

From Thornbush to Apple Tree



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From Thornbush to Apple Tree

1 **M**y son, forget not my law; but
let thine heart keep my
commandments:

2 For length of days, and long life,
and peace, shall they add to thee.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake
thee: bind them about thy neck;
write them upon the table of thine
heart:

4 So shalt thou find favour and
good understanding in the sight of
God and man.

Proverbs 3: 1-4

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Introduction

Our purpose in writing this book is to present the gospel message of the Bible in a way that is appealing to children. *From Thornbush to Apple Tree* is a simplified version of *From Bondage to Freedom*, written by F. T. Wright and published by The Sabbath Rest Advent Church.

The gospel message includes an understanding of many principles that are not covered in the present book which looks at the meaning of sin in relation to the rebirth experience. Further books will need to be written to cover such important topics as true faith, repentance, acceptable confession, the meaning of justification, the differences between revival and reformation and an answer to the commonly asked question - am I born again? The present book may be used by a parent who is labouring for the rebirth of an older child, or as a reader for a Christian child who is seeking deeper understanding of the ways of God.

Sin is a Problem that only God can Solve



Sin is a problem that causes us lots of trouble. Sin also causes lots of trouble for God. It makes God and the good angels very sad when we sin. Sin is a problem that only God can solve - we cannot fix it ourselves – so we need His help.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin [is] death; but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What is the Gospel ?

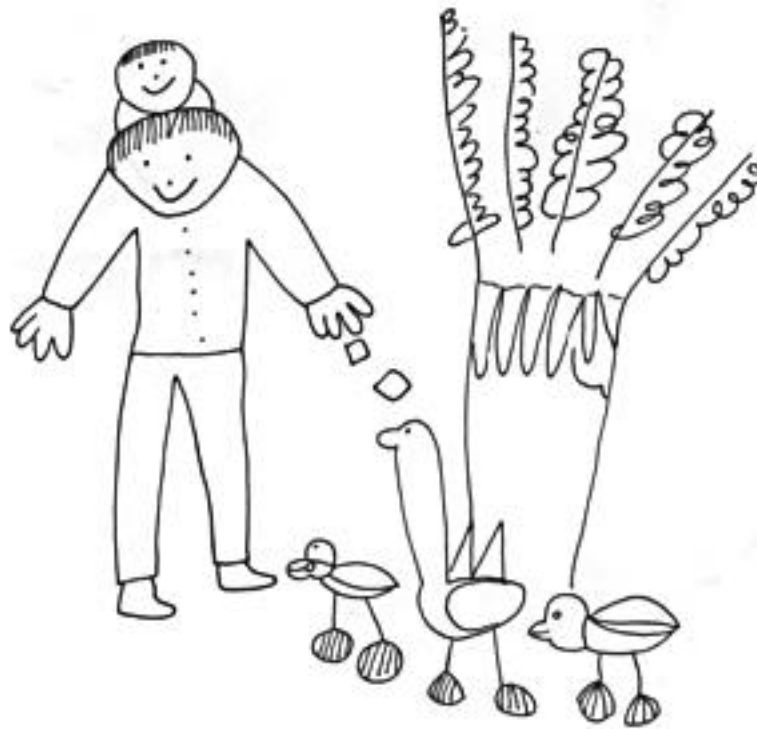


God's solution to the sin problem is the gospel. The gospel is a message that tells us how God saves us from sin. God's power is in the gospel message.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

The gospel enables us to understand what sin really is. The Bible teaches us that sin causes two problems. Firstly, sin is an action - it is something that we do. Secondly, sin is a slave master - it is something that keeps us in bondage.

Sin is an Action - Something that We do



The apostle John tells us that sin is the breaking of God's law.

1 John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

God gave us the Law of Ten Commandments so that we would know the difference between right and wrong. What does it mean to transgress one of God's Ten Commandments?

We transgress God's law when we do what God has asked us not to do. Or when we don't do what God has asked us to do. In other words, we break God's law when we disobey God.

What Happens When we Disobey God?



When we do something that God has asked us not to do, or when we don't do what God has asked us to do, we are guilty of disobeying God and we need to ask God to forgive us.

