

The Cleansing Power of the Holy Spirit

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Bible Text: Titus 3:5-6

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The motto of our church is "Teaching God's People God's Word" and we have in front of us this morning a wonderful text that helps us understand how it is that we came to be the people of God. How it is that a person becomes a Christian. How it is that the work of Christ is applied to the heart of a sinner and converts him into someone new and it's a beautiful text that we have in front of us. For those of you that are visiting with us, we're teaching through the book of Titus this morning, actually over a period of a few months actually not just this morning, but we're in the book of Titus this morning and I'd invite you to turn to Titus chapter 3 for our text this morning. Last time we saw with great clarity from the word of God that nothing motivated God to bestow salvation upon his people other than his own goodness and mercy. Titus received from Paul this letter and Paul said that, "It was not on the basis of deeds that we have done in our righteousness that he saved us but according to his mercy." It was according to the mercy of God alone that God provided salvation for sinful men, never anything in us; there's nothing that we could have done. If we spend a lifetime crying a river of repentant tears, nothing could earn the majesty of salvation that God gives to his people and so we have to completely divest ourselves of any sense of personal merit, any sense that somehow we were better than the next guy and that's why God preferred us. No, it was all a matter of God's mercy upon each one of us that gave us the gift of salvation.

Now the question for today as we continue on in the text is this: how is it that he accomplishes that salvation in individual lives? Stated differently I'd like you to think about the question this way: how is it that God bridges the historical gap between the crucifixion of Christ 2,000 years ago, his death and resurrection, how is that gap bridged over a period of two millennia to a point where a sinner today comes to saving faith in Christ? Is it that we somehow transport ourselves back to the cross or does something different happen? Or is it a matter of God bringing the cross forward to us today? Well, how does God bridge that gap? How does he accomplish salvation in individual lives? Here's your answer in one sentence: he does it by a powerful work of the Holy Spirit. He does it by a powerful work of the Holy Spirit and that's what we're going to see in our text this morning

Titus chapter 3. We're going to begin at verse 3, although our text will primarily be verses 5 and 6. I want to read the text to set it in your mind as we look to this powerful

work of the Holy Spirit that brings salvation to the individual sinners. Paul speaking to believers says in verse 3,

3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

Let's stop there for just a second. If someone was going to write a biography of my life or yours they would need to write it from that perspective. This was the condition of each one of us before we became Christians: we were foolish, disobedient, enslaved to lusts, filled with malice and envy. That is the testimony of the word of God on our lives and so you see that as we contemplate what it really means to be Christian, it's a very humbling thing. We're not Christians because we were better. We were not Christians because we pursued it. The testimony of Scripture is that we were lost in a dark life which manifested itself in different ways but at root we were foolish, deceived, disobedient and dead to the things of God. Beloved, there is no way that a man in that condition could rouse himself up and go look for Christ. There's no way. That is simply an utter impossibility. If a dead man is going to live, someone has to act upon him from outside. There has to be something from outside the man to resurrect a spiritual corpse and that's what we're seeing here going on as we go into verses 4 through 7. Notice the contrast. Paul says, "But," in contrast to that foolish, hateful life of verse 3,

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us,

Basic grammar, the subject of that sentence is God. The verb is "saved." The direct object, the one that received the action of the verb is us. God acted on us. We did not act on God to prompt him to save us. God motivated by his mercy, motivated by his goodness, acted on us to save us. This is just clear and simple grammar. Verse 5,

