

# - BORN of the SPIRIT -

*"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'"*

*(John 3:5)*

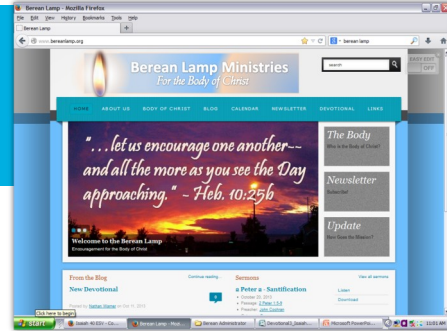


**Berean Lamp Ministries**  
*For the Body of Christ*

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## The Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)



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The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller

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## *The Birth of Jesus*

*"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.*

*"But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'*

*"And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus."*

*(Matthew 1:18-25)*



## How Is One Born of the Spirit?

By Nathan Warner

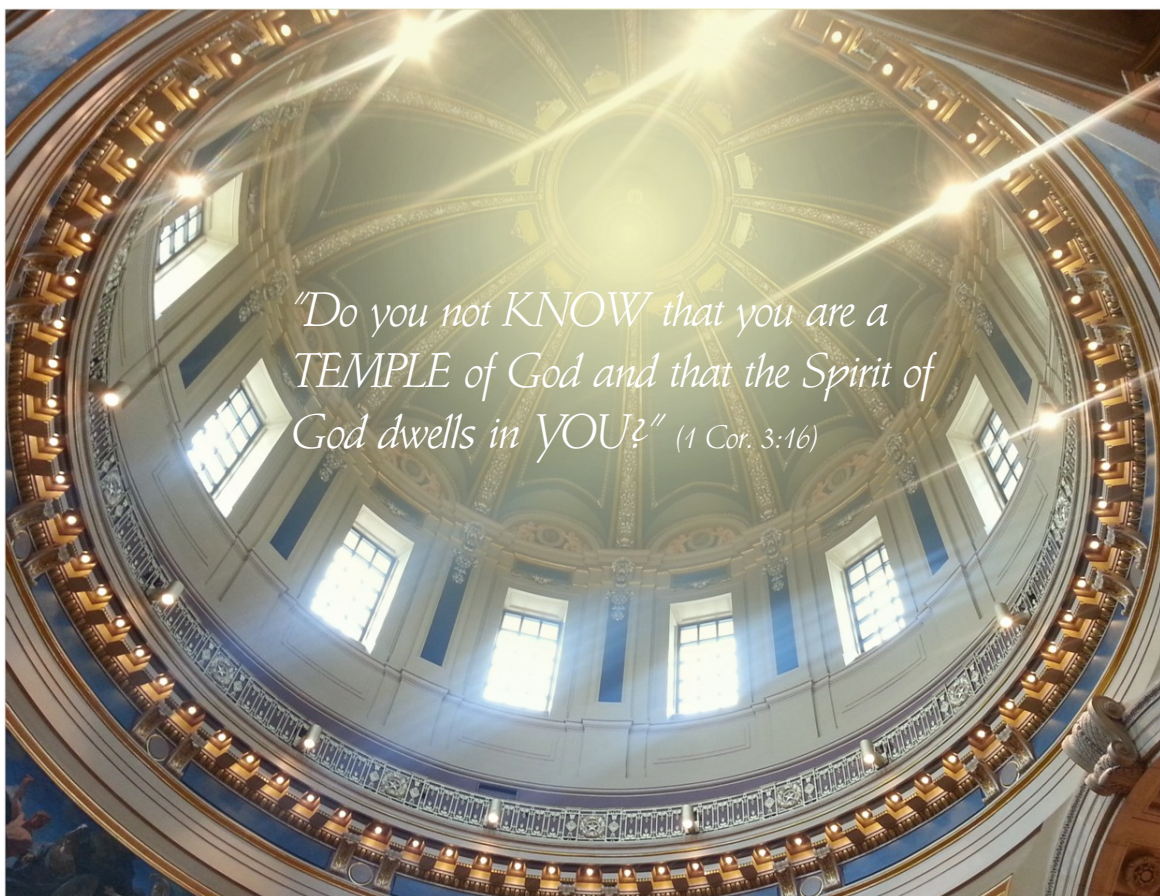
*“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*  
(John 3:6 NASB)

What does it mean to be “born of the Spirit”? Quite simply, it is synonymous with being “born again,” justified, “adopted” by the Heavenly Father as His child, and “betrothed” to Christ as His Bride. Why so many terms for the same thing? Like any real and important thing in life, Salvation is beautifully simple in essence, yet wonderfully complex in all its implications. All it takes is faith in Christ, but you have as a result implications of position, home, inheritance, eternal life, union, marriage, and royalty, to name a few.

Without Jesus, Salvation is meaningless. Jesus demonstrated He had the ability to re-

store mankind to God – that He alone could bring us back from our unstoppable trajectory to eternal death and eternal separation from God. He justifies us to make us acceptable in God’s presence. On our part, God requires faith, and this is where our birth begins. We must put our faith in Jesus’ ability to restore us to the Father by His substitution of Himself in our place of judgment and punishment for our sins. This faith cannot save us in and of itself. It is not some magic potion nor some phrase we speak like a spell that has the power to restore us to God. On the contrary, it is God’s promised response to our faith that truly saves us. He has promised that if we put our faith in Christ and come under His headship, God will respond by saving us. This response comes to us immediately by God’s Holy Spirit indwelling our bodies. This changes us, although it might not always be immediately perceptible. We are “born again.” What does that mean?

