

Cleansing by the Holy Spirit

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Bible Verse: Titus 3:5-6
Preached on: Tuesday, September 13, 2022

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Turn to Titus 3 for our text this evening as we continue the study that we began on Sunday in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 3. I'm going to read the broader context to just set the stage for us here this evening. Titus 3, beginning in verse 3 going down through verse 7.

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. 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, 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.

God's mercy motivated him to provide salvation for unworthy, sinful men, and as you know so well, the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who purchased that redemption for us at the cross of Calvary some 2,000 years ago. The question for tonight that we want to answer, ask and answer, is how does God bridge the chronological gap between that death on the cross 2,000 years ago to the conversion of a sinner today? How does redemption accomplished at the cross come to be applied to the heart of a sinner subsequent to that event? And the short answer is that God does this by a powerful work of the Holy Spirit and that's what we see in our text here this evening.

Look at verse 5 with me. It says that, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Now before I go into what the text actually means, I want to address an error known as baptismal regeneration taught by the Church of Christ and others who would say that the washing in this verse refers to the ceremony of baptism. They might cross reference to Colossians 2 and things like that, but does the washing here in this chapter refer to baptism, water baptism in the church today? I want to address that question and answer the question how would we respond to that before we get into the actual exposition of the text, and it'll be a little bit of a time here, a few minutes as we address this, and what I want to do is set some context from Scripture for us to be able to answer it well.

So our first point here for this evening is this, it's that the Holy Spirit cleanses like water. In a manner of speaking, there's an analogy between what the Spirit does to cleanse the heart of a sinner like water does to dirty human flesh. And to really set the context for this, I'd ask you to turn back to the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament, chapter 36. Ezekiel 36 and we're going to read verses 25 through 27 here. God is promising a future revival to the nation of Israel. He says in verse 24, "I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land." Then 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. Moreover, 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 as God speaks about cleansing them there in verse 5, "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean," there's something that should be obvious to you from the very beginning to help guard you from the error that is taught by the Church of Christ and others like them. When God speaks of cleansing here, it is obvious that he is speaking about a spiritual cleansing. He is not promising them a literal bath to cleanse them from literal physical dirt. Their problem was not that their bodies were dirty but that their hearts were dead and that they were spiritually dead. The problem was spiritual in this context, as you see at the end of verse 25 when he speaks about cleansing them from all their idols, their idolatry was a problem. In verse 26, they needed a new spirit inside them. It was not that they were unