

New Birth and the Fruit of the Spirit

• John 3: 1-8

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John chapter 3. Because we finished our study through the New Testament here a few weeks ago, I am taking some time to talk about The Person and the Work of the Holy Spirit here for a few weeks while we're finishing up the Old Testament on Wednesday nights.

If you're in chapter 3 of John, we're going to read the first several verses and then we're going to ask the Lord to open our hearts. It says, *"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. "*

⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (NIV)

Stop there if you would please and pray with me.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to what You want us to hear today. We want to receive from You. We want to be taught by Your Spirit today. And we ask in Jesus name that our hearts might be made ready to receive all that You want to say to us at this time through Jesus Christ, amen.

The passage that we've just read is among some of the more popular passages in the Bible. It eventuates into John 3:16, which of course is the verse that most people are probably most aware of in the Bible. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..., "* and so forth.

But this story is really a wonderful one because it depicts for us this rare meeting between Jesus and this one soft-hearted Pharisee. There weren't very many of them. Most of the Pharisees very, very much opposed the ministry of Jesus. But this one comes to Jesus. It says, he comes at night and he begins to speak to Him about His ministry.

And what's wonderful about this passage is that as Jesus talks with Nicodemus, He begins to give us information about what we as human beings must undergo in order to be saved. In other words, in order to go to heaven, in order to see the kingdom of God. He says that we must undergo something and He refers to it as being "*born again.*"

Now, Nicodemus loses Him at that point and he starts going, okay, I don't know what you're talking about here because how in the world can somebody be born again? And then he even starts to wonder out loud to Jesus, are you talking about a man actually reentering the womb? And how could that even be possible and so forth?

And Jesus comes back with His response to and this is probably the key verse of that whole response. If you look with me again in verse 6 of your Bible there, it says, "*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*"

Now I'm going to go ahead and put that particular verse up on the screen and we'll hold it there for a while because this is going to be the anchor for a while here of our thought processes related to this, okay.

John 3:6 (NIV)

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Let's take a look at this phrase or this statement and let's see what it means. First of all, "*Flesh gives birth to flesh,...*" What that basically means is that God has given us human beings, this wonderful ability to procreate is what we call it after the flesh.

And those of you who are parents or grandparents here in this room, those of you who are parents to be, this is one of the most wonderful things about the things God has given us. But it's a little bit freaky sometimes too, because you have children and they look like you and that's weird. I mean, and in fact, not only do they look like you, you see this amalgamation of you and your spouse in this child. This child has my eyes and her nose or her hair and my whatever.

And it's just strange to have children and delightful at the same time. Strange and delightful. I'm not sure if it's more strange than delightful might depend. And I've told you guys many times, I've gotten to look in my... I'm in my fifties now, I look more like my dad now than I ever did. And I, sometimes I look in the mirror and it frightens me at first. And it's like, Dad, what are you doing here?

But that's what we are given the ability to do. That's what this passage says, "*Flesh gives birth to flesh.*" We have children after the flesh. They are born after the flesh. But Jesus said that only "*Spirit... (can give) birth to spirit.*" And that is the miracle.

Jesus is talking about new birth that is required of all people to go to heaven, but it can't happen through physical means. All flesh can do is give birth to flesh. That's all you can do. But God comes along in the life of an individual and gives them a spiritual birth, or in this case, rebirth, and we say, then they are born again.

And I, one of the reasons I also love this passage here in John chapter 3 is that we realize or we see here that this term "*born again*" is not some evangelical Christian-ease. It's a word or it's a phrase that Jesus Himself used. Okay. And it literally means to experience new birth. All right.

And what happens when someone receives new birth is really, you guys, it's a miracle. I mean, we might not see it as the same kind of a miracle as somebody, some supernatural change in someone's physical condition. Isn't that interesting?

We look at physical miracles as like, whoa, this guy came and he had one leg that was shorter than the other, and they prayed for him, and now they're the same length, or something like that. Or this person, the doctor said they had no possibility of surviving this illness and they come. And they anoint him with oil, and they pray the prayer faith, and they're healed. We just go whoa, that is amazing. And we're just blown away.