The moment of birth is a moment of coming



into a relatable relationship with reality. Before we are physically born in the natural world, we undergo a period called gestation. Gestation is an involuntary developmental stage where we are in complete dependence and largely unconscious. We are not aware of our needs or our environment, and we are not relating to our parents. Everything we need, we just automatically get through the umbilical cord, without even knowing we need it. Everything about our situation is focused on bringing us to our birth. In a similar manner, most Believers can honestly look back on their lives before they were saved and see God's hand was preparing them for spiritual birth. Perhaps you were raised in a Christian home and were somewhat familiar with the Gospel? Perhaps difficult experiences challenged you to look deeper to see beneath the veneer of life? For some, it might have been a mysterious reverence for God, even though they may not have understood His Gospel. God is always preparing the way in our hearts—making *"His sun to rise on the evil and the good"* (Matt. 5:45), but for some time, this reality may only be on the periphery of our consciousness, just like an unborn baby is probably somewhat aware of its mother's existence on some level but is not yet in a personal relationship.

Then comes the time for birth. This can be traumatic for the child. Maybe an event happened in your life? Maybe you had a crisis? Perhaps someone pushed into your perceptions and made you aware enough about Salvation that a decision was unavoidable – there was no escaping it this time – you had to make a decision. Heed the call or not? Follow Jesus or choose your own way? Faith in Him or faith in yourself? This is a moment pregnant with possibilities. But you must be open to God, for *"without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6). Will you believe that He is? Will you come into a personal relationship with your Creator and enter reality, or will you recoil from Him and slip perhaps into deeper darkness? If you heed the command, *"Follow Me!"* (Matt 9:9) from your innermost heart,

this is the moment of putting faith in Jesus Christ – acknowledging you cannot restore yourself to God—putting your trust in Jesus to do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

At this moment, God pours His Spirit into you and "births" you into reality and into a relationship with the Heavenly Father. You are sanctified or set apart for God. You are born of the Spirit – this is a spiritual birth, which is why Jesus referred to it as being "born again" – you are reborn from the certain death of the natural sin-stained existence of physical life on its trajectory to hell into the certainty of new life in the future resurrection from physical death through the power of God and Jesus' headship over your life. *"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God'"* (John 3:5).

So, if you've put your faith in Christ from the heart, God has promised you will be born into His family by the Spirit. So, you are born. Do you know everything now that you have been born into reality, have a relationship with God, and His Spirit indwells you? Do you understand all things? No, you are an infant, newly born, recently welcomed into reality, newly acquainted with your Parent. We cry and we whine and we make a mess. What do parents do with infants? Do they get on their case to do their chores and finish their homework? No, they are very understanding, gentle, and attentive, and they feed them milk.

In this manner, the Apostles addressed the new Church at Antioch: *"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well"* (Acts 15:28-29). This is milk. *"I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able"* (1 Cor. 3:2). *"Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to Salvation"* (1 Peter 2:2). As you grow, you are weaned off milk to seek solid foods, *"for everyone who partakes only*



*of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant” (Heb. 5:13).*

We grow into spiritual maturity under the Holy Spirit’s guidance and teaching. It is what brings God’s Word to life in you, applying it into your life, making it bear fruit in you.

This is called Sanctification, which originally related to vessels set apart for use in God’s temple and is also the term used when a man and a woman are set apart for each other – betrothed to be married. The Apostles spoke of Sanctification as a discreet event and also as a period of time. This is because there are two types of Sanctification. There is the event that has already happened for all Believers: *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2).* *“Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 16:11).*

And there is the process: *“But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, **resulting in Sanctification**, and the outcome, eternal life” (Rom. 6:22).* Like a vessel reserved for the temple, or a bride reserved for her husband, you were set

apart for Christ – this Sanctification, as an event, coincides with Justification. But even though that vessel has been dedicated and set apart, it still needs to go through a cleaning process to prepare it for its ultimate long-term purpose in God’s household. This is the second definition of Sanctification – not an event, but a process – a process of “cleaning out.” We would say a woman was sanctified when she was set apart, or betrothed for her husband, but between this event of betrothal and the event of her union with him in marriage there was a period of time that held a process of Sanctification in which she needed to be “cleansed” of her former life with its attachments, duties, and ways so that she would be capable of assuming her new life as a wife in her husband’s household.

So, back to the child of the Father. Perhaps you’ve matured from milk, eh? Now you have chores! Now you have increasing responsibility. Maybe you are like six years old now. Now you eat broccoli and chicken but turn your nose up at the parsnips and the lima beans and prefer candy bars and soft-drinks. There’s disobedience and unfruitfulness and more room to grow and mature. Like a teacher or guardian, the Spirit gently moves us along toward the day the Spirit’s pledge will be redeemed. What does that mean?