Forgiveness is an important part of God's solution to our sin problem, but it's not the only part. We need more than forgiveness because sin is much more than what we do. The Bible also teaches that what we *do*, is a fruit of what we *are*.

Sin is also What We are Inside



Jesus wanted to teach people that sin is much more than what we do. To help us understand this, Jesus used a lesson from nature. He said:

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither [can] a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matthew 7:18).

In nature, everything produces its own kind of fruit. Jesus wants us to see that we can be like a good tree or a bad tree. Only a good tree can produce good fruit. We never expect to find apples growing on a thornbush. An apple tree doesn't have to try hard to produce apples, neither does a thornbush try to produce thorns. We are just like apple trees or thornbushes.

People Produce Fruit too

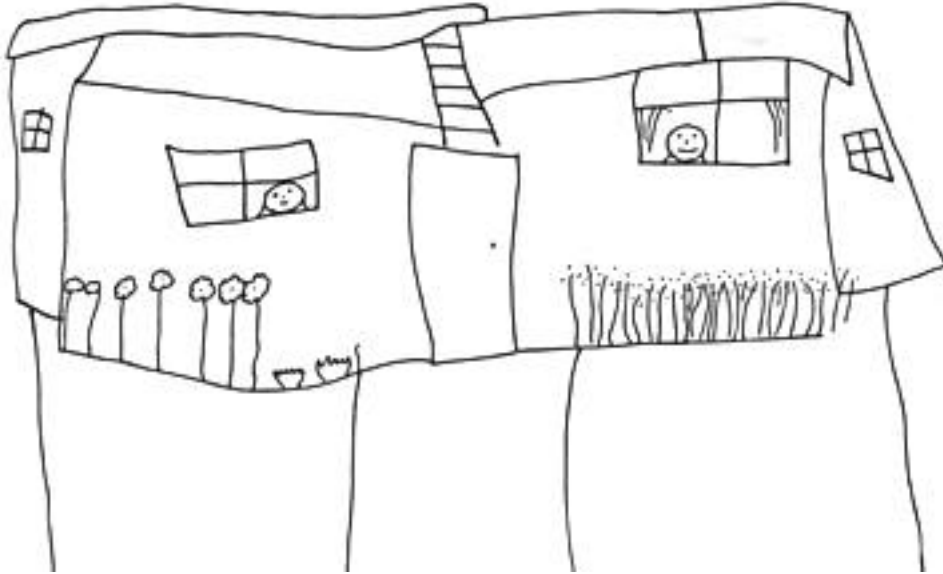


People also produce fruit. Just as an apple tree produces apples, so the children of God produce the fruits of obedience. God's children love to obey, because they are good trees. And a good tree can only produce good fruit - it's easy.

Sadly, most people in this world are not God's true children. They can't obey God. Just as a thornbush cannot produce apples, these people cannot obey God. The presence of sin inside them produces bad fruit in their lives. Thankfully, God knows how to solve this problem. God knows that what we do is simply the fruit of what we are inside. Jesus said:

"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by [his] fruit" (Matthew 12:33).

What Sort of Tree are You?



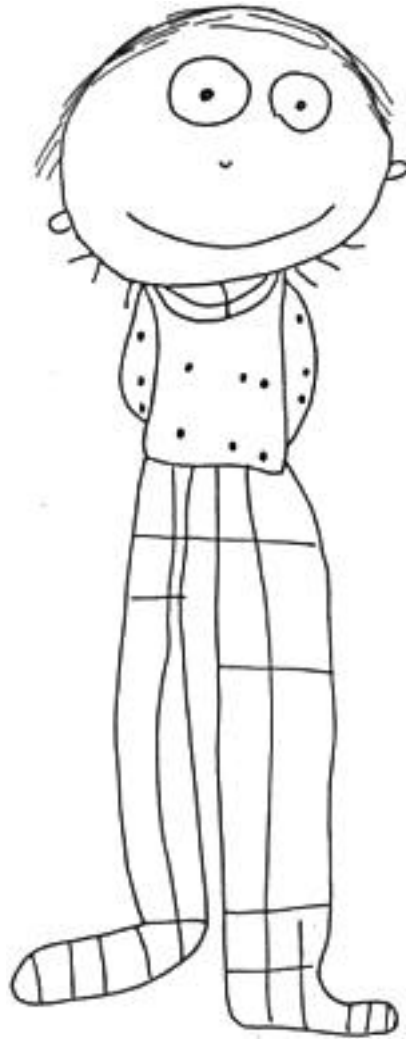
If you are unsure, you can ask God to show you what kind of tree you are. There is much to learn about this matter. One simple test is to look at the fruits of your life - the things you do. If you find that you can't help doing the very things that God has told you not to do, or if you find that you can't do what God has asked you to do, then you have discovered the fruits of sin in your life.

