

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW BIRTH

— by Kenneth Hagin

Fight the good fight of faith....

1 Timothy 6:12

The only fight the Christian is called upon to fight is the faith fight. I often say that I think some folks have read that verse all right, but they have just read the first word--fight. They stopped right there and started fighting. Some have thought it just said "fight". And some have thought it said, "fight fellow Christians." But the fight God's Word says to fight is the "good fight of faith."

Now, if there is a "fight" to faith as this verse indicates, there must be "enemies" or "hindrances" to faith.

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.
—Romans 10:17

The greatest "enemy" to faith is a lack of understanding of God's Word. You will usually find that all hindrances to faith are centered around a lack of understanding of God's Word. For just as soon as the light of God's Word shines into the heart of man, faith is there. The Psalmist said, "The entrance of thy words giveth light...."(Psalm 119:30). And as soon as the light comes, faith is there. We cannot believe or have faith beyond our actual knowledge of God's Word.

Many years ago as a teenager I was on the bed of affliction. Medical science said I could not live. Now I had heard salvation, the new birth, preached all my life. I had no lack of understanding along that line. I knew what God would do when it came to the subject of salvation. I knew what His will was because I had heard that preached all my life. I had not experienced salvation, however. Though I had joined the church, I had never really been born again. Yet, on the bed of affliction, when I came to the Lord I had no doubt in my mind at all that He would hear me. I had no lack of understanding along that line, therefore I had no doubt--no unbelief. I received salvation and I knew I was saved, born again.

But, there I was--bedfast. Now I certainly had a lack of understanding of God's Word concerning healing for the body and prayer and faith. We just hadn't had much teaching along that line. About all we had heard was, "Just leave it to the Lord. After all He knows best."

Yes, but in His Word He has made provision for us to have His best. Praise God! He has told us how to get it--but it is up to us to get there.

You can see that a lack of knowledge of God's Word and its provisions hindered my faith. It kept me sixteen months bedfast. In time, after much study of the Word, I saw the exact steps to take in prayer and just how to release my faith. If I had known that, and had the understanding of it months before, I could have been off that bed long before I was.

God didn't have a certain "set time" when He came by one day to heal me and at that "set time" the paralysis disappeared and the incurable blood disease left and the deformed heart became normal. No, He didn't have a "set day" to do that. He is the same every day! The trouble wasn't with God. It was on my end of the line. It was my lack of knowledge of God's Word that hindered my faith. And just as soon as I found out what God's Word says, and acted upon it, I got results! We do not act upon God's Word beyond our knowledge of it.

Your faith will grow with an understanding of God's Word. If your faith is not growing, then your knowledge of God's Word is not growing. I would be greatly concerned about myself if my faith were not growing. We talk about spiritual growth and spiritual development. But we are not actually developing spiritually if we are not growing in faith. Faith grows with understanding of God's Word.

A lack of knowledge of our redemption and of our redemptive rights often times is the reason for unbelief. A lack of understanding of what the new birth actually is--what it means--hinders faith life.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.
-II Corinthians 5:17

Praise God, I am glad I am a new creature! What a tremendous verse of scripture--what tremendous truths are in it. "If any man be in Christ--he is a new creature! The margin of the King James says, a new creation.

We must realize, of course, that this is speaking of the "inward man"--the real man. This is not talking about the outward man. Remember that Paul said in the previous chapter, "...though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (II Corinthians 4:16). The inward man is the real man. The inward man is the real you.

No one can ever know himself, much less know anyone else, unless he has been born again and has become a new man in Christ. Elsewise, he does not even know that he is spirit man. A psychiatrist, unless he is a Christian psychiatrist, can never know you. Unless he is a Christian, he does not know that man is a spirit being. Psychology has to do with the operation of the mind through the physical senses. Psychology operates on the assumption that man is just a body and a mind.

Several years ago I read on the front page of a metropolitan newspaper in California that one of the leading psychiatrists in the area had committed suicide. Here was a man, comparatively young; only 46. Some of the leading movie stars had been under his care.

They simply could not understand why this man, who seemingly had everything and such a promising career would commit suicide. He lived in a beautiful, palatial home that was completely paid for. He had no financial troubles. He had a large bank account. He had no domestic troubles. He had no physical trouble. After the last article was run, they still didn't know. Here was a man who was supposed to help others, but evidently didn't have the answer.