Alcatraz Island, CA



*“So if the Son **MAKES** you free, you will be **FREE INDEED.**”  
(John 8:36)*

Without the Spirit indwelling us, there would be no Salvation. The Spirit is God's pledge to us. Why do we need a pledge? Because even though our eternal destiny may be decided, so that we say we were "saved," we yet remain in this flesh doomed to experience and succumb to the earthly consequences of sin. The revelation, consummation, or fulfillment of our Salvation is yet in the future, coming into its own in our physical death and the resurrection to eternal life. This is why the Apostles use the past tense sometimes for "Salvation," yet other times the present and future tenses. *"For by grace you **have been saved** through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"* (Eph. 2:8). Here Paul is clearly saying that the Believer HAS BEEN saved, yet his present condition is not one free from death and the effects of sin, so it is speaking to the pledge of God through the Spirit – the irrevocable promise of God that he will be rescued completely from the Fall if he has the Spirit dwelling in him. This is why Paul also speaks of Salvation in the present tense: *"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God"* (1 Cor. 1:18). Because we do not yet see the fulfillment of our Salvation – it is in our future.

And so the future tense: *"So Christ also,*

*having been offered once to bear the sins of many, **will appear a second time for Salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him**"* (Heb. 9:28). Because the promised fulfillment of our Salvation from our death-doomed bodies and the consequences of sin is still in the future, our promised future destiny is sure by the pledge of the Spirit which seals us. *"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your Salvation—having also believed, **you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise**"* (Eph. 1:13). *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"* (Eph. 4:30).

So, in one sentence, you are born again when God births you into His family by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit in your body, AFTER we put our faith in Jesus Christ to make us acceptable to God through His headship. The Holy Spirit is our most precious possession – a priceless, infinite gift from God Himself. As Christ's Bride, it is His betrothal pledge to us of His intention to return for us to make us His. And it dwells in us as a part of us! Think of it! God Himself dwelling in you to make you His child. And His Spirit uniting our spirit to Christ. *"But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him"* (1 Cor. 6:17). Amen!





## Fully Convinced He Is Able to Save

By Ginny Larsen

*“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

*And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

*And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”*

(Luke 1:35-38 KJV)

*“And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.”* (Luke 1:45)

Mary believed God, and the Son of God was miraculously conceived in her and born from her. *“Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord”* (Luke 1:45). This miracle was an act from God. Mary simply submitted herself to the Word sent by God to her from the angel and believed him. God performed the rest. A miracle took place, wrought by God, not man. There was nothing any human being could do to bring about the Savior of the world or Israel’s Messiah. Just so, there is nothing man can do to bring about another birth, the new birth of the Believer – the life of Christ Himself born in us. It is an act of God as we simply believe (trust in, adhere to, rely on) in Christ, the only provision for our Salvation.

*“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:12-13). *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:8-10a).

The Word of God is powerful and able to fully work in us what He says He will do. It is the power of God that performs in us the new life, when we believe in Him as our Savior, making us a new creation in Christ Jesus. It is not our performance or works that saves us. What a wonderful Salvation the Lord has brought about for us! Man tries in so many ways to complicate it with his own religion or works, but God has shown us all through His Word that man is unable to be righteous at all and that God alone is able to save us by fulfilling the righteousness and the penalty of the law, becoming our Salvation and imputing righteousness to us. To think you can save yourself by performance or works is to degrade that Salvation and nullify it (Galatians 2:19-21).

What a wonderful gift God has given to the world! It should encourage our hearts to know that just as He fulfilled His promise to come to us and to give the gift of His Spirit to dwell in us (Romans 8:9), that He will just as surely fulfill His promise to complete our redemption by coming again to take us to be with Him, changing our bodies to be like His, so we are enabled to dwell with Him forever in unbroken fellowship. The first part of our Salvation was accomplished by giving us a new birth into Christ. We are given a promise by His Spirit, a guarantee that we will also see the completion of our redemption and enter into our inheritance.

*“In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your Salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory”* (Ephesians 1:13-14).

I remember when I was a young teen, seeking for the truth, seeking God’s Salvation – having been convicted of my sin, and knowing I was lost and on my way to hell – how joyful I was to discover that there was Salvation for me! I didn’t know very much about God at the time. I didn’t really know a lot of doctrine or theology. I didn’t even know that much about



Jesus. But just as when Moses held up the bronze snake in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9, John 3:14) and all who looked upon it were healed, I looked upon Jesus one day, believed in Him and what He did for me, and asked Him to save me... and He did. I remember how joyful I was when the person who prayed with me that day told me He would come into my heart and live there. Come into my heart? Yes! Suddenly my eyes were opened, and I understood that I was a "whosoever" and that Jesus died for me. For a couple years before that day I walked around in darkness, trying desperately to clean up my life, to be better, to quit sinning. But all my efforts were to no avail. I tried reading my Bible but didn't understand it. What I did understand from it was that I was a sinner and worthy of death. There was no escape from the law of God. I was struck by it. I cried out to God to show me if I could find His Salvation.

God answers those desperate cries. Anyone who seeks to know Him in truth, God will answer that. He is so eager to save "whosoever will."

My prayer is for many this Christmas season to learn of His wonderful gift of Salvation

and simply turn to Him, *repent* (change your mind), believe in Him alone to save you, and trust that His Word is true and that He will perform it. Blessed are you if you believe what the Lord has spoken. Blessed indeed, with everlasting life that can never be taken from you.

Like Mary I want to sing, "*And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name'*" (Luke 1:46-49).

My confidence in eternal Salvation does not come from myself, my goodness, or any works I've done, but I have a confidence that what the Lord has spoken in His Word regarding His Salvation for "whosoever will believe in Him" is true and He will perform it. It is for all!

Abraham was "*fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised*" (Romans 4:21). I am also fully convinced.

