

A Spirit to improve you

Christians often underestimate the powerful blessings that God gives to them when they commit their hearts to Christ. And those wishing to become Christians sometimes balk and pull back at the point of conversion because they think that the Christian life must be lived in one's own strength, and know that they do not have that strength to walk in holy ways. What an encouragement and joy then to discover that at conversion, God gifts His Holy Spirit to each believer *to comfort their hearts, and to improve their characters, and to give them strength to live the Christian life*. This second study in our Covid series explores this great truth from Paul's letter to Titus.

Icebreaker



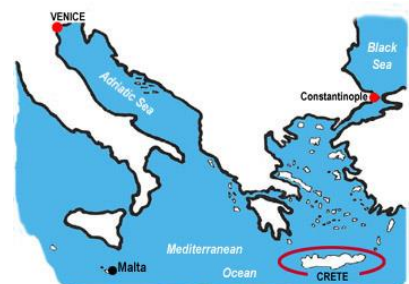
What are some things that you would try to do, if you knew that in stepping forward to do them, the power to do them was suddenly and mysteriously uploaded into your mind and heart and soul?

Read: Titus 3:1-8

¹ Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone. ³ At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Introduction

The apostle Paul stationed his young assistant Titus on the Island of Crete to pastor the congregation, and from his confinement in Rome wrote to him words of encouragement and counsel. In reading Paul's letter to Titus, we get the picture that Crete was a rough culture and a tough place to live. But the gospel was bringing change and transformation, and Titus needed every encouragement to exhort his



congregation to live out their new life in Christ; and one of those great encouragements was to know that God had given His Holy Spirit to each of them to improve their character and conduct.

Question 1

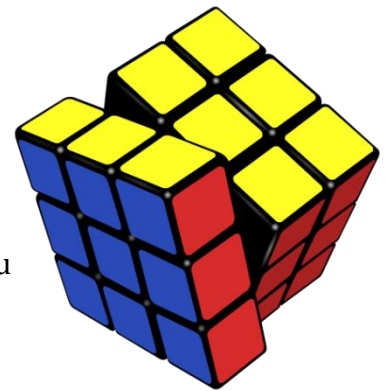
The first three verses of Titus 3 contrast the new Christian life with the old pagan life. What are some of the startling differences? What is the one that most impresses you? Noting Titus 1:12,13, what is the one that must have made quite an impact in Crete?

Theological Comment

The saving work of Jesus was the emphasis of our first study, and won't be repeated here, though it is very much in view in verses 4 and 5a. One point however to make in these verses, is that the phrase 'because of his mercy' should be linked with the phrase 'when the kindness and love of our Saviour appeared'. The point is that we are not just saved by 'mercy' alone, but by that mercy associated with the appearance of Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection.

Question 2

In verse 5 Paul speaks of 'the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit'. These phrases touch on those salvation facets of regeneration and sanctification, whereby our spirit is not only made alive, but rightly configured and turned 'right-side-up'. If you were one of the Christians in Crete, how might you have been encouraged by these graces? How might Titus have been encouraged in his pastoral ministry?



Case Study 1

Andrew is a new Christian and desperately keen to live a holy life, and even to be rid of all his sin. He is told by a well-meaning friend that it is possible. One night in church, he sings that song with the line: "Let no sin or vice remain, that resists your holy war"; and breathes an ardent prayer that all his sins and sinfulness and sinning might be gone... forever. What spiritual advice would you give to this young brother?

Case Study 2

Susan found great joy in accepting Christ, and those who knew her before her conversion noticed a significant change in her attitude. But Susan knows that she struggled with jealousy before she became a Christian, and finds that same sin still lurking and annoying her, and sometimes perplexing her as to its continued presence. What encouragement should she find in the doctrine of sanctification? What part does Susan play in this process of sanctification? (See Philippians 2:12,13)

Theological Reflection

Martin Luther rightly taught that Christians are "*simul justus et peccator*", meaning "at the same time *just* and *sinner*". Another way of saying this is that we are safe, but not yet sound. That's encouraging! We are safe (justified) and being progressively made sound (sanctified), and will one day, in heaven, be forever and perfectly 'Safe and Sound'!