The answer to man's needs stems from the spiritual. And so a man really doesn't know himself unless he is a Christian. No matter who that man is. And a man who is not a Christian, is just really liable to do anything. This is because the spiritual nature of man is a fallen nature. Man got this nature from Satan when Adam sinned in the garden. That nature is a Satanic nature. And man cannot change his nature. The Bible says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jeremiah 13:23). No, man cannot change his own nature--but God can!

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature! The inward man, the real man,

is a new creation. He takes on the very life and nature of God.

The outward man, however, is not a new creation. We do not receive a new body when we are born again. The Bible says we are going to have a new body one day, but we don't have it yet. However, the man on the inside, the real you, which is a spirit man, has already become a new man in Christ.

The trouble with many is they are always looking at things from the physical, from the outside, rather than from the spiritual viewpoint. They even look at themselves from the natural.

I got hold of II Corinthians 5:17 on the bed of affliction and it is one of my favorite verses. When I came off that bed, I told everybody I met, "I am a new creature."

I was only 17 and had no other Christians to fellowship with who believed as I did. I didn't have one living soul, young or old, to stand with me to encourage me for a moment in this area of faith and believing God. I simply had to stand alone--but I tell you I had a high-heeled time doing it. Praise God! And I am sure the one reason I didn't have some of the problems others had with the world, the flesh, or the devil, was because I told everywhere I went, "I am a new creature." That was my constant confession.

Hold fast to your confession that you are a new creature. You will always rise to the level of your confession. Then the new man on the inside will be manifested on the outside and through the flesh.

On the second Saturday of August in 1934, after I had been raised up from the bed of affliction on the previous Tuesday, I went to town. This was the fourth day after sixteen months of being bedfast, almost totally paralyzed.

I ran into a friend of mine. Now, before I had become bedfast we were bosom pals. If you saw one of us, you saw the other. But, during the sixteen months I had been bedfast, he had only been to see me once. This Saturday he seemed really glad to see me. We sat down on the running board of a 1934 V8 Ford and began to talk. Now he was the same old creature he always was. But, I had become a new creature. He began talking about the things we used to talk about and things we used to do before I became a new creature.

To fill you in so that you will understand, let me go back a little. From the natural standpoint, everybody has some kind of talent. We are just born with it I suppose. Well, I had two talents. I could always tame wild animals and I could open any lock.

I can't tell you why, but locks intrigued me. As a boy in my early teens I could always get into just about any place I wanted. And what this

boy was talking about was that I had opened the lock on some buildings and a group of boys, about 12 or 13 years of age, had gone in.

I don't want to leave the impression that I made a practice of it, but once or twice I had managed to open a lock or two for these boys. I wouldn't go in myself. For one thing I was afraid of the dark. They didn't keep the stores lit up like they do now. They had gone in and gotten candy. That's all they ever took, just candy. Now, of course, I did help them eat it after they got it. And that is what this boy was talking about.

He pointed to a building down about half-a-block and said, laughing, "Remember that night!"

I just sat there with a mask-like look on my face and acted like I didn't even know what he was talking about. (I knew what he was talking about all right, but I was going to use this as an opportunity to witness to him.)

He finally said, "What is the matter with you?"

"Not a thing. Not a thing in the world."

"Well, you act like you don't even know what I'm talking about and if it hadn't been for you, we wouldn't even have gotten that candy." He went on talking about it, going into more detail and I just sat there with a blank look on my face.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked again.

"Not a thing," I replied.

"You act like you don't know what I'm talking about and you were the key to the situation."

I said, "Lefty, the fellow who was with you boys that night is dead."

"You're not dead!" he exclaimed. "You know you're not dead."

(You see he was looking at it from the physical standpoint. And I didn't die physically. But I was looking at it from the spiritual standpoint.)

He said, "I know you almost died, but you're not dead. That's you sitting there."

"Oh," I said, "you're just looking at the house I am living in. You're looking at the outward man, at the body. The man on the inside who gave permission to the body, the outward man, to open that lock is gone. And this man on the inside now is a new creature in Christ Jesus."

I went on, "The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:17 that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things have passed away and all things have become new."

Notice what that says. O-L-D things have passed away. So I was right when I told him that old man on the inside had passed away! A-L-L things have become new!