5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy,

It wasn't anything good that we had done that motivated him to save us. Quite to the contrary it was according to his mercy. That's where we ended last time. Now, in a text that I'm just delighted to bring before you here this morning. Now we see how it was that he saved us. Last week we saw the motivation, it was his mercy. Now, we're going to see the means by which he did it. What was the means by which God took us from death into life? That's what we're seeing here in verse 5,

but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Look at verse 5 with me again, "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." This passage tells us how it is that we were delivered from the bondage of our selfish hearts. It tells us how we were delivered out of sin and I want to introduce a problem here with the way that probably the majority of commentators take this text. When they see the word "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit," you can read multiple commentaries that say that that's referring to the ceremony of baptism, that it was in baptism that we were saved and they take the washing and thinking about the literal water of baptism and they say, "There you have it. That's the ceremony of baptism." What should we say to that? How should we think rightly about this term "washing" that is used in the text? Here's what I'm going to do, I'm going to go in a big long circle. You're going to think I've lost my way. We're going to start at that word "washing" and kind of circle a long way around and then come back to it to see what it really means but I want you to start with some context from Scripture that's going to make this passage explode on your understanding and give you a great new appreciation for the work of God in your life.

What should we say to the idea that baptism is the reference here? Let's set some context from Scripture and in this message I'm going to give you four points to follow along to just kind of give you some places to hang your notes and to build your understanding. This passage is talking about the Holy Spirit. That couldn't be any clearer. Verse 5, it's the Holy Spirit who does the washing. He was poured upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior and we're going to see four aspects of the work of the Spirit in the life of a believer when he saved him. The first point is this coming from a broader scriptural context, point number 1, this is so really exciting to me. I hope it will be to you. Point number 1: the Spirit cleanses like water. The Holy Spirit cleanses like water and when you look at the broader context of Scripture you see this very plainly.

Turn back to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 36. We'll just kind of let Scripture set the context for us. Ezekiel chapter 36, looking at verse 25 to begin with. As God speaks to the nation of Israel and promises them a coming future redemption, he says in verse 25, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols." Let's just stop there for just a second. God in this passage is not speaking about giving a nation a literal bath is he? That would be ridiculous. That's not the context. That's not what you do with a nation. He's obviously using water as a metaphor for something else. God isn't promising them a literal bath because they're physically dirty. He is promising them cleansing from sin. He is promising them cleansing from their false religion, from their false idols. He says, "I'm going to do a reviving work on you that will deliver you from false religion and will deliver you from the defilement of sin," and he says, "It's going to be like sprinkling water on you. It's going to be like cleansing you."

You probably didn't realize it but in your normal practice of personal hygiene this morning, you prepared yourself for this message. I would venture to say that every one of you in one manner or another used water as part of your preparation for coming here today. You took a shower. You brushed your teeth most of you and water had a cleansing

effect upon your outward physical body. We use water like that all the time. We use it without even thinking about it. Water has a cleansing impact on us. Well, God is taking that well-known property of water and applying it as a symbol to what he does to the human heart inside. From the filth and the dirt of Titus 3:3 of the hatred and foolishness and deception, the idea of washing is that he's going to cleanse us from all of that.

Now, along with that cleansing, he promises to put his Holy Spirit in them. Look at verse 26 of Ezekiel 36. He says, "Moreover," in addition to this spiritual cleansing I'm going to give to you, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." Now notice, again, you can see that there's evident symbolism in that passage when he talks about a heart of stone. Nobody has a literal rock inside their chest. He's talking about a heart, an attitude toward God that is cold, hard and non-responsive. He says, "Your heart is just like stone. It's dead. It's cold. It's inanimate. It won't move," and he says speaking to the nation of Israel, "There's a day coming when I'm going to take out that heart of stone. Your unresponsive condition to the love and goodness that I have shown to you, I'm going to take that out and replace it with a heart of flesh. Something that is warm and responsive and living." And so he's saying to Israel, he says, "There's two things that I'm going to do for you in the coming restoration: I'm going to cleans you from sin and I'm going to put my Spirit within you. It'll be two aspects of one great act of redemption. Spiritual cleansing and the impartation of the Holy Spirit."