Devil's Tower, WY

*"CASTING down  
imagination, and EVERY  
high THING that exalteth  
itself against the  
KNOWLEDGE of  
God..."*

*"...and BRINGING  
into captivity every  
THOUGHT to the  
obedience of CHRIST."  
(2 Corinthians 10:5)*



## The Helper

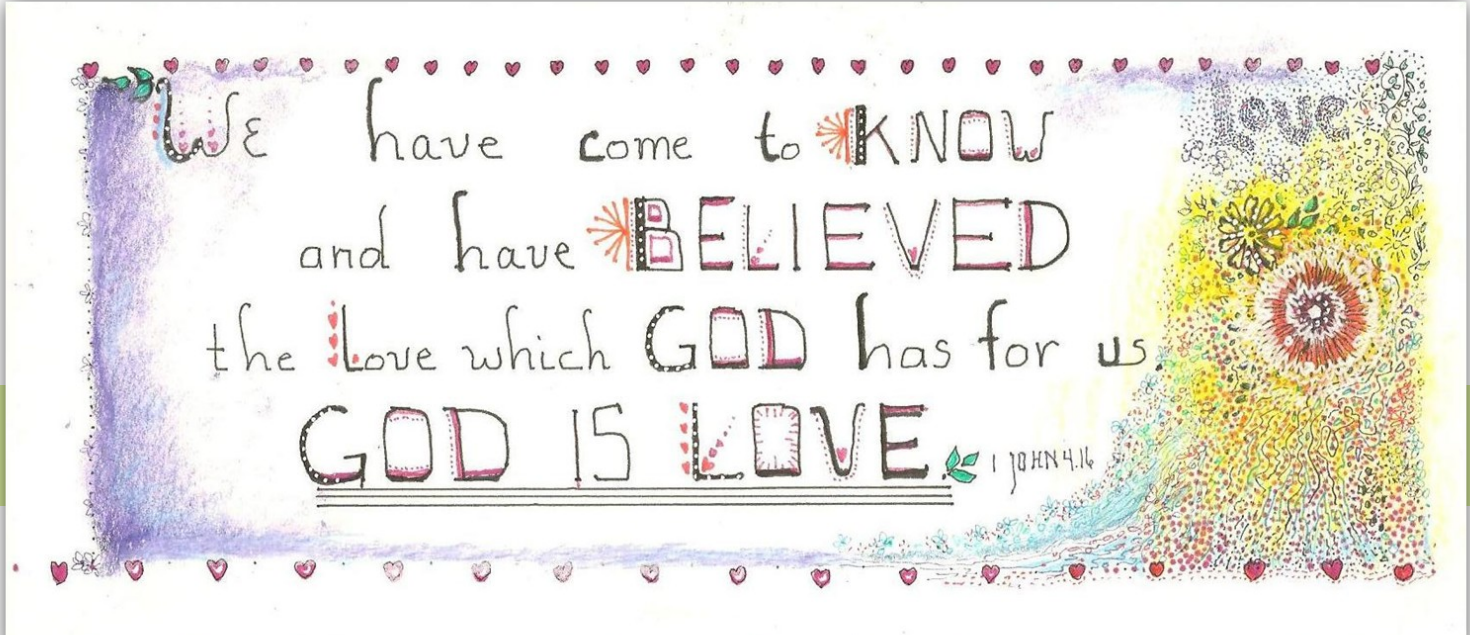
By Betty Harstad

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit has many attributes, one of which is as our Helper – *parakletos* – one called alongside to help. Jesus spoke to His disciples about the Holy Spirit that would be sent from the Father after His resurrection: *“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me”* (John 15:26 ESV). *“And when He comes, He will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment”* (John 16:8).

And so did this promise really happen? We can look at Acts to see that Peter and the other apostles were enabled to become convincing witnesses of the eternal life offered by Jesus Christ after the Holy Spirit was poured out. Many of the people were convicted and were “pricked to the heart” after hearing why Jesus was crucified and resurrected. *“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 2:38-39).

For future generations, the apostles (of whom Paul became one) were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write several books on the Gospel of Salvation, Sanctification, prophecy and warnings regarding false teachers. Jesus had promised that the Helper, the Holy Spirit, would teach all that was needed: *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”* (John 14:25). *“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth”* (John 16:13).

We can be so grateful for each word written for us and for the Holy Spirit Who illuminates the truth of it to our hearts and minds so we can be changed into His likeness. *“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit”* (2 Corinthians 3:18).



We have come to KNOW  
and have BELIEVED  
the Love which GOD has for us.  
GOD IS LOVE. 1 JOHN 4:16



## *Be It Unto Me According to Thy Word*

*"Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.'*

*"And Mary said:*

*'My soul exalts the Lord,  
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.  
For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave;  
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.  
For the Mighty One has done great things for me;  
And holy is His name.  
And His mercy is upon generation after generation  
Toward those who fear Him.  
He has done mighty deeds with His arm;  
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones,  
And has exalted those who were humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things;  
And sent away the rich empty-handed.  
He has given help to Israel His servant,  
In remembrance of His mercy,  
As He spoke to our fathers,  
To Abraham and his descendants forever.'*

*And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home."*

*(Luke 1:39-56)*

## Spiritual Life vs. Spiritual Death

By Jane Titrud

*“For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6 NASB)*

In the beginning, God made a covenant of life with Adam. That is, continued life for the man was contingent upon his obedience to the commandment of God not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil: *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die’”* (Genesis 2:16–17). This is the same covenant that was later broken at the time of the fall, and death happened as warned.