In a new creation, of course, all things would become new. And, as Christians, we need to learn to let this new man on the inside dominate the

outward man. The outward man is not a new man. The body has not been born again. The body will keep on wanting to do things it used to do and things that are wrong. Paul said that his body did. So don't be surprised if your body does.

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.
-I Corinthians 9:27

Notice what Paul said, "But I..."

Who is "I"?

"I" is this man on the inside--this new man in Christ.

"...I keep my body under...(I) bring it into subjection..." Paul wrote.

Now if the body were the real you, he would have said, "I bring myself into subjection." But he didn't say that. He said, "I bring it (he calls his body it) into subjection."

Well, into subjection to what? To the inward man.

Notice the terminology, "I bring my body into subjection. I keep my body under." God is not going to do something with your body. You are going to have to do something with it, or else nothing is going to be done with it. God does something with your spirit. He makes the inward man a new creature and then He sends His Holy Spirit to dwell in your spirit to give you power so you can do something with the outward man. Hallelujah!

Some people say, "Well, I can't. I can't help that." Yes, you can!

Paul said, "I keep my body under. I bring it into subjection." You know as well as I do that this great man of God, this apostle, this holy man of God wouldn't have to keep his body under if his body were not wanting to do things that were wrong, would he? Certainly, he wouldn't!

We have the flesh to contend with. And then too, the devil will work through the flesh. The devil tells Christians sometimes, because in the flesh there are trials and tests and temptations, "Well, you must not even be saved. If you were saved you wouldn't want to do that." He insinuates that it was really you who wanted to do it when the man on the inside didn't want to do wrong to begin with.

Paul's body evidently wanted to do some things that were wrong, or else he wouldn't have had to keep it under or bring it into subjection. But he simply said, "I am not going to let my body dominate me. I bring my body into subjection. I keep it under. Lest by any means after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The margin reads, "I should be disapproved." Disapproved of God. Well I don't want to be disapproved, do you?

How can a lack of knowledge along this line hinder faith?

In talking with people I have had many say, "Brother Hagin, before I was ever saved I lived such an awful life." They go on to the effect that the Lord is not going to do anything for them such as heal their bodies or answer their prayers, because they have lived such sinful lives before they were saved. Well you see those people have a lack of understanding concerning the new birth--concerning the new creature.

The Word says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature!" Old things are gone! All things have become new!

The sinner when he comes to Christ receives remission of sins--not forgiveness of sins but remission of sins. The Christian after he is born again and becomes a child of God can receive forgiveness of sins. The translators of the King James version often took the Greek word meaning, "remission" and translated it "forgiveness". There is, however, a difference between the two.

When the sinner comes to Jesus, his sins are remitted. They are simply blotted out. Not only are all his sins and all his past life blotted out, but all that he is spiritually speaking in the sight of God is blotted out. It ceases to exist and he becomes a new man in Christ Jesus. And God does not see anything in his life back beyond the moment he was born again.

Remember that Peter said, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2). He is writing to born again Christians who have become new men and women in Christ Jesus. The Bible teaches that there is a similarity between spiritual growth and physical growth. No one is born a full grown human. We are born babies in the natural and we grow up. And no one is born a full grown Christian. Christians are born as babies and they grow up. And God's Word says, "As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word...."

In looking at a newborn babe in the natural lying in his mother's arms, the outstanding characteristic of that baby is innocence. You hear people say, "You sweet little innocent thing." You don't think of that baby as having a past, do you? You don't look at that little baby and say, "Well I just wonder what kind of a past he or she has had. I wonder what awful sin he has committed." That baby is newborn and doesn't have any past.

Now do you see what God is saying? God is saying to folks who have been born again and have become children of God and babes in Christ, "As

newborn babes--as newborn babes--desire the sincere milk of the Word. You have become a new creature! Your past is all gone! I am not remembering anything against you."

I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. -Isaiah 43:25

...their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. -Hebrews 9:12

God, as He looks at you, doesn't remember that you have any past. Why should you remember it? It can hinder faith.

I have seen some with very shady pasts come right in and be saved, filled with the Holy Ghost, or come black into fellowship if they were backslidden and others would almost get angry about it as if it were me who was baptizing them in the Holy Ghost, etc. "I just don't understand that," they would say. "That couldn't be God. Why He wouldn't fill a person like that with the Holy Ghost."

I remember the first time I preached in a certain state quite distant from our home. The pastor was an old friend from Oklahoma who had invited us to stay in the parsonage during the meetings.