If you have discovered bad fruit in your life, that is because you have the presence of sin within you. The sin inside you is like a thornbush that produces thorns in your life. Jesus also taught that a person who disobeys God is a slave to sin:

Jesus answered them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34).

What does this mean? A servant, or slave, is a person who must obey his or her slave master. The sin inside you is a very strong slave master who can make you do the very things that you don't want to do.

In the Time of Moses



In the time of Moses, the Egyptians were very powerful slave masters. They used whips to make the children of Israel work very hard. The Bible says:

"And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage ..." (Exodus 1:14).

The children of Israel wanted to go to the promised land to worship their God, but the Egyptian slave masters would not let them go. The Israelites were stuck in Egypt - they were in bondage to the slave masters and there wasn't a thing they could do to free themselves.

We too are Born into Bondage



The Bible says:

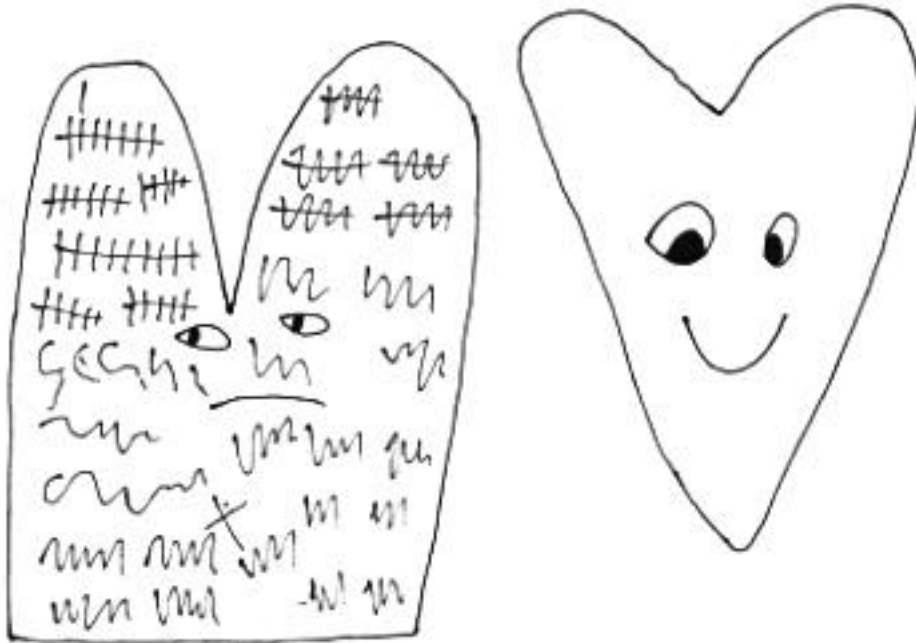
Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me (Psalm 51:5).

To be shapen in iniquity means that our parents passed onto us the sin of Adam and Eve. Everyone receives this sin as the apostle Paul says:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23)

So we begin life in bondage to sin, just like the children of Israel who were born in bondage to the Egyptian slave masters. Thankfully, God had a plan to set the children of Israel free from Egypt and He also has a plan to set us free from the bondage of sin.

What is the Sin Master?



The sin master is the part of our human nature that was spoiled as a result of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden of Eden. The sin master is not a person like one of the Egyptian slave masters. In the Bible, the sin master is called the stony heart.

Ezekiel 11:19 ... and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:

When Adam and Eve were first created, they had hearts of flesh. There is no sin in the heart of flesh - it's a good heart that enables us to obey God.