Indeed, both Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. Each, moreover, suffered spiritual death by becoming separated from the life of God and eventually died physically as well. What is more, death spread to all men, even to those who, unlike Adam, had not violated a known requirement or law of God (Romans 5:12).

Yet, the Bible says that sin entered the world through the sin of the man rather than through the sin of the woman or even both of them (Romans 5:18–19; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22). It also reveals that Adam’s sin affected all of mankind in a way that negatively corresponds to the work of Christ on the cross: *“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so **through one act of righteousness there resulted Justification of life to all men.** For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous”* (Romans 5:18–19, bold emphasis added). *“For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive**”* (1 Corinthians 15:21–22,

bold emphasis added).

Such revelation has led many Bible scholars to believe that Adam held a representative form of headship over all of mankind from the beginning. This would also appear to be the proper foundation upon which to build a true understanding of the gospel.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners by undoing the universal effects of Adam’s sin. Taking on flesh as an innocent child apart from the curse of sin, He was born to die for the sins of the world. This is the ultimate message of Christmas. In the fullness of time, the Savior of the world was born to a virgin. His mission would be to submit to the will of the Father and offer up the righteous sacrifice of Himself, once for all (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12). His death and resurrection would then become the basis for the Gospel of Salvation.

God’s gracious plan of Salvation—His remedy, if you will, for the problem of sin and death—is simply to offer Salvation to all who will believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Everyone has already been justified by the perfect work of Christ, according to what Romans 5:18 says above. It is just that this truth must be accepted by faith. It is of no benefit to the unbeliever. But whenever a person does believe the Gospel, he becomes a child of God, a new creature in Christ, and receives the gift of eternal life.

*“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:12–13). *“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

Being “born again” is synonymous with becoming a new creature in Christ as well as with the concept of being regenerated. But while this aspect of Salvation is presented in John 1:12–13 (quoted above) as entirely God’s do-



ing and involves a work of the Spirit in the life of a Believer (Titus 3:5), Salvation can only be accomplished in conjunction with faith in God's truth on the part of man (1 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). This is true with every aspect of Salvation as well, including being "born again."

What is more, the concept of Salvation by grace through faith did not originate in the New Testament with the teachings of either Jesus or the apostles. Hebrews 11:2 says that, long before the advent of Christ and the Gospel, men of old gained approval before God by their faith. Abraham is listed in this regard in Hebrews 11 along with the examples of many others. The apostle Paul also holds up Abraham elsewhere in the Scriptures as the primary example of one who found righteousness by faith. He is even presented as the spiritual father of all Believers.

*"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:1-5).*

*"Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:23-24).*

*"Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer" (Galatians 3:6-9).*

According to Paul, Abraham was clearly justified by faith apart from works. We cannot

say for certain that Abraham was "born again" in the same sense that Believers in the Gospel are today for there is no specific teaching on this detail in the Bible. Yet, what we are told specifically is that Abraham was justified by his faith in God without the mention of any other prior requirement for the exercise of that faith.

Nevertheless, some theologians have gotten the idea that one must be "born again" or regenerated *before* one can exercise saving faith unto Salvation. Much of this stems from a particular interpretation of what Jesus told Nicodemus when He said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3), as well as what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:14: *"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."*

The problem here is with a mistaken assumption that these passages are speaking of the need for regeneration *prior to* Salvation. A closer look at context in each case, however, reveals a different story.

In the case of Nicodemus, for instance, one must remember that Jesus was speaking to a Pharisee. Most Pharisees did not understand their need for Salvation. They considered themselves "saved" simply by being physical descendants of Abraham and keepers of the Law, as was typical of most other Jews in that day as well. What Jesus was then implying was that he needed to be truly saved and, thus, become a spiritual child of Abraham by faith. This is what He meant when He told Nicodemus that he needed to be "born again." Only then would he qualify for *entrance* into heaven. For as Jesus said again in verse 6: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot **enter into** the kingdom of God"* (John 3:6, bold emphasis added). To "see" oftentimes means to "understand," but in this case, the parallel is "enter into."

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 2:14 (quoted above), the subject here is not the *process* or various *aspects* of Salvation. According to the

context, Paul is rather referring to the *benefits* of Salvation: “*THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE THAT LOVE HIM*” (1 Corinthians 2:9)—things which, consequently, make no sense to unbelievers. These would include such things as being children of God and becoming “born again” (John 1:12–13), being new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), being indwelt by Spirit of Christ (Colossians 1:27), being sons of God by adoption and fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14–17), being seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6), being overcomers by faith (1 John 5:4), and being joined to the life of Christ (1 John 5:11–12). For truly, how would one go about explaining such things to an unbeliever?

It is important to get the order right because interpreting the need to be “born again” as a necessary precursor for being able to exercise saving faith in the Gospel takes any responsibility for Salvation out of the hands of man and puts it squarely upon God. That is because only God could bring about such spiritual birth. But that is precisely the point. The goal of this thinking is to emphasize the sovereignty of God. Man, on the other hand is viewed as spiritually dead and, thus, he *cannot* respond to the truth. They believe God must supernaturally enable a person to see the truth of the Gospel via His work of regeneration *before* man can believe it, and this God does by His sovereign choice—enabling some to see His truth but not all.