Now, with that in mind, follow along with me. Go to the book of John chapter 3, the Gospel of John in the New Testament. John chapter 3. What I want you to see is that this imagery of water and the spirit is used repeatedly in Scripture to speak to the single act of redemption. Two aspects of the one great work of salvation. John chapter 3:3. You know the story: Nicodemus came to him by night and in verse 2 he said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him," and Jesus immediately confronts him with Nicodemus' own spiritual deadness. He answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Nicodemus, while you're trying to flatter me with this praise about the kind of teacher I am as if I needed affirmation from you, let's get right to the heart of the matter: you need to be born again. You can't enter the kingdom of God when you are spiritually dead. You need to be spiritually born before you can even begin to talk about the kingdom of God." And Nicodemus said to him verse 4, "How can a man be born when he is old? Lord, I've been like this all my life. I don't know what you're talking about. He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born can he? How can I start over? I'm locked into this." You can see the desperation with which he speaks and give Nicodemus some credit, he's picking up on a metaphor. He's not talking about literally re-entering his mother's womb, he's an intelligent man. He wouldn't speak that way as if that was what Jesus was talking about. He's simply taking the metaphor and building on it. "How can I be born again? This is impossible," and Jesus answered him in verse 5, "Truly, truly, I say to you," watch this now, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." He's using the exact same metaphor that Ezekiel did. He says. "Nicodemus, you

need to be cleansed from sin. You need to be washed like God spoke to the nation of Israel and Ezekiel. You need to be washed from sin and you need to be born of the Spirit. You need your prior defilement removed and you need a new life, a new spirit given to you if you're going to enter the kingdom of heaven and this is something, Nicodemus, that you cannot do on your own. You are in a desperate situation. Your only hope is by an act of God outside of you upon you. You must be born of water and of the spirit. You must be cleansed from sin and receive the Spirit of God."

One more as we're setting the context for Titus 3. Remember I told you we're going on a long circle and we're going to come back to the main point. Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 6 now. 1 Corinthians chapter 6, beginning in verse 9. In a different way, Paul is speaking in the same manner as he does in Titus 3 looking back at the life of the church at Corinth, looking back at their individualized before conversion and then speaking to what the result is after conversion and he says in verse 9, in words that should shake our modern society to the core, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." That sounds like a blueprint for modern day advertising, doesn't it? The blueprint for modern day advertising is the very thing that excludes people from the kingdom of God. That's an aside point. What I really want you to see is in verse 11, "Such were some of you," past tense. This is what you used to be like. "But," what happened? How is it that you went from that realm of darkness in verses 9 and 10 to the realm of the kingdom of God? How is it that you sit here now as a member of the kingdom of God, as a born again Christian? How did that happen is the question? "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 here it is, "and in the Spirit of our God." You were washed from that prior defilement. You were born. You were set apart by the Spirit of God to enter into the kingdom of God. There was a cleansing from sin and there was a being born again. There was a reception of the Spirit of God in your life. They were washed from sin and set apart in the Spirit of God. Here's what I want you to see from that. Remember the whole first point here was, the Spirit cleanses like water, and we see over and over again in the Scriptures this description of the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing of sin as being something like a washing. A removal of dirt and filth so that what is left behind is something clean and pure. And so water symbolizes an internal cleansing in the realm of salvation and God provides the Spirit of God to secure conversion. A cleansing, a prior defilement, the Spirit of God securing conversion.

