5:19 (RSV) "Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise."

John 8:28-29 (RSV) "So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. <sup>29</sup>And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." Jesus' total life was lived out submitted to the Father's divine will.

Now this is our pattern: Jesus was doing and saying only what he saw and heard the Father doing and saying. That is our pattern. We must be doing and saying only what Jesus is doing and saying. How do we accomplish that? We let Him live out His life through us. As noted above, we become that living sacrifice of Rom 12:1 (RSV) "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

What does this mean? It means to completely lay down our will in all things, give up all our desires, all our hopes, all our dreams, in favor of Him determining what He wants to do through our lives. He wants to live out His life through us. Will we still be us? Will we still have a personality of our own? Most assuredly! If God had wanted robots, He could have created them just as easily as He created man. No, God desired a being that He could have fellowship with, a being that of his own volition would choose God and God's desires for His life. God wanted a relationship and what He does in this earth, He wants to do it in and through us. If we accomplish it on our own and just allow Him to help us when we cannot quite make it, He has no interest in that kind of life with us. He desires to be our very life.

Eternal Life is not some thing, it is a person: Jesus Christ. He is living in us and desires to do all things through us. 2Cor 12:10 (RSV) "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong." Eph 6:10 (RSV) "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."

In the Old Testament, the Lord was doing the very same thing. How were the Israelites to take the land of Canaan? In the strength of the Lord! Consider Jericho in Joshua 6:20, consider Gideon's success in Judges 8:22, consider Jehoshaphat in 2 Kings 3:22-24. In all these circumstances it was the Lord's strength that was used to overcome the enemy. In the battle of Jericho, God used marching and trumpet blowing and the shout of His people to defeat Jericho. In Gideon's battle, God reduced the army from thousands down to just 300 so that all could see it very plainly was a miracle of the Lord. In Jehoshaphat's victory over Moab, God caused the water to look like blood to fool the Moabite army into thinking the enemy was defeated. Then Israel arose and defeated the Moabites. All this was plainly the Lord showing His strength on behalf of Israel. God is only interested in working through us and not us in our own strength!

Once we see that God wants to work in and through us, as us, we can see that our identity will never rest in our abilities or our actions or our ideas - nothing of performance will determine our identity. It is all who we are in Him. So long as we see our identity resting in our actions, good or bad, then we will look at our performance and if we do well, be proud of ourselves. If we do poorly, we will be ashamed. God does not want either feeling. He wants to do it all. Nothing we can do will change our identity in Him.

In Christ, we are holy and righteous and complete. This is truth that will not change. We are His; we belong to Him. Nothing we do changes that identity, not even sins. Sins do not reduce or diminish the great truth or identity we have in Him. True, it certainly affects our walk with Him. If our life is a life of sinning and sins, we will never enjoy the fellowship in Him that is our portion. Why? Because we will always approach Him with feelings of guilt knowing we have not walked by the spirit but in our own flesh. The sins in our life do not determine how God regards us, but it does affect how we regard ourselves and our relationship with Him.

The believer does not have to sin. The believer has a choice; in order to sin, he must choose to sin. Once the believer understands that the persona called "Sin" (or as we are using the name, "Mr. Sin") dwells in him and will always dwell in him and that Satan will always use this persona to get access to our mind, he can realize that the sinful ideas coming at him are suggestions or ideas from the evil one, Satan, to defeat him in his mind. (See Rom 7:17 (NKJV) "But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.") It is not us and never will be us that is proposing the sinful ideas as we now have a

reborn spirit that is completely in Christ. This “new man”, in Christ does not want to sin though he can sin. If he allows himself to be deceived by Mr. Sin, he will be defeated in his mind and wind up doing the very thing he hates just as Paul tells us in Rom 7:19-22 (NKJV) "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. <sup>21</sup>I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. <sup>22</sup>For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." Your re-born spirit, made alive in Christ, will always desire to follow the will of God and do the correct thing in every circumstance.

As we begin to really understand our true identity in Christ Jesus, that our new man does not want to sin though he can sin, we begin to see that if we resist the temptations of the enemy coming at us through this Mr. Sin to our mind, we can walk in victory. Col 1:27 (RSV) "To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." There is no other hope. Christ working through us, as us, will provide the victory. And it will be a victory done in the Lord's will. It will never be a “dead work” that is useless to us. It will be a work that brings blessing to us and life to the people with us. This is what is called “walking by the spirit”. Gal 5:25 (RSV) “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

So finally, let us remember: Birth determines Identity in the Lord's eyes! Performance determines identity only to the flesh and to the world. And flesh will never accomplish the purposes of God. Rom 7:18 (RSV) "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it."

(\*\*Note by author: In the lesson above brackets [ ] denote explanatory words inserted by author in the biblical text and are not part of the original and do not form a part of the scripture but are solely to assist the reader in understanding the intent of the author in using the particular scripture).

**\*\*\*\*\*End of Lesson\*\*\*\*\***