Requiring man to exercise faith unto Salvation is, moreover, thought to involve works righteousness. It has already been shown that saving faith is not equivalent to works, for the faith of Abraham is contrasted with works in Romans 4:1–5. Yet, within the view that faith is all of God and nothing of man, faith is interpreted as a gift of God, supposedly in accordance with Ephesians 2:8–9: “*For by grace, you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*”

However, the key to understanding here is that the gift of God is not referring to faith but rather to God’s entire plan of Salvation. The fact that we are saved by grace through faith is not of man. It is the gift of God to a fallen race, but faith is required to receive the gift. For, looking again at John 1:12–13, one can see that the right to become children of God is dependent upon first receiving Christ by believing in His name: “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:12–13).

God is obviously the One who does the work of regeneration, but He only does this for people who first believe and receive their Savior. Requiring regeneration prior to faith, on the other hand, tends to “put the proverbial cart before the horse.” Since some people equate being “born again” with the process of putting your faith in Christ, the phrase, “you must be born again to be saved” can sound as if one needs to get saved in order to get saved.

God is certainly involved in the saving of souls. For Jesus said, “*No one can come to Me except the Father who sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up on the last day*” (John 6:44). He said that the Holy Spirit would come to convict the world of sin, righteous, and judgment (John 16:8). In addition, the Word of God plays a key role in generating faith (Romans 10:17). God has even chosen to save by preaching the word of the cross in demonstration of the Spirit and power of God instead of persuasive words of human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:17–31; 2:1–5).

“*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and Sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, ‘LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD’*” (1 Corinthians 1:30–31).

Yet, the trouble with seeing God as solely responsible for Salvation without any input on the part of man is that this also tends to make Him responsible for the loss of those who never come to believe the truth. For why



would God choose not to bring everyone to saving faith if it were in His power to do so?

One must remember what was said earlier about sin coming into the world through one man. That is, the consequences of Adam's sin including death passed on to everyone, *"even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come"* (Romans 5:14). Man could never bring about such a thing as the universal application of the consequences of Adam's sin to all of mankind. Obviously, then, this was God's doing. If He did this to foreshadow the coming work of Christ who would bring justification of life to all men, as it says in Romans 5: 18, and thereby facilitate His plan of Salvation, then it had a righteous purpose. Justification could then at least be offered to all and effectively applied to everyone who willingly chose to exercise faith in God. But, if God must first regenerate those whom He chooses to save and yet He does not do so for everyone, then He is condemning people to death who have no ability to believe after being the One who transferred the consequences of Adam's sin onto all of them in the first place. This understanding, consequently, tends to make God out to be the author of sin and death.

What then about the understanding that unregenerate man is spiritually dead and is, thus, incapable of receiving the truth of God until he is "born again" through a supernatural act of God? The trouble here has to do with misunderstanding what it means biblically to be "spiritually dead."

People often define spiritual death by equating it with physical death, in which case one becomes unresponsive to outside stimuli. However, since life in the spiritual sense is biblically associated with being joined to God, it would seem best to define spiritual death in terms of being separated from the life of God because of sin and unbelief. Such a definition fits the description of what we were like before our own Salvation. Ephesians 2:1 describes us as being *dead in trespasses and sins*. In other words, sin once separated us from the life of God.

The idea that separation from the life of

God defines spiritual death coordinates well with Jesus' parable of the vine and branches in John 15:1-11: *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned"* (John 15:5-6).

It coordinates well with the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15: 11-32, for the son that left the father was said to be dead. By the same token, coming back to the father is depicted as becoming alive again: *"'Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry.... 'But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found'"* (vv. 23-24; 32).

A similar definition of life—and, by association, death—is also abundantly clear in 1 John 5:11-12: *"And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."*

Even in the case of our spiritual walk of Sanctification, the mind set on the flesh is said to be death whereas the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6). Here again, the issue with the flesh has to do with sin, which separates one from God, and life apart from Christ and the Holy Spirit amounts to death, *"because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Romans 8:7-8). *"For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"* (Romans 8:13-14).

The Bible does not present the problem of fallen man as if he were spiritually unresponsive and, thus, unable to react to the preaching of God's truth by exercising faith. The problem is that he is in bondage to sin and cannot come to God except on God's terms. Apart from accepting God's truth, he can also be-

come subject to the lies of false spirituality or become spiritually apathetic. Indeed, one can find a prevalence of people all over the world who are either caught up in some form of false spirituality or else want nothing whatsoever to do with the God of the Bible because they love darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

Moreover, the need to accept Jesus Christ and the Gospel by faith is not some lofty theological concept that only the intellectually gifted can grasp. The basic idea is simple. People know what it means to believe. Even a child can exercise faith; it just needs to be directed towards the right things. Consequently, Jesus said, *"Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all"* (Mark 10:14b-15).