Now, none of those passages that we just looked at Ezekiel 36, John 3 and 1 Corinthians 6, not a one of them have a drop of water baptism in them. It has nothing to do with that. It's talking about a spiritual cleansing and listen, external water applied to the body cannot remove the sin of your soul. It cannot remove the deadness of heart. Water on the body can't impart life to the inner heart of man. Physical water does not cleanse spiritual sin. The context of all those passages is a spiritual cleansing of sinful people and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, with that in mind, beloved, go back to Titus chapter 3 and what you see here in Titus 3 is simply another variation, an application, an extension of what Scripture has been teaching throughout the progress of revelation from the Old Testament to the ministry of Jesus to the work of God. At the church of Corinth, you see the same thing being described when Paul talks here in verse 5 and it brings us to our second point. We're talking about the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit here today. We said first of all that the Spirit cleanses like water. Now secondly: the Spirit cleanses with power. The Spirit cleanses with power. How is it for those of you that have truly been born again, how is it, why is it that your life changed? Why did your life go from one of walking in darkness to one of walking in light? As I was preparing this, I couldn't help but remember my own conversion and what happened in the immediate aftermath of my conversion. I used to be a man with such a foul, profane mouth. It makes me shudder to remember it. How easily the most profane blasphemies came off of my lips and how utterly restrained I was to speak the two simple words, Jesus Christ. I couldn't say his name unless I was cursing, unless I was somehow blaspheming. My mouth was so foul and I was converted and do you know what? All of that went away. The profanity, the profane nature of my mouth changed overnight. All of a sudden my lips were released to speak the name of Christ and to praise him and to honor them. How did that happen? How is it that that occurs in the life of someone? How is it that church history shows people who were drunkards becoming sober, productive members of the church? How is it that homosexuals are converted and changed into righteous people? How is it that unbelieving people who hated the name of Christ are found shortly later praising and honoring his name? How is it that people who had no regard for the word of God, who would toss it aside gladly, suddenly find in the word of God the very word of life and it captivates their heart and they can't let go of it, they can't read it enough? How does that happen? Listen, it's not because somebody made a decision to up and change. It can't happen that way. It doesn't happen that way. In Jeremiah chapter 13:23 it says that the Ethiopian cannot change his skin. The leopard cannot change his spots. He says, "You who were accustomed to doing evil could not convert your own nature." If you're blind in deception, you can't suddenly open your eyes and see with clarity. Something has to happen outside of you. Something great and magnificent and powerful has to come to pass in your life otherwise you just go on like you were. We have no built-in spiritual momentum that overcomes the inertia of sin.

So how does that happen? How is it that a man goes from being dead in sin one day and he wakes up with songs of praise to Christ in his mouth the next day? How does that happen, I ask you? It's not because the man did something to himself. It's because something happened to the man and what we see described in Titus chapter 3 is what happens. It explains why that came to pass and the power of this is astonishing. The greatness of this flowing from the merciful heart of God should silence us, should stun us, should make us think with the words of Habakkuk, "Let all the earth keep silent before him because God is in his holy temple." How did this happen? The answer is that the Spirit cleansed with power. The Spirit cleansed you with power, that's how you changed. Paul describes the spiritual cleansing which happens at salvation in verse 5. Look at it with me, "He saved us." We were on the receiving end of the mercy of God, that's what happened. This life that we were enmeshed in deserved judgment and

condemnation. That life naturally leads to the fruit of eternal damnation in hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth and the worm does not die and their thirst is not quenched, that's what the outcome of that life is. And yet, "God saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy," because God is kind and good and loving and he did it, "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Here's the means by which you were changed. If you're a Christian, what we're reading here in verse 5 is your spiritual biography. God is revealing to you what happened in the unseen realm of your life. He is showing you what he did to save you. He is explaining the root that produced the fruit of the change in your life when you became a Christian. And bless his holy Name, we can only know this by revelation. You could never figure this out. Jesus said that. "The work of the Spirit in regeneration is like the blowing of the wind. You can't see where it's coming from. You don't know where it's going. You just see the effects of it." Well, here God is describing for us in human language the magnificent power of God in salvation.