When Adam and Eve Sinned

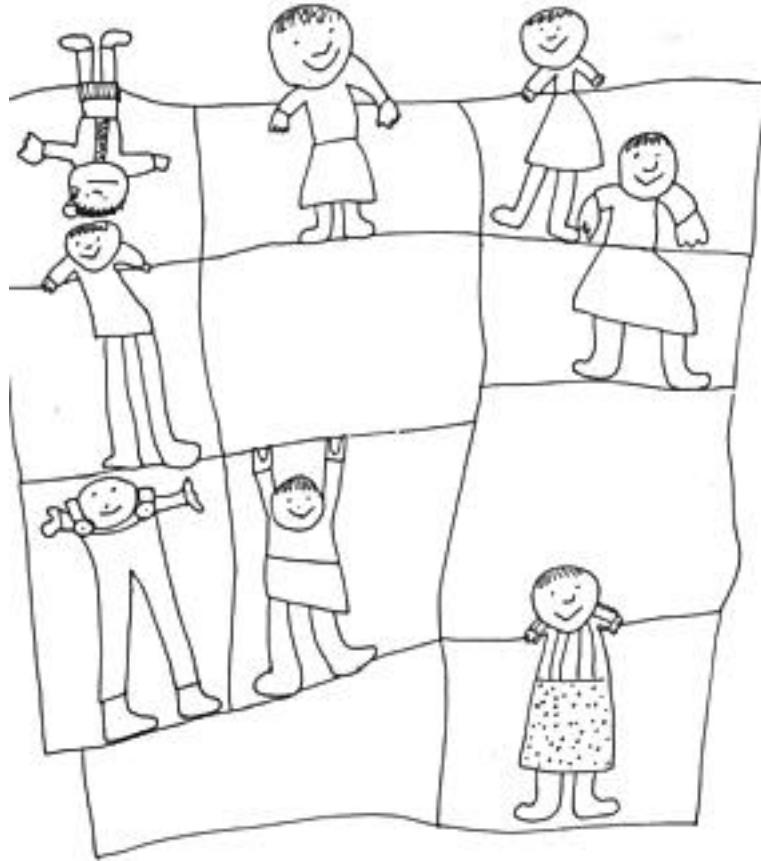


When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit, they lost their hearts of flesh. Their beautiful hearts of flesh became stony hearts that were spoiled by sin. With hearts of stone, Adam and Eve became the servants of the sin master.

Romans 6:20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

The sin master, or stony heart, made Adam and Eve do the very things that God had asked them not to do and it stopped them from doing the things that God asked them to do. They were stuck in bondage, just like the children of Israel were stuck in Egypt. This made God and the good angels very sad. It made Adam and Eve unhappy too.

We are the Children of Adam and Eve



When Adam and Eve had children, they were born with stony hearts too. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, everyone in this world begins life with a stony heart. This is what the Bible means when it says:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (Romans 5:12).

We all begin life with a stony heart inside us. We are the slaves of the sin master, so we can't obey God, even when we want to. Whenever a person with a stony heart tries to obey God, the sin master makes them do the very things they don't want to do and stops them from doing the things they do want to do. The Apostle Paul once had this problem which he wrote about in the Bible.