On Tuesday night I preached about laying on of hands and then at the end of the service I laid hands on people to be healed or filled with the Spirit. And so, I came to a certain lady in line. I had never seen her before. I had never preached in that church and didn't know anybody, but in my spirit I had a revelation. God will reveal things to you sometimes. The Holy Spirit dwells on the inside of me in this inward man and He is the one who brought the revelation to me. I knew that when I laid hands on this woman she would be filled with the Holy Ghost and would speak with other tongues. I knew that.

But, I also knew this. That unless I stopped before I did it and preached a little bit and explained some things to this crowd--that if I didn't say anything, but just went ahead and did it--then that crowd, that church, would be ready to close the meeting on me because they just knew that a woman like her could never be baptized in the Holy Ghost and I would have had to be a false prophet.

So I stopped right there in the prayer line and addressed the crowd, "Folks, now this is going to surprise you. I know you don't know me. This is only the third day I have been here and the pastor will tell you that I have been out of the parsonage very little. And when I have gone out, it was with him. So no one has told me anything. And he certainly has not told me anything. But

this woman I am about to lay hands on is going to be filled with the Holy Ghost and speak with other tongues the minute I touch her."

You could hear gasps all over the auditorium.

"Now," I said, "the reason I am stopping to explain this, and I don't want to embarrass her and this won't embarrass her, is because you know that she hasn't lived a very good life. I won't go into detail, but you know that. And, she knows that."

"I certainly do," she said.

"Even since she has been born again," I continued, "at this church she has been in-and-out, more out than in, and up-and-down, more down than up. She has lived such a haphazard life that no one has any confidence in her or in her Christian experience."

I spoke then to her, "Sister, now I don't want to embarrass you, but that is the truth, isn't it?"

She said, "Brother Hagin, it is all so."

Then I went on, "Some of this congregation will say, 'Well now, some of us have been seeking the baptism of the Holy Ghost for years and if God is going to baptize anyone with the Holy Ghost it would be us goody-goody folks.' "

I continued speaking to the crowd, "But what you don't know is this, and if I miss it I want this sister to speak up and say that I have missed it.

"Right in the middle of the sermon, and I didn't see her do it because I wasn't conscious of her presence then, but in the middle of the sermon about laying on of hands to be filled with the Spirit, she said to the Lord, 'Lord, I want to be filled with the Spirit.' And she bowed her head over on the seat in front of her and, though I didn't see her do it I have the revelation in my heart that she did it, she said, 'God, forgive me of all my sins. I have failed. I have been so weak. I have been a failure. Forgive me.' And, He did!"

I addressed her, "Sister, did you or did you not do that?"

With tears she answered, "Brother Hagin, I did. I bowed my head over on that seat and the lady sitting beside me will tell you I did. I prayed, 'Oh God, I have been such a failure. Please forgive me.' "

"Now," I said, "I want to ask this congregation something. How long do you think it will take God to forgive her? Do you suppose He has done it yet, or do you suppose He will do it sometime within the next ten years?"

I went on, "The Bible says in I John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Now just how long did it take Him to forgive her and cleanse her?"

I had put them on the spot.

Some of them said, "Right then."

"All right, if she is cleansed, then He will fill her right now."

I laid my hands on her and she started speaking in tongues instantly.

In the parsonage after the service, the pastor said, "Boy, I am sure glad you stopped and explained that to that crowd. I know you don't know that woman but we live here and if you had just laid hands on her and she would have been filled with the Spirit without an explanation, I would probably have had to close this meeting. They would have sworn that you were a false prophet."

Yes, it surprises people sometimes.

After a morning teaching service in the First Assembly of God Church in Pasadena, Texas where Brother J. R. Goodwin is pastor, a lady came up to talk to us.

She said, "I want you to pray for me. My eyes have been opened in these day services to something I never saw before. I see now that the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking with other tongues is for us today and I want to be filled with the Spirit. Please pray for me."

"Well," Brother Goodwin said, "there will never be a better time than right now."

"Oh, no, no," she said, "I couldn't be filled this morning."

"Why not?" he asked.

"I'm not quite ready yet. I'm not good enough. I have a little bit more digging to do."

Brother John Osteen, the Baptist evangelist, was standing close by and he asked if he might say a word. Actually, the lady was a member of the Baptist Church he had formerly pastored.