And then we say oh, by the way, three people got born again. Cool. And for some reason that takes a backseat in the sense of what a miracle might be but you stop and think about what takes place. The transformation that takes place when somebody prays to receive Christ as their Savior.

And before they prayed that simple prayer, they were lost, but now they're found. Before they prayed that prayer, they were walking in darkness, and now

they're walking in the light. Before they prayed that prayer, they were alienated from God. They were separated from God, and now they're a child of God. That's a miracle. John talks about it, actually, earlier in his gospel account in chapter 1. I'll put this also up on the screen for you. John chapter 1, verses 12 and 13 says,

John 1:12-13 (NIV)

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— (and then he goes on to talk about that flesh thing) children born not of (the flesh, which is) natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but (what are they born of? They're) born of God.

It's a birth of God by God that someone is given. All right. Whereby they are born again. But notice here's something that we, that's when we become a child of God. The world loves to say, well, we're all God's children. We're not all God's children.

The children of God are those who have, what does it say? “...received him, to those who have believed on his name, (those) he gives the right to become children of God—” That's a transformation.

Do you remember when you got saved? Do you remember the transformation in your life? Do you remember how different life was? How you saw life differently after you were born again? I mean, just the amazing changes that happen to us when that happens.

It is a transformation of really everything in our lives, but not the least of which are those things related to character. That's the crazy thing about this transformation. We start to act differently. Not by our own ability, not by our own power, but by the power of God.

And so you think, well, what exactly does that look like? Well, the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about it, and I'll put this also on the screen from chapter 3 verses 18. Here's what he said. He said,

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

And we...are being transformed into his likeness (and notice that it is a gradual thing) with ever-increasing glory, which comes from...

You getting down and gritting your teeth and working out and try to be a good person. It doesn't say that, does it? Aren't you glad it doesn't say that? Do you know that there's a lot of Christians? Oh, let's see. Do you think that's fair to say? Yeah, I think that's pretty fair to say.

I think there's a lot of Christians who are toughing it out and they're trying to be a good Christian. I'm just trying to live that good. I've had people say that to me. Pastor, I'm just trying to live the good Christian life. And I always say the same thing. Stop it. Stop trying to live the good Christian life.

And they're always taken aback by that. Pastor, what do you mean? You don't want me to live the Christian life? Not that way. I don't want you to try to live the Christian life. I want you to give up. I want you to surrender. And I want you to yield to the Holy Spirit so that He might live that life through you. Do you see what this passage says?

And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

It is the Spirit of God in us that is transforming our lives into something other than what they used to be, which were lives of selfishness and darkness and sin. And that doesn't mean that we are completely taken out of the potential of selfishness, darkness, and sin, but it means we're on the road. "...*ever increasing glory.*" And that is one of the most wonderful things.

Okay, Paul says it's a transformation. It's a transformation in our lives. I have got this theme from the transformer movie going through my head. I'm not going to sing it though, okay. Hey, I remember that song when they did it on the cartoon back in the 70s or whatever it was, but I still won't sing it for you.

Anyway, Paul outlines what this transformation looks like in the life of a believer when he wrote to the church in the region of Galatia. It's from the fifth chapter, and it's what we call the fruit of the Spirit. This is what that transformation looks like. Paul says,

Galatians 5:22-23a (NIV)

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

...the fruit of the Spirit (and then he lists these 9 things:) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Now, there's several things I want to talk about related to these things, but I want to call attention to the very first thing that Paul says, they are "*the fruit of the Spirit.*"

By the way, fruit is a word in the Bible that means more than something that grows on a tree or on a vine. Fruit means the result of something, the byproduct of something, the after effect of something. Like the fruit of your labors is getting paid, okay? The fruit of your life, what is that? It's what comes from your life.

Well, the fruit of the Spirit or the byproduct of the Spirit being in our lives is, and then he begins to list these various attributes that have to do with character. And he begins to say that these are the things that the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives.

Remember what he said before, in increasing measure, little by... And it doesn't just come upon us where one minute, we're living in the world and the next minute we come to Christ and we ask Him to save us. And suddenly we're just like glowing with a halo and so forth. Those changes aren't quite that dramatic are they? They come over time.

