

# What About... Being Born of the Spirit

By Dave DeWitt



## What Does It Mean to Be Born of the Spirit?

Jesus told Nicodemus, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (John 3:6).

The Apostle Paul addressed the subject with some detail in Romans chapter 8. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit* (Romans 8:2-4).

All human beings, unlike plants and animals, are spiritual beings. That means, in addition to having a living body (like plants) and a personality (like animals), humans also have a spirit, evidenced by a sense of justice, purpose, destiny, morality, and creativity. Humans are born with a spirit but not with the Holy Spirit.

Humans are also born into a realm of sin and death. You have heard the only sure things are death and taxes. Actually, the only sure things are death and sin. But if you have received Jesus as your Savior, then the *offering of Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death*. The Mosaic Law could not solve the problem of sin or the penalty of death. It could only point out sin and point to death because of sin. The Law could do nothing to eliminate either sin or death.

## Why Does Salvation Allow Believers to Be Free from Sin and Death?

Because Jesus died on the cross as an offering for the sin of the whole world (1 John 2:2), salvation is no longer about sin. It is all about receiving Jesus (John 1:12). But He did something else the Law could not do. He gave believers a positional holiness (or positional sanctification, Romans 6:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21) so that the Holy Spirit of the Holy God could indwell a positionally holy believer. For example, the Old Testament Israelites had to live by the Mosaic Law because Jesus had not yet paid for their sin. Old Testament people were saved by faith in what God revealed at that time (Genesis 15:6). But Old Testament believers could not be filled with the Holy Spirit because they were

not yet positionally holy. Jesus' death for our sin allowed us believers of this church/grace age to *not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*.

*For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 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 8:5-8).

## What Is the Evidence for Being Born of the Spirit?

Since the spiritual life is not physical, only its effects are visible. For example, one of the greatest proofs of the truth of the gospel is that we can see the changed lives in people who get saved. Generally, people do not change—unless they receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. Salvation actually changes our spiritual nature because we are born of the Spirit. Believers change. We can see it in their lives. But we cannot see the Spirit that gave them that changed life.

Jesus said, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, "You must be born again. 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 3:6-8).

## Where Does Spiritual Re-birth Come From?

Most people (except evolutionists) understand that physical life only comes from other physical life. The same is true of spiritual life, the difference being that spiritual life only comes from God. But surprisingly many people seem to think spiritual life can come from other sources. Here are some things that are not spiritually alive and therefore cannot produce the fruits of the spirit:

Money, nature (trees, flowers, animals) moral commandments, statutes, and ordinances, conservative or liberal politics, icons, “lucky” charms, sermons, pastors, priests, books, songs, Bible colleges, seminaries, and local churches. Mystical significance derived from things or people is from superstition not the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:22-23). None of those things/people can give spiritual life, to anyone. Believers who participate in these things are spiritually alive, but even they cannot make anyone else spiritually alive.

The spiritual life cannot be passed on by parents to their children, pastors to congregations, teachers to students or friends to loved ones. Spiritually alive people can only tell others about the spiritual life, but they cannot make them spiritually alive. For anyone to have spiritual life, they must individually be *born of the Spirit*, which only comes by being born again. The Spirit of God is only available through the Son of God, *as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God* (John 1:12).

The spiritual life takes a very different path from laws ...*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law* (Galatians 5:22-23). Laws can make us live a certain way, but they cannot make us want to live a certain way. Police, who enforce the speed laws, can force us to keep the speed limit, but they cannot make us want to keep the speed limit. They cannot make us feel miserable if we speed without getting caught. Laws can force us to not sin, but they cannot create in us a desire to not sin or make us miserable when we do.

A desire to not sin only comes from the Holy Spirit. In one sense, the difference between Christians and non-Christians is that Christians are miserable about their sin. Non-Christians may be miserable about the consequences of their sin, such as getting sick, being divorced, or going to prison. They can go to therapy or join groups or just use self-discipline to help them control their actions (say, to drink, smoke, use drugs or pornography), but they still have the desires, with only the flesh to combat those desires. Christians also have evil desires because they still (this side of heaven) have a sin nature. But only born-again Christian believers are miserable about their sin itself, because the sin itself offends the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I suggest that we will not stop sinful behavior until we are more miserable from our sin than we are gratified by it. And no unbeliever can do that because only the Holy Spirit does that. As we saw, Paul said those *who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit* (Romans 8:5). Laws cannot change our desires, but if you *walk by the Spirit ... you will not carry out the desire of the flesh* (Galatians 5:16).

*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).

How do you know that you are being led by the Holy Spirit? Paul says you know you are being led by the Spirit when you *are putting to death the deeds of the body*.