

¹ 1 Cor. 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.

³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

We Believe: The Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

A man comes to see Jesus one evening. His name is Nicodemus, a religious leader, so you'd think he's got some spiritual smarts. He makes a startling admission for a Pharisee: "Rabbi, we know you are from God, for no one can do the things you are doing unless God is with you." Jesus is not flattered. His reply has become a keynote of evangelical Christianity:

Truly, truly I say to you, unless a person is born again, it is impossible to see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus is as confused by these words as we are. "So, we're supposed to go back in our mother's womb and?"

No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

Nicodemus doesn't get it, and, mostly, neither do we. What does Jesus mean by being born...any of these ways: again... from above...born of water and Spirit?

It has become, for some, a slightly frightening message to non-believers, and, truth be told, most of us mainline believers, too.

Have you been born again?

Someone will ask.

When were you saved? Is another version.

Name the day, date and time you were born again, you invited Jesus into your life and were saved.

What is this born again business? Do we have to have a Billy Graham moment to be a disciple of Jesus? Must there be sawdust and weeping, people singing, "Just As I Am, Without One Plea"?

Don't get me wrong. I don't discount any of that. But nowhere in the Bible does it say it has to be that way. The Apostle Paul, who had his own born again experience, gives us a great explanation here in his first letter to the Corinthians. On the surface he's talking spiritual gifts, but, beneath that is a foundational understanding of what the Holy Spirit is, and what it means to be born of the Spirit.

You remember, he says, before you were Christians, you worshiped all sorts of gods. These powerless, lifeless idols enticed you to worship them. Some of you even got pretty passionate about it. So, you need to understand something: if lifeless pieces of wood and stone can entice you to worship them, how much more does the living Spirit of God empower you to say, "Jesus is Lord."

Doug Clark put it beautifully at Men's Prayer Breakfast on Tuesday. In the beginning, God created Adam and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and he became a living being. His life – his breath – comes from God's breath. Now, in ancient thought, breath and spirit are the same thing. In both Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, the word for breath is the same word as for spirit. Your breath is your spirit; God's life-giving breath is God's Spirit. So, when God breathes into Adam's nostrils, it is God's *spirit* that enters Adam and gives him life. Adam is *born* when he receives the spirit/breath of God.

Now Paul says to the Corinthians, back when you were worshiping pieces of wood and stone, you were dead. Those things had no spirit, no breath to give you. You were dead men walking. There might have been breath in your lungs, but there was no Spirit in your hearts. But when the Holy Spirit breathes into your being, you are born anew; born from above; born of the Spirit. You are a new creation...and part of the new creation called the kingdom of God. And if you want to know whether this rebirth has happened to you, all you have to do is ask if you believe. You can't say Jesus is Lord unless the Holy Spirit has already breathed into your heart and enabled you to see the truth.

The next thing Paul says usually confuses us, too. He says that no one can speak by the Holy Spirit and say Jesus be cursed. He isn't talking about swearing at Jesus or cursing Jesus, whatever that might mean. He is saying that *no one can be led by the Holy Spirit to walk away from Jesus*. Maybe the most faithful way to say what Paul is saying is, "The Holy Spirit will never lead anyone to say, 'The heck with Jesus,' and walk away from him." Never will the Holy Spirit who breathed kingdom life into your soul cause you to say, 'I'm done with Jesus,' or to say that something or someone else is lord."

Remember that in those days, the pledge of allegiance in the Roman Empire was, "Caesar is Lord." Paul says, ***when the Spirit breathes born-from-above life into you, you can't give your soul to anyone or anything else.*** Caesar isn't Lord – even though saying it may get you into a lot of trouble with Caesar. Your job isn't lord – even though that may get you in trouble with your boss. Your kids aren't lord, though they may not appreciate your saying so, neither is the profit margin or anything else except Jesus, and when the Spirit of Jesus has breathed into your nostrils, you suddenly see that all the things

the world says is lord, they aren't. That's when you know you've been born anew, from above, from top to bottom. One day you realize that all those things that used to be so important, they're not. The things that used to mean so much, they're empty, like mute gods that no longer inspire you.

Then you know, the breath of God has entered your nostrils and filled your lungs, and revived your heart. You have been birthed from above.

And then you realize something else. The Spirit living in you is also breathing through you into the lives of others. You gradually find certain characteristics ... these days we call them "fruit" of the Spirit – coming through you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Not that we are perfect examples of these, but, if the breath of God is in your spiritual lungs, these qualities become more apparent.

And, we not only have the fruit of the Spirit, we also have "gifts" of the Spirit – powers that are outward displays of the Spirit's presence in your life, and those powers are given to us so that we have the ability to do something truly amazing – we can help build the kingdom right here in our little corner of the universe. When we walk with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, we become a positive presence wherever we are. We are the non-anxious presence in a room where everyone else is uptight; there is a light that comes through us that makes the room brighter, the mood brighter, the conversation more conciliatory.

But on top of that, the Spirit breathing inside of you gives you abilities that make you able to do his work, speak his word, give to those who need it, teach, lead, organize, heal, understand, bring people together to share the Good News that Jesus is Lord. These aren't just talents you were born with, these are more than that, they are Spirit-given abilities that, when you do them, you have this very strange and strong feeling that it wasn't you who did it at all. When you first come to faith, you have this sense that you didn't pick God, God picked you. When you find this peace in the middle of a crisis, you know that peace didn't come from you. When you forgive someone who hurt you, really hurt you, you know it wasn't you. When you join together to worship, and something comes over you that brings tears, or catches your breath, you know the Spirit is breathing in and through you.

So many of you have told me stories of feeling that way, and they all end with the same words, "It wasn't me." When it wasn't you, it was the Spirit, and you can be sure that you have been born from above.