Look at verse 5 with me, he did it "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." The washing. He did an act of spiritual cleansing on you. The washing of regeneration expresses the cleansing effect of salvation. The Holy Spirit cleansed you. He washed you spiritually by changing your nature under the sound of the word of God. The Gospel was brought to you in one manner or another and while many around you heard it and it bounced off their ears, somehow through something you read, something you heard, it penetrated your heart. Something gripped you. Something awoke within you and said, "Oh, but this is true. I've missed it all before but now I see it. I taught people things of God but I didn't even know them to be true myself, they weren't true in my own experience." Some of you know about that. Part of what you can see, part of the way that you can see is that it has to be a work of the Holy Spirit is that over and over again, you'll hear people say, "Why didn't I see this before? How was it that I missed it?" Why did you miss it? I'll tell you: it's because you were dead. There was more than simple comprehension that you needed. You needed the aid of the Holy Spirit to open your mind like Lydia in Acts 16 where he opened her heart so that she could believe and receive the things that were being spoken by the Apostle Paul and unless the Spirit of God had done that in your life, you would still be in darkness today and so here's what happened: from all of that dominant pollution in your life from Titus 3:3, the Holy Spirit removed that dominant pollution of your disobedient nature and he imparted new life to you, a new life that was willing to repent and believe in Christ. He washed away that defilement. Through a supernatural act in the spiritual realm unseen by you, he did an act on your very nature and removed that sinful, dominating, polluting power in your life and imparted to you a life that was new and responsive and could understand the word of God and respond to it. He washed you. Whereas before you were spiritually stuck in the mud, he lifted you out of that, cleansed you and set you on a new path. He washed you by the work of regeneration. Regeneration simply means that he gave you new life. He gave you new spiritual life that you did not have before, that you had no access to. There was no switch that you could turn on and make that happen. God saved you by the washing of the work of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. That's why you're a new creation here today. That's why you're not the man or the woman that you used to be. It's because of the work of the Holy Spirit described as a washing, a cleansing work.

Now, look at the end of the verse with me, "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." This idea of renewal is closely related to that idea of regeneration. Regeneration, the impartation of new life. Renewal, the idea that that new life comes with, watch this, with power. It comes with power. The renewal describes a transformation that took place in the deepest recess of your heart. The Spirit of God gave spiritual power to live the Christian life. That's why you changed when you became a Christian. That's why people change in real conversion, it's because suddenly there is a new power at work in their mind, in their affection and in their will and it changes them powerfully and conforms them in every greater degrees to the image of Christ. But understand, what Paul is describing here is two aspects of the single work of the Spirit of God in conversion: he cleansed you from sin; he gave you new life that had power with it. That's why you changed and so when God saved you, he cleansed you. He removed that controlling defilement of sin in a way that resembles cleansing dirt from a physical body only God did it on the inside where no man can touch. At the same time that he cleansed you, he gave you power to live righteously. Once your defiled heart loved sin, loved yourself, now with the work of the Spirit came a heart that aspires after holiness: wants it, desires it, and pursues it. Once you were dead to the word of God and could not understand it, then the Spirit came and opened your mind and you could read it with understanding. You could read the word of God and you were just like me after your conversion, you read the word of God and you say, "This is true! This is true! I never saw this before. I never believed that before. I didn't feel this way before but now there's somehow, something has changed. There's an animating principle in my life that receives and loves and reveres and believes and understands this word." That happens because a real genuine work of the Holy Spirit takes place in the life of a Christian. God had to save you if you were going to be saved because you couldn't save yourself and by his Spirit, that is what he did. God saved us through an act of the Spirit that cleansed us from within and imparted new life. That is a blessed gift.

Now, someone might say after all of that, "Are you sure it's not about an act of baptism that makes this happen?" Well, let's look at the text. Let's look at the context again. Paul had just said, how do men miss this who make their livings writing books? Do you know how they miss it? It's because they're dead too. He had just said it's not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness. Of course it's not a ceremony. It's nothing that we did to ourselves. It's nothing that another man did to us. It's something that the Spirit of God did to us. God forbid that we would rob God of his glory by attributing it to an act of human hands in a false religious system. What a satanic travesty that is to rob the Spirit of God of the glory that he deserves for converting someone and saying, "Oh well, we can do this by baptism." No, you can't. You could put somebody under a faucet for a thousand years and not convert their souls. You think you're just going to sprinkle some water, pour it on them or dip them in water and change their heart? Please. That's not what he's talking about here.