The Romans Seven Experience



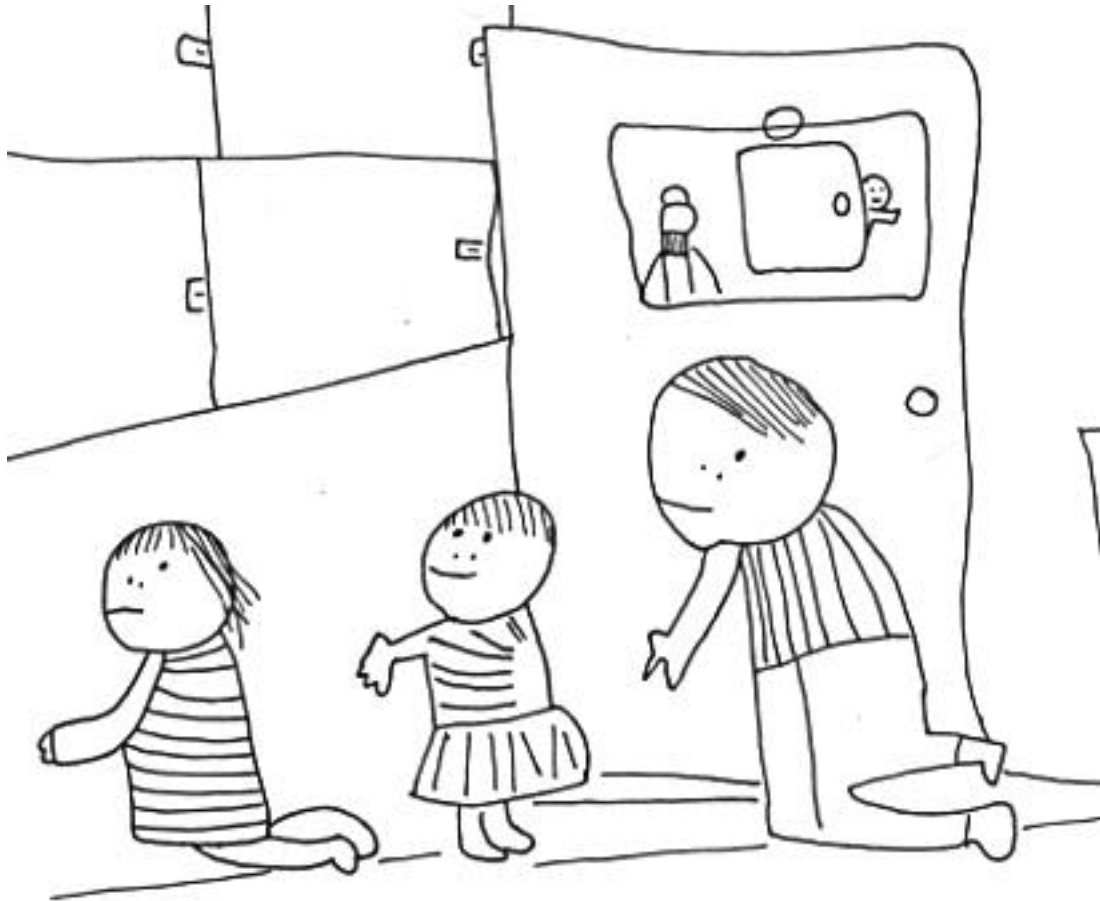
Paul wrote about his experience as a slave to the sin master in the seventh chapter of the book of Romans. Although he wanted to obey God's law, he began life – like all of us – as a slave of the sin master. When Paul tried to obey God's law, the sin master would make Paul do the very things he didn't want to do and stopped him from doing the things he did want to do. Because the sin master lived inside Paul, he says that he was a servant, sold to sin.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I ... Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me (Romans 7: 14 -17).

Here Paul clearly says that he broke God's law because sin lived inside him. He longed to be delivered from bondage to this sin master. He expressed the longing of his heart in these words:

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Romans 7:24)?

