

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 restore 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?

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!