Now, it's not by deeds of righteousness, let's notice something else. What was it just right in the context? You can see it for yourself. You don't have to depend on what I say here. In the context what does he say was poured upon them? In the context he says it was "by

the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit whom," the Spirit of God, "whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." It's the Spirit of God that was poured out that resulted in conversion, not the pouring of literal water. It's right there in the context. He can't be talking about anything else and only a preexisting spiritual agenda would lead you to a different conclusion. The Spirit cleansed us with power. That's what happened.

Now, stay with me I'm not done yet. Thirdly. The Spirit cleanses us like water, not with it, like it. The Spirit cleansed you with power at your conversion. Thirdly: the Spirit cleansed you abundantly. Abundantly. Oh, the glory of this just transcends the ability of words to express. Look at verse 6. God saved us "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Beloved, God poured the Spirit out on us. He did it richly. He did it abundantly. You see in this verse the utter magnitude of the generosity of God. He didn't do this in a stingy manner. He didn't leave the waitress a 5% tip as a token that he had been there. He did this with such generosity that it can be said that he just dumped the Spirit out without measure, pouring this great cleansing power of the Holy Spirit on our souls with such abundance that it can be said that he did it richly. With great abundant spiritual wealth, God blessed us with his gift of salvation.

Now, the only way that you can continue to reinforce the greatness of this, the wonder of this, the power of it, the sheer goodness of it, is to continually bring your mind back to verse 3. Don't lose sight of verse 3 on this. Who did he pour these riches out upon? He poured them out on us, those who believe in Christ. What were we like when he did it? Verse 3, "we were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our lives in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another," saying the we were Christians when we weren't. Cursing the name of Christ, some of us including me. We were like that and here we are today heirs of eternal life, born again. Brothers and sisters in Christ, don't you see the generosity of God is utterly beyond measure? That it is too great for human expression? That this is so far beyond the realm of human achievement? That this could only glorify and magnify a God of grace, love, mercy, and kindness beyond degree? And while it humbles us, it doesn't just humble us and make us deny our spiritual merit and deny our spiritual pride and repent of it all, it does something on the positive side as well: it draws us to love and magnify and worship him. "Oh God, there is nothing on this earth to compare that measure of grandeur, that grand display of kindness that you have poured out on me. Nothing on earth compares to that and, God, I just fall on my face and worship you with gratitude, with devotion, claiming none of the merit to myself and giving you all of the glory." That's what this does to your heart. The Spirit cleansed us abundantly. He poured the Spirit out on us to ensure the accomplishment of our salvation.

Now, let me say something really important here: the tendency these days in many circles is to think about somebody being saved and receiving the Holy Spirit later, accompanied by supposed gifts of tongues and all that other stuff or some kind of other second blessing that comes after conversion. I'm restraining myself from getting overly animated here. If you knew how much I wanted to jump up and down and pound, you would congratulate

me for my self-control. But I don't want the drama of that to obscure the point that you need to see here: God does not hold back the Holy Spirit for a select few who receive a second blessing after their conversion. That utterly decimates the generosity of God in salvation and contradicts a verse like this. God poured out the Spirit on every single believer in Christ. He was abundantly generous on every one of us and his generosity was such that he gave the fullness of the third person of the most blessed Trinity and poured it out on us to cleanse us from sin, to impart spiritual power and to change us forever and to make us a child of God. Every one of us. You're not a Christian if you don't have the Holy Spirit. And to suggest anything different is to suggest that God hasn't really been all that rich with us in the first place. This whole passage says that the richness of God, the goodness, the mercy, the grace of God is seen in the fact that he richly and abundantly poured out the Spirit on everyone who believes. Every one of them, not just of few. And the evidence of that new birth, that evidence of regeneration and renewal, is not jabbering nonsense coming from the lips of somebody in an excited, emotional state, it's the abiding ongoing work of spiritual transformation that shows itself in someone living righteously whereas before they lived in the deadness of sin. That is the mark of the work of the Spirit of God and we are the unworthy beneficiaries of that work if we're here today and we're in Christ. Praise be to his name.