And some things in our life take longer to address by the Holy Spirit. But let me ask you this. Is the Holy Spirit still addressing things in your life? I'm really glad because that proves you're alive. I mean it also proves you're saved, but it proves that you're alive.

And you know what? As long as you and I are Living and breathing on the face of this earth, God the Holy Spirit is going to continue to speak to you and I about ways that we need to improve. Ways that we have taken things in our life and we've locked them away. And we haven't surrendered those things. We haven't yielded those things to the power of His life in us.

And so every so often the Holy Spirit comes along and does a little, knock on the door of our hearts and says, yeah, there's another area there, Paul, that I

really need you to open up because you haven't opened that up to Me. It's like, God, I, really? I'm keeping that one closed from You. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

That's an area and it could be any number of things. Could be how I feel about someone. Could be a hurt that I've suffered at the hands of someone and I'm struggling with forgiveness. Maybe it's, God is moving upon my heart to express kindness to someone, but I just don't want to. That Jonah syndrome. Just soon see him fry God sort of a thing. And so on and so on.

But whatever the Holy Spirit may be showing you, that's His way of convicting you to open your heart further to Him that the fruit, His fruit might be seen in you. But once again people, this is not your fruit. This is His fruit.

Now you might look at that list of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and you might say well, I've seen those things in other people. Here's the thing about some of the aspects of this fruit. The flesh can counterfeit these things to some degree, but it cannot reproduce them. And they are not lasting fruits in our lives.

Let me just go over these very quickly for you and just by way of giving a brief description of each of them. First of all,

Love	Faithfulness
Joy	Gentleness
Peace	Self-control
Patience	
Kindness	
Goodness	

Love. Notice that love comes first. This is the premier attribute. It's the one that binds them all together and we'll see that here in a little bit. But this is agape love. This isn't love like in you like, you love pizza, or you love your spouse, or you love your kids.

This is agape love which is unconditional self-sacrificing love. This is the love that God shows us. It's not love that originates from the heart of man. I don't love people with agape love in and of myself. If I do love someone with agape love, it's because His love is flowing through me and enabling me to love unconditionally. Think about that word, unconditional. That means I'm going to love you no matter what and that's just really not us. We love pretty much for what we can get out of it.

It gives us joy, gives us a sense of purpose, a sense of being, but God's love has none of those things attached to it. He loves unconditionally and that's the kind of love He's talking about here.

Next is **Joy**. And joy, this guys, people, this has nothing to do with happiness. All right. This is not this whole thing of, I just want to be happy. This is not that. In fact, this joy is even present when happiness isn't because joy is that undergirding of our lives that keeps our hearts rejoicing in the Lord, even when circumstances around us are falling apart.

When life is producing all kinds of rottenness, there is an undercurrent of rejoicing. And it's not that we're happy about our circumstances. It's not that we're happy about what's happening. There is a joy in the Lord and it transcends circumstances. And it ought to be seen in believers lives.

Even when life is falling apart, there ought to be that undercurrent of joy that can be seen in the life of a believer. By the way, have you ever noticed when you go to minister to somebody who's just had what we consider to be a tragedy, that they end up usually ministering to you? Have you ever noticed that?

You go to somebody because they've like had something happen and you're like, oh no. And you're devastated. You go to the person cause you want to support them and love them and help them. And they've got this joy. And they're not happy about life right now. They're not happy about what just happened, but there is a joy in the Lord. And you walk out of that meeting ministered to because they're walking in the grace of God to walk in that joy. It's really wonderful.

The next one is **Peace**. And this peace is something that Jesus said He gives us not as the world gives us, but as only He can give us because it's peace that passes understanding. (John 14:27) In other words, there's no reason that you can think of that you are at peace. Because again, life around you might be absolutely spinning out of control, but you're at peace. There's a peace and people will say that.

I hear Christians do this all the time when they're going through a tough time. They'll say, this really stinks, but I have such a peace from God and I hate what's going on right now, but I have such a peace from God. I just know that He is in control. I know that He's working all things together for my good. I just know it. I know it. I know it. There's peace and they'll say, I don't even know why I've got peace exactly. I've just, I'm just, I've got it.