He addressed her, "You remember me, don't you, Sister So-and-So?"

"Yes, of course. You were my pastor for several years. In fact, it was reading your testimony about your being filled with the Spirit that caused me to start attending Full Gospel meetings. And now, since coming here, I see the truth of it. Now it is fully revealed to me."

"Well, like Brother Goodwin said, there will never be a better time than now," Brother Osteen stated.

"Well, yes. But I have a little more digging to do first. I'm not quite good enough yet."

Brother Osteen smiled and said, "May I ask you a question? For several years you were a member of my church, but yet you know that it is not being a member of a Baptist Church or an Assembly of God Church that makes you a Christian. I want to know. Have you really been born again? Do you really know Jesus as your

personal Saviour?"

"Oh, yes, Brother Osteen, I know the Lord as my personal Saviour. I have been born again."

"Well fine. Do you believe that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has cleansed you from all sin?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Yes."

"Well, then you are a born-again, blood-washed child of God."

"Yes, I am."

"Now, I want to ask you one more question. Do you believe that if you were to die--well, just say, for instance, that right now while you are talking to us you had a heart attack and fell dead right here in the church--where would you go?"

"Why, I would go to heaven, of course."

"Well, he said, "if you are good enough to go to heaven right now, you ought to be good enough to get a little more of heaven in you! It is the blood that has cleansed you."

(In other words he was saying, "You are a new creature in Christ. Recognize that.")

It dawned on that woman. She said, "Yes, that's right. I don't have any more digging to do, do I? I'm clean. The blood has cleansed me. I am clean by the blood. You fellows just lay your hands on me and I will be filled right now."

We all reached forth our hands but we had barely touched her when she threw up both hands and started talking in tongues. You can see how understanding helped her faith. Just a moment ago there had been a hindrance. A lack of understanding hindered her faith. But the moment she saw what the scripture says, "I am a new creature in Christ Jesus. I have been born again. I am blood washed. It's not what I did that got me ready. It is what He did for me."--then faith came forth.

The Lord has taught me something else. We sometimes let ourselves be religiously brain-washed. Bless our hearts! We're all that way. Whatever religious or church group we were with, whatever their teachings are, even after we're baptized in the Holy Ghost, some of these things will hang on to us. Whether they are right, or wrong. Some of them may be good--but some of them are not so good.

This happened in New Testament days. After the Church was instituted and the Gentiles were saved, some of the 'brethren of the circumcision' wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised. Now here they were already saved, already baptized in the Holy Ghost, already speaking with other tongues, but here came these brethren along saying, "You cannot be saved unless you are circumcised."

A fellow came along to me recently and asked, "Have you ever been baptized in the name of Jesus only?"

"No," I answered.

"Well, you're not saved then."

I laughed right out loud! "That's the funniest thing I ever heard in my life." I laughed right in his face.

I told him, "I have been saved and baptized in the Holy Ghost for years--for years. Being baptized in water in anybody's name has got nothing in the world to do with being saved--the new birth. The new birth is a spiritual birth. You are not born of the water. That would not be a spiritual birth. That would be a physical birth."

Another fellow came along and said to me, "I could believe you were saved if you belonged to our church. What church do you belong to?"

I said, "You're the bunch that's saved, I guess."

"That's right."

I laughed, "I've been saved for years and I'm not in your group and not about to get in it."

You can put any kind of a label on a can, and the can can be empty. It doesn't put anything in the can just because you put a label on it. It's not the name on the church door that saves you, or even being a member of the church. It is getting something on the inside of you!

I ran into a lady recently who was distraught. She'd heard some idiot preaching on the radio. She said, "Well, maybe I'm not even saved because the way he preached no one was saved but him and his group."

I'm glad God's kingdom is bigger than that! Praise God!

This lady was all upset and I said to her, "Well, I just want to ask you one question. Are you saved?"

"Yes, I am."

"Forget it then," I said. "You know it. That's the thing that counts--what you know. Not what somebody else says. God's Word says, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren...' (I John 3:14). I would much rather have Bible evidence than some man's opinion."

A lack of knowledge hinders us. Not knowing the truth of what the new birth is will hinder your faith and keep you from receiving from God the blessings that He intended you should have. Walk in line with God's Word. Sometimes we get off on tangents instead of walking right in line with what God's Word says.

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