Beloved, I say a lot of different things repeatedly but I just ask you, those of you who know Christ I ask you, don't you love him? Don't you love him for this? I mean remember where you were and where you were going and God saved you and poured the Spirit on you? Washed you from your defilement which you couldn't do for yourself, gave you new power, has made you an heir of eternal life where you will see Christ face-to-face throughout all of eternity. Don't you love him? Aren't you grateful, thankful for such a magnificent unearned gift as that? And those of you that are here and you're not a Christian, my heart breaks over you. How is it that you can be cold and indifferent to this clear instruction from God's word upon your heart? Come to Christ. I want you to share in the benefit of this and Christ calls you and says, "Come to me that you might share in this gift."

Well, fourthly: what does the Spirit use? Some of you are waiting for me to get to this point here it is. The Spirit of God didn't just zap us out of nowhere. Point number 4: the Spirit himself uses means. What does he use? What does the Spirit of God use in that dead heart? Point number 4: the Spirit cleanses with God's word. He cleanses with God's word and I'm so excited to show you this and for you to see it even in the context of Titus. Listen, throughout this letter of Titus, Paul repeatedly commanded Titus to preach the word and to preach it with authority. Look at chapter 2, verse 1, actually let's go back to the qualification to be an elder. Verse 9 of chapter 1. It seems like a long time ago since we looked at an introduction to the qualification of elders but in verse 9 one of the qualifications to be an elder in the church, verse 9, that the man "holds fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." Teaching is at the core of the mission of the church. Chapter 2, verse 1, Paul speaking in the second person singular to Titus says, "As for you," Titus, my apostolic representative, "as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Verse 15 of Titus chapter 2, Titus, "These things speak

and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." Chapter 3:8, right at the end. We're going to cover verse 7 next week, otherwise we'd be here till noon or 1 o'clock. Verse 8, Paul says again, "This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men." Titus, teach. Titus, the leaders must be able to exhort in sound doctrine. Titus, say it with authority, say it with confidence. Why that emphasis on teaching? It's because the Spirit of God's uses the teaching of the word of God to do his work in human hearts. It is by the proclamation of the word of God that the Spirit of God opens up the understanding, illuminates the mind of those who hear and breathes new life in them.

The Spirit works through the proclamation of the word. Go back to the book of Ephesians briefly. You must understand this. Ephesians 5:25. Paul is teaching on marriage but he's simultaneously teaching on the nature of the relationship between Christ and the church. "Husbands, love your wives, just as," parallel thought, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her," here it is, "having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word." The spiritual cleansing comes through the teaching of the word of God, that's what he's saying. The Spirit works through the proclamation of the Bible. 1 Peter chapter 1, on the other side of the book of Hebrews and the other side of the book of James. 1 Peter chapter 1. He says, "You have been born again." 1 Peter 1:23, "you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off,' oh beloved, "but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you," that imperishable living word that caused you to be born again. You see, when a preacher stands up in a pulpit and proclaims the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and calls on them to repent and believe in the Gospel, Christ said in Mark chapter 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." You see, when a preacher does that, when a book faithfully proclaims the Gospel, when you speak to your neighbor the fundamental facts of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are dealing in the imperishable word of God which has intrinsic power to convert a soul. What happens when someone is saved is that the Spirit of God takes that proclamation, brings it with understanding and power to that human heart so that that person is drawn and pulled to repent and believe. It makes sense, it resonates in his heart and that word of the Gospel is taken by the Spirit of God and impacted and imparted to the human heart so that that person repents and believes.

You ask how did that happen? How did you come to be converted? If you're a true Christian, somewhere, someone, sometime told you about Christ. Someone, somewhere, sometime pointed you to Scriptures that spoke the truth about salvation and maybe it took a long time for it to reach its mark but somewhere along the line you said, "Yes, that's true. I believe that. That's what I want. That's for me. Lord Jesus, I call on you for mercy in the midst of my sin." Those of you that are here and don't know Christ, that's what you need to do, just call on him for mercy. I'm not going to prescribe a formulaic prayer for you to pray. Christ is the only Savior and you are dead in sin. Call on him for mercy and then go to his word and let the Spirit lead you.