The next thing is **Patience**. Patience is the ability to wait on God. Do you know, I bet I'm not the only one in the room that does the mad dash to the finish line thinking that I got to get this thing taken care of. I got to get this thing worked out. I got to take care of the issue whatever it may be. We men, much to the chagrin of our wives are fixers. We enjoy fixing things, of course, because we're occupational in nature. That's why God made us.

What that produces sometimes in a man, and certainly in a woman too, is this ability to run ahead of God and not wait for Him to fix things. Not wait for Him to do that work that He wants to do to wait patiently, but we run ahead because we think we got to take care of right now. And if we don't take care of it, nobody is. And we get all panicked to be at all, I got to do this sort of thing.

God is working patience in us and it is a patience that says to you and I, slow down and know that I am God and the battle belongs to Me. Got to learn that, right? I heard somebody once say, don't ever pray for patience.

Kindness is the next thing. Do you know the word kindness as it's used most often in the Bible is used in the context of benevolence? Meaning that helping people. Blessing people is really the expression of kindness. And so we begin to have a different attitude when we are born again. We begin to have a different attitude toward people, and their needs, and the desire to give, and to help.

I remember when I was just started walking with the Lord. I was in my early twenties and I remember going to a grocery store. It was, in fact, it was a little neighborhood grocery store, like you don't see many of those anymore. A little mom and pop grocery stores, and there's like no other stores around it, but a little neighborhood thing. And I was in there getting something for the family. And there was this woman that I saw who was just, who was very distressed. And I hadn't been walking with the Lord long, but I just had this powerful urge to help somehow.

Well, I was new in the Lord. I was a little intimidated. I didn't say anything actually, but I thought, well, I can pray. But before I met the Lord, I wouldn't have cared about something like that. It's like, gee, what's your problem, lady? Get over it. We got things to do, get out of my way.

But now all of a sudden I'm paying attention and I'm sensitive. And it's like, I want to walk up to this person and say, can I pray for you? Is there something that I can do to help? Something that sort of thing. You know what? That's the Holy Spirit. That is that work of kindness that God is doing in us. That is a work of His fruits.

And then **Goodness**, which is love in action. We talked about love at the outset. This is putting it into action. Expressing the goodness of God and so forth. And being good in our own lives.

Faithfulness. Oh, by the way, let me just back up to goodness for just a second, can I? Do you guys realize there's no goodness in us? And we've talked about this before. Those of you guys have been around Calvary Chapel for a while, you've heard me talk on this, but I don't mean to insult you here today, but you don't have any good in you. So says Jesus Christ.

Not me, but if it was me, you could probably be free to throw something at me. It's not, I didn't think it up. In fact, I wouldn't have thought it up. I would love to believe there's goodness in me. I mean, that would make me very happy. Paul, you're a good guy. Thank you. No, I'm not.

Remember when Jesus met the rich young ruler? Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said, why do you call Me good? There's no one good but God. Now, that wasn't Jesus saying He wasn't God. He was correcting a false understanding of this young man that you could actually do something to get to heaven that was good. That was good enough.

Paul says, in my flesh dwells no good thing. (Romans 7:18) That pretty much ends the story right there between Jesus and Paul laying those things out for us. We can pretty much come up with a doctrinal position on this if you will. We're not good. So if there's any goodness coming out of me, is it me? No, it's the spirit.

And then **Faithfulness.** Faithfulness is being true to your word. You say it, stick with it. And it's also a faithfulness of character. Steadfast. Don't you love people in life who are steadfast? And don't people who are just ping-pong around like a ball in a machine, like pinball, they don't, they kind of make you tired. You're looking for those steady Eddie's and God's Spirit is doing a work in our hearts to bring steadiness and stability and faithfulness.

And then there's **Gentleness.** It's interesting gentleness, this is also translated meekness. Jesus said He was meek, but listen, that doesn't mean weak. Gentleness, the best definition of gentleness is the proper use of power. In other words, you don't even find somebody who's gentle until you see someone who has power and authority, but who uses it properly. That can be seen in the home with parents. It can be seen in the business place and it's certainly seen in the church.