Question 3

Verse 8 notes that Paul counts this salvation theology among his so-called “trustworthy sayings”. (In fact, this is the fifth such saying, the first four are: 1 Timothy 1:15 (Grace), 3:1 (Church), 4:8,9 (Godliness), 2 Tim 2:11-13 (Devotion).) Why is this one so important, and excellent, and worthy of emphasis?

Encouragement to a believer

Read the following list of things that God is producing in the life of His people by His Spirit (Galatians 5):

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.



What hope can be found in this verse for a believer? What might a believer expect to be like in 5 years from now? At the end of their life? Reflect also on the following verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24; 2 Peter 1:3-8

Encouragement to a seeker

Read the following excerpt from a letter from Emma Moody (wife of American Evangelist D L Moody) to her son Will, in encouraging him to become a Christian.

About Papa, I don't think he is changed. I think and know that he is anxious about you the same as I am. He does not worry over your going to Yale. He does not mention that to me, but I know that the thought of you being in any college without reliance on the help of Christ, is to both of us an anxiety that we can only generally pray about. I have feared to “nag” at you as it might seem and yet it seems so often that I cannot bear the thought of you being so unsafe... Papa I know is praying, and I am that God's Spirit may lead you to give up yourself to Christ entirely, not to please us but because it is “your reasonable service”. You know what you ought to do, then do it, not halfway but out and out. I shall keep praying for you. ***It is not for dying alone but for right living you will need help stronger than you own.***

Moody without Sankey, Pollock, 1995 (p271).

What does Emma Moody mean by that last sentence? Does God provide help for us to live the Christian life? Reflect on these verses: 1 Corinthians 10:13, Philippians 1:6 (If you're not yet a Christian, you may wish to now quietly commit your life to Christ.)



Case Study 3

Alex is a stockbroker by profession, and a serious young Christian by profession of faith. At work one morning, he was closely examining a stock market chart, when it dawned on him that the chart could have easily been titled “Sanctification versus Time”. He marvelled that there was a basic upward movement, but one that incorporated many ups and downs along the way. He pondered though, whether some of those stock-market crashes had to have a necessary correlation in the Christian life; that is, does the Christian life have to have some big crashes? What do you think? Should he be fearful?

Apostles' Creed

To close, why not recite the Apostles' Creed together as a group.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic* church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**This phrase literally means "I believe in the holy whole church". The word 'catholic' derives from the Greek word, kata-holos, and means 'according to the whole'.*

Prayer

Finish in prayer – thanking God for His strong salvation (the Father for making you, the Son for redeeming you, and the Spirit for sanctifying you), and asking for grace to make progress in living a holy life. Pray also for any seekers that you know. And then have your group leader finish with the doxology (word of praise) from Jude 24,25.

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Theological Appendix

This section of the study is an extra, and may be helpful in trying to understand the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation.

When theologians discuss salvation, they often speak of an order of events. We get a hint that there is a 'salvation order' in Romans 8:30, and there also seems to be some of this order suggested in Titus 3. The most basic terms and order are as follows:

- (1) Regeneration* (the act of being made spiritually alive or born again) John 3:3
- (2) Conversion (the expression of repentance and faith) Acts 16:30,31
- (3) Justification (a legal declaration of being in good standing with God) Romans 5:1
- (4) Sanctification (a process of being improved in likeness to Jesus Christ) 1 Thess 5:23
- (5) Glorification (the state of perfection in body and soul in heaven) Revelation 21:4

*The placing regeneration before conversion is a mark of the Reformed Faith and is amply demonstrated by Romans 5:6,8 and Ephesians 2:5.



With regard to the particular work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, theologians propose that the Spirit is active in every facet of salvation: causing us to be born-again (regeneration, John 3), endowing us with power to live the Christian life (baptism of the Holy Spirit**, Acts 2:38,39), changing our characters progressively to be more holy (sanctification, 2 Cor 2:17,18), and at the end, radically changing our body and soul to live forever in heaven (glorification, Revelation 21,22).

** Those of the Reformed Faith understand that all Christians (and not just some) have been baptised with the Holy Spirit, and that this baptism follows immediately upon justification (and not some significant time later).