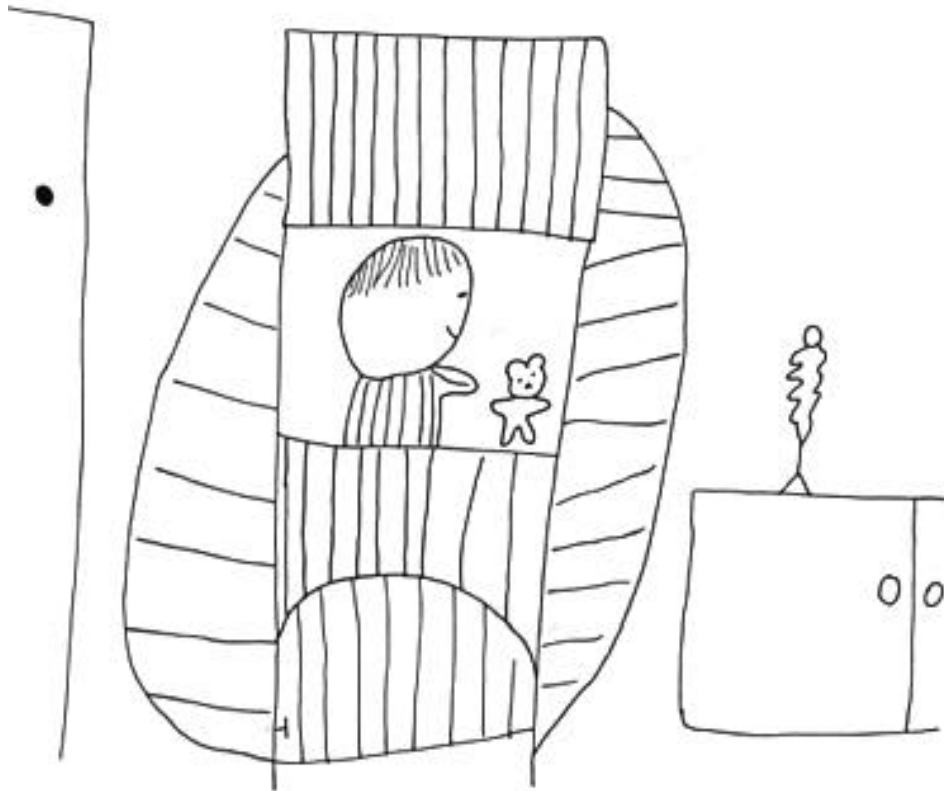
Paul Tried to Solve the Problem of Sin



In Romans chapter seven, Paul describes a time in his life when he was trying to deliver himself from sin. He was like a thornbush trying to be an apple tree, but apples don't grow on a thornbush. Paul would ask God to forgive him when he had sinned. But forgiveness is not enough. Forgiveness is only part of God's solution to the sin problem.

Paul believed that God forgave him for his sin, but next time Satan tempted Paul, he would sin again. Paul was still in bondage to the sin master. He needed to ask God not only to forgive him of his sin, but also to take away the cause of his sin - the stony heart.

Forgiveness Alone is Not Enough

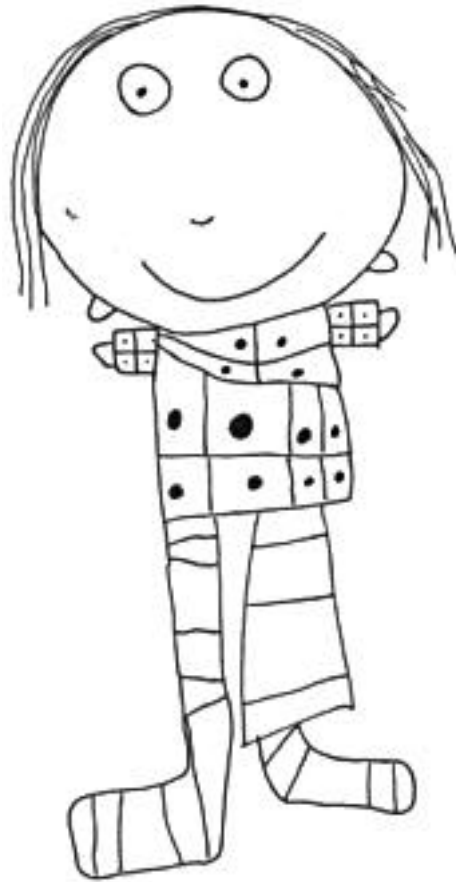


Forgiveness alone was not enough to solve Paul's problem. Paul needed to ask to be forgiven for his sins and also to be set free from the power of the sin master. Only then would he be free to obey God as he wanted to. God wants to set us free from the sin master by taking away our stony hearts and giving us hearts of flesh instead. God removes the thornbush and plants an apple tree in its place. Jesus taught us:

"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by [his] fruit" (Matthew 12:33).

When we are set free from the sin master – the stony heart – we are born again. How can we be born again?

How Can we be Born Again?



To be born again means to have a new heart. This happens when God takes the sin master or stony heart away and replaces it with a heart of flesh. The new heart that God gives us is a good heart that produces good fruit in our lives. This new heart does not stop us from obeying God. Instead, it enables us to obey God. If you would like to be born again, then ask God for the gift of a new heart. God will answer your prayer, for He has promised:

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh " (Ezekiel 36:26).

Remember, Jesus said that a tree is known by its fruit. If God plants a good tree within you, it will produce good fruit in your life.