Just because you have the power and authority doesn't mean that you run roughshod over everybody's head. You walk in a spirit of gentleness, which is what the Spirit wants to do in our lives. To gently correct, to gently speak into people's lives and so forth.

And then lastly, **Self-control**. Self-control is power under control and it's one of those attributes of the Holy Spirit that God is working in our lives, little by little, progressively, and so forth. And while none of us in this room or anybody within the sound of my voice is going to perfectly display these fruits all of the time, this is what God wants to do in our hearts. And I will submit to you that this is the definition of Spiritual or even Spirit-filled.

We're going to talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit here soon in this series of the Holy Spirit. We're going to talk about what they are and what they aren't. We're going to look at what the Word has to say.

But when I talk about, when we talk about somebody being spirit-filled or somebody being spiritual, we most usually think about. The gifts of the Spirit or some ability that they have that wows us. Somebody who has the gift of prophecy, somebody who has the ability to look into the Word and see amazing detail and insight.

We go, wow, that person is really spiritual, but I submit to you that it may not be so. And to underscore that statement, I want to share with you and show you a passage that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. By the way, a church that loved spiritual gifts, and here's what he said to them. He said,

1 Corinthians 13:2 (NIV)

If I have the gift of prophecy and I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I have the gift of prophecy and I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, (he says, the final result is) I am nothing.

We just finished our study of the Book of Revelation. It's a wonderful book. We had a great study. But there are always things in the Book of Revelation that are a little bit tweaking to your heart and mind. And you come away from a study in the Book of Revelation and you're like, well, some of those things are, they're tough. They're tough to lay hold of.

Can you imagine somebody who just had the whole Book of Revelation dialed in 100% and we all believed them? Everything they said about it. We would probably look at that person and go, wow, they are spiritual. Paul says not necessarily. He says, yeah, sure, somebody might be able to fathom all mysteries. Imagine that.

But if they have not this premier fruit, that one that starts off the whole list of the 9, which, by the way, I don't think is a conclusive list. But if they have not love, they, in fact, are nothing at all. I just think that's really amazing.

I would like to close by sharing a passage from 2 Peter, where Peter gives us an exhortation related to the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Here's what he says. He says,

2 Peter 1:5-8 (NIV)

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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All right. Now, before we talk about what this means exactly, when I was going through the gifts or the fruits rather of the Holy Spirit, just a little bit ago, and I was defining them, I'm willing to bet that some of you here today were thinking of someone other than yourself.

You probably had some picture of someone in your mind who perhaps claims to be a Christian, but in whom you've never seen any of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And you were thinking to yourself how far that person really falls short of manifesting or revealing any aspect of the fruit of the Spirit in their life. And that may be true and there's a place for determining fruit.

But what Peter is saying in this passage, is rather than policing others, which we very much like to do, he says to you and I, that we are to make every effort to add to our walk of faith, these various fruits of the Spirit. And although we are

very adept at looking at the life of someone else and saying, do I see the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life? What Peter is asking us to do is to say, do I see the fruit of the Holy Spirit in my life? Do I see these things increasing in my life with ever increasing glory? Do I see progression being made?

And do I love people now more than I used to? Do I care about people now more than I used to? Is there more peace in my life now than there used to be? How about patience? Kindness? Gentleness? How about self-control?

Is the flesh having more control over my life than it used to or less because even though, as I said before, we're never on this side of glory, going to perfectly manifest these gifts or these fruits rather of the Holy Spirit, there ought to be an increasing work.

And once again, stop thinking about your neighbor. That's not who God wants you to look at right now. God wants you to look at your heart. And ask yourself the question, how am I doing? Even ask the Lord. David wasn't afraid to pray that prayer. Lord, search me and know me. (Psalm 139:23) He allowed the Holy Spirit to take inventory. How about a fruit inventory of our lives? How are we doing, people?

Now, this isn't for you to speak up and talk about. It's between you and Jesus. And each and every one of us ought to be always thinking about it. Do you know what? I'll just go as far as to say this and then we'll close. If every single one of us did our own inventory, other people wouldn't have to.

Let's stand together.