Now, so here's what we said: the Spirit cleanses like water. The Spirit cleanses with power. The Spirit cleansed you abundantly and Spirit cleanses with God's word. Now, I want you to understand something really fundamental here. We're still a new church, less than two years old. This is why we preach. This is why we're not interested in a lot of dancing people with flowers up on the stage. God doesn't use that to convert hearts, he uses the word. That's why we're not trying to entertain people with what we do and all that other junk that you can find at every \$.05 church everywhere else. We're not interested in that. Why? Because the Scriptures says it is the preaching of the word of God. It's only the word of God that can save a soul and we want to make that as clear and distinct and as undistracted as we possibly can so that the word of God would have the full reign of the Spirit to work in the hearts of people who hear. That's why we do what we do. Scripture teaches and we believe that this book of 66 individual books is the instrument that the Spirit of God uses to save sinners from eternal damnation. That's why we preach. That's why we act like it's important. Do you know why? It is important. That's why we do what we do and we let all the other stuff go. We're not interested in that because it doesn't matter, because there is no real power in it. You can move someone's emotions with different kinds of lights and loud and soft music, you can move their emotions but you can't awaken them from sin, only the word of God does that and that's why we do what we do. The Spirit of God uses the word of God to produce children of God who will adorn the doctrine of God by living righteously. Praise be to God for his inexpressible grace.

Bow with me in prayer.

My heart is so heavy for those of you that are not Christians here this morning. Let me speak to you directly. Jesus Christ paid the price of redemption when he shed his blood on the cross and now he's calling you by the power of the Holy Spirit to repent of your sin and to believe in him for eternal life. My unsaved friend, you're responsible for what you've heard. There's no reason for you to turn away from the Gospel. God offers it to you freely. The abundance of grace that he's shown to so many in this room is available to you and he calls you to receive it. Don't turn away again. God has graciously brought you under his word for the express purpose of showering his goodness on you. Don't think that you're too bad because Christ died for sinners just like you. Don't think it's been too long, it's never too late. The thief on the cross was welcomed into paradise that day. Don't underestimate the goodness of God. At the same time, my friend, don't take it for granted. Believe in Christ and be saved. Come to Christ for mercy. You need it. Oh, you need it so much.

Heavenly Father, I pray that your Spirit would take your word and apply it to unsaved hearts here today. For those of us that are Christians, we look back on that work of your Spirit in our hearts. Some of us see it in a distinct day, others recognize the fruit of it over time. All the same, Father, it was the work of your Spirit saving us and delivering us and bringing us out of death into life. From an old man to a new man. If anyone's in Christ, he's a new creature, the old things have passed away. Behold new things have come. Father, we humbly, gladly, freely acknowledge that we couldn't have done this to

ourselves. If we're here today as a Christian, it's because you had mercy on us and you did something to us, we didn't do something to you and so we love you and honor you and thank you for that.

Father, make this church a place where your word is faithfully proclaimed, not only from its pulpit but in the lives and the mouths of its people. Father, we know that we fall short. We don't love you like we should. We're not as earnest as we should be. And even our existing Christian lives remind us that it has to be by mercy and grace, not by human effort. Forgive us of our sins. Forgive us of our indifference. Father, may that renewing power which the Holy Spirit permanently imparted to us at the moment of our conversion, may that have enduring ongoing results and change in our lives. Even those of us that have know you for decades, Father, we still need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and we pray that you would help us to do that but we would wrap it all up this morning by simply thanking you for that work of the Holy Spirit whereby we were washed from our sins. We were given new life. We were given life that had power to change us and did change us and, Lord, you gave it to us richly, abundantly, without measure. We honor you and we thank you for that. With grateful hearts in the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

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