With respect to those who do not come to saving faith, therefore, it is not because they *cannot* put their faith in Christ without first

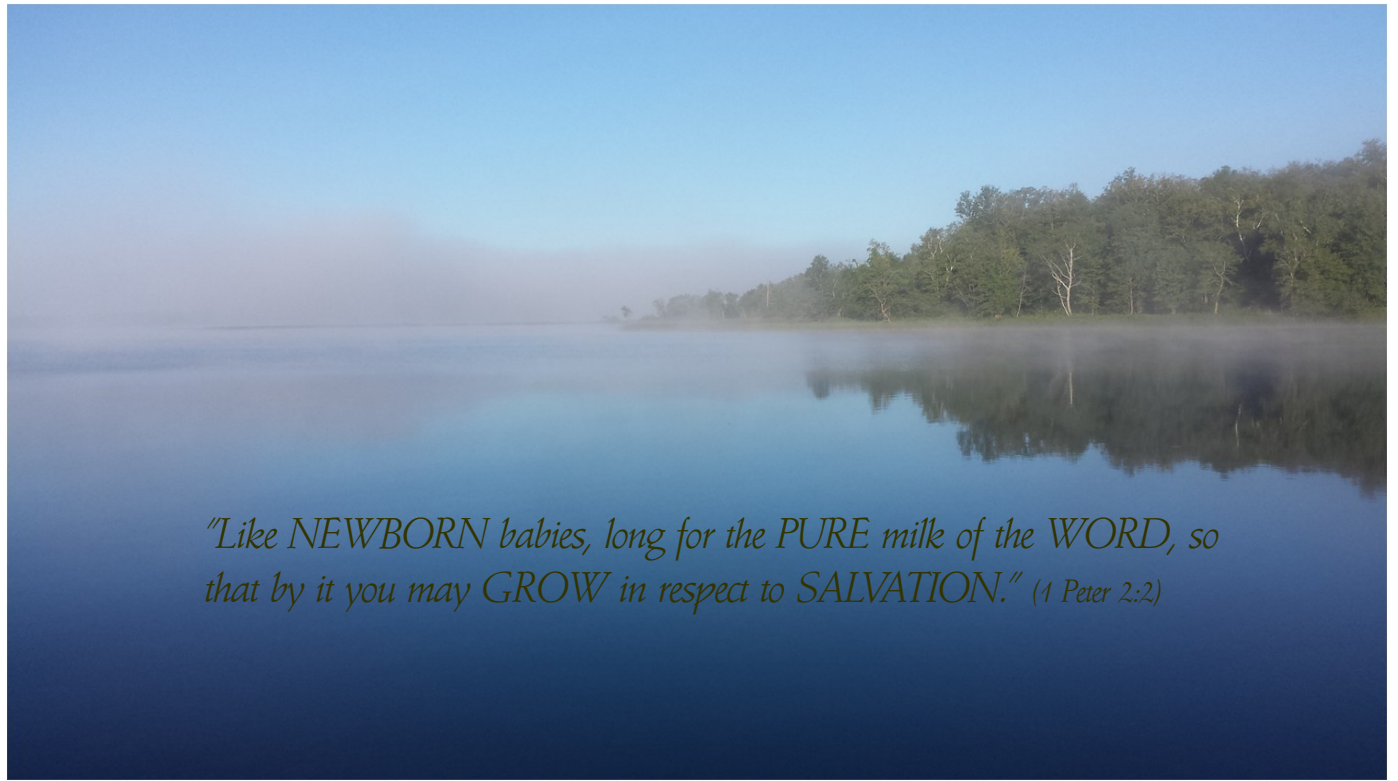
being "born again." It is either because they have never been presented with the truth of God's Word in the first place or because they *will not* accept the Gospel by faith and submit to its truth. And a theology that says otherwise tends to bring sharp and unnecessary division in the Body of Christ.

As Paul told Timothy, the last days will be characterized by people who hold to a form of godliness but have denied its power (2 Timothy 3:5). This should be of primary concern to Christians. While there is still time, therefore, let us be about understanding, preserving, and spreading the simple Gospel in all its power instead of being distracted and divided by the wisdom and teachings of mere men.