The Stony Heart



The stony heart is just like the thornbush. As long as it is inside you, it produces thorns in your life. You will never find good fruit growing on a thornbush. And you will never find a person with a stony heart obeying God.

People with stony hearts cannot obey God, because they are in bondage to the sin master - they are like thornbushes.

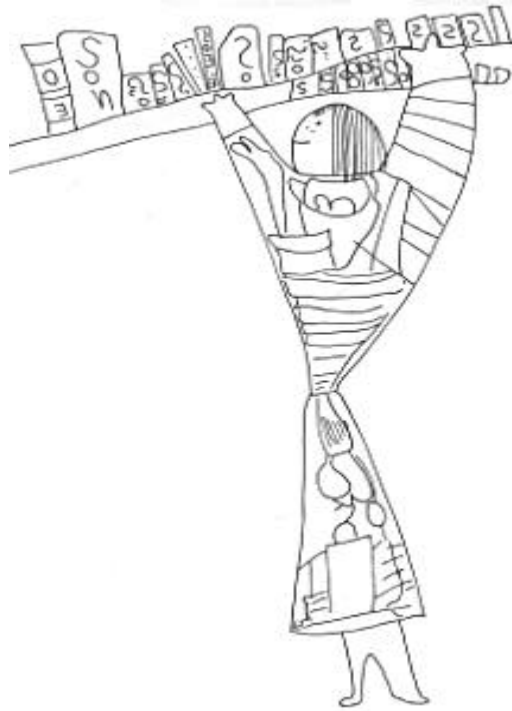
The Heart of Flesh



God's solution to the sin problem is to take away the stony heart when we ask Him, and to place a new heart within us. This new heart is called the heart of flesh.

The heart of flesh is a good heart - it's just like an apple tree. You never find thorns or bad fruit growing on an apple tree. For this reason, people with hearts of flesh no longer have to disobey God. They can produce good fruit all the time because they are free from the sin master. They are free to obey God because they are like apple trees.

There is a lot More to Learn about the Rebirth Experience



There is a lot more to learn about the rebirth experience. So far we have learnt that we all begin life in bondage to sin and that this causes two problems that only God can solve. Firstly, God forgives us for the actions of sin. Secondly, God removes the presence of sin from inside us – He has promised:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God has promised to forgive and cleanse us from sin when we ask Him. Cleansing removes something dirty or sinful. God wants to forgive us and to cleanse away the stony heart. In the place of the stony heart God puts His very own goodness.

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

Always Remember that Sin Causes Two Problems

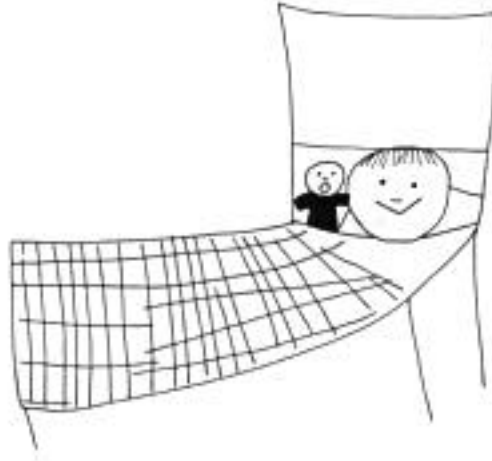


It's important to remember that when we disobey God this causes two problems – sin and sinfulness. God has a special solution for these problems. If we have only asked God to forgive us, then we are still in bondage to sin. Only when God has both forgiven us **and** taken away the stony heart do we change from a thornbush to an apple tree.

The stony heart can even be removed while a baby is still in its mother's tummy. Jeremiah the prophet was born again while he was still in his mother's tummy. God made this very clear to Jeremiah when he said:

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee.

Free to Choose



People who have stony hearts have no freedom of choice. They are in bondage to sin and as slaves they must obey the will of the sin master. When we have hearts of flesh we are free to choose whether we will sin or not.

John 8:36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Because we have the freedom to choose to sin or not to sin, it is possible that when we have a heart of flesh we may sometimes disobey God. This does not mean that we have our old stony heart back again. But we still need to ask God for repentance, forgiveness and deliverance from sin. We will study about this in another book.

Romans 6:22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.