*"Without FAITH it is  
IMPOSSIBLE to  
please HIM."  
(Hebrews 11:6a)*

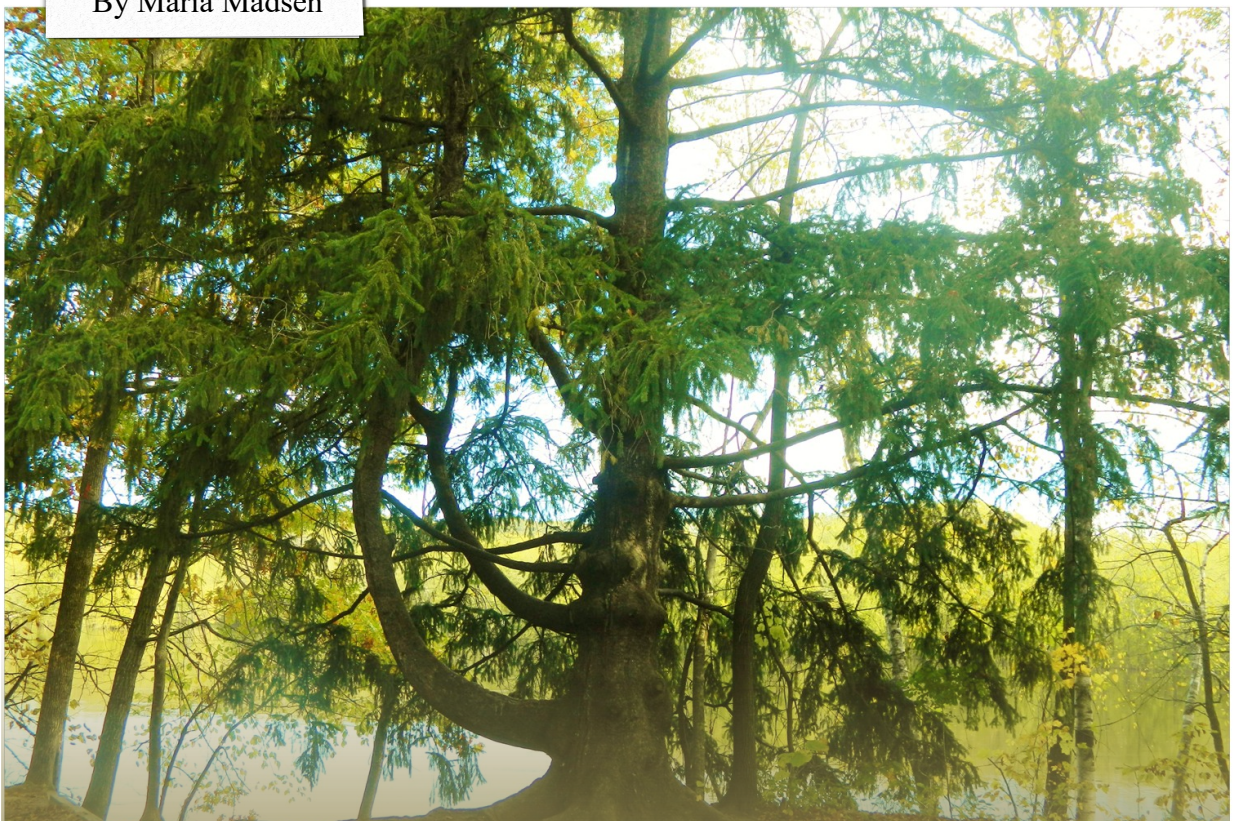






*"Like NEWBORN babies, long for the PURE milk of the WORD, so that by it you may GROW in respect to SALVATION." (1 Peter 2:2)*

By Maria Madsen



*"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)*



## Born of the Spirit

By Lynn Warner

When someone is born of the Spirit, God gives that person many gifts. Some of the gifts God gives us through being born of the Spirit begin with the power to become children of God, to enter the Kingdom of God, to know God and Jesus Christ, to know and abide in God's love, to be kept from the evil one, to be sanctified in the truth, to be one and perfected in unity, and to be with Jesus forever. All these gifts (and more!) are found in the book of John with more details in the Epistles.

The first gift given to those who receive Jesus is the power or right to become children of God, born of God, as described in John 1:12-13: *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"* (NASB).

As children, we can enter the Kingdom of God, having been born of water and Spirit, as stated in John 3:5-6: *"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'"*

As children who enter the Kingdom of God, born of the Spirit, we are given eternal life, which is the ability to know God and Jesus Christ. We read this in John 17:1-3: *"Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.'"*

What greater gift can God give, than to be given the right to become children of God and the ability to know God and His Son! Those who receive Jesus also receive joy – the blessing of joy that come because we are His children, loved by Him with the love of the Father

in us.

In John 15:8-11, Jesus shows that we must abide in His love to bear fruit. By abiding in His love and producing fruit, His joy is in us: *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."*

Also, when He prayed in John 17:26, He said, *"And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."* To know God is to know God's character and to know His love and forgiveness.

Also, those who receive Jesus are to be kept by God from the evil one. We are transferred from the kingdom of darkness (lies, deception, and hatred of God) to God's Kingdom, where we are sanctified in the Truth by the Spirit of Truth. For example, we read in John 17:15-17: *"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*

We read in John 16:13a that we are guided into the Truth by the Spirit of Truth: *"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth."* To have truth is a great blessing, especially in this dark time when man is subverting truth, darkness is being called light, and light is being called darkness. Rather than being submerged in confusion, the child of God has clarity and vision.

Another gift we are given is to be in perfect unity. In this world of fragmentation, separation, and chaos, unity is a great blessing. Jesus prayed for the children of God to be one in John 17:20-23: *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world*



*may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."*

As God's children, God's love is in us, and we are free to love God and love others. We put off anger, bitterness, unforgiveness – all things that cause separation – and put on the love of Christ, which brings peace contentment, and wholeness. Last, we look forward to being with Jesus where He is. A passage many Christians love is John 14:2-3: *"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."*

We desire to be with Jesus. We read in John 17:24 that He desires us to be with Him also: *"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have*

*given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."* He desires to be with us and gives us the desire of our hearts.

In summary, when we are born of the Spirit, we receive many gifts given to us by God through the Spirit, and because of Jesus Who was sent to us by God. In this Christmas season, we can meditate on the gifts from God – gifts no money can buy. In this article, we read of being given the power to become the children of God, born of the Spirit, able to know God and His Son Jesus Christ. We are forgiven and loved with God's own love, which we in turn pour into others. Though we are in the world, we are not of the world, and are kept from the evil one. We are strengthened to know the Truth and to be able to stand in the Truth, even as we see the world rejecting the Truth. Because we have God's love and Truth, we can live in peace and unity with God and others, even as God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are in unity. And with anticipation, we desire to be with Jesus, where He is, and behold His glory!





## January/February Newsletter Theme— TRUTH

**Submission Deadline: January 28**

**Publish Date: February 6**

### Truth...

- What is truth?
- Why is truth important?
- How is truth related to God?

### Verses on TRUTH

**2 Samuel 7:28** — “Now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant.”

**Psalms 15:1-2** — “O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart.”

**Psalms 25:10** — “All the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth To those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.”

**John 1:17** — “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

**John 4:24** — “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

**John 14:6** — “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”

**John 15:26** — “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.”

**John 16:13** — “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

**John 17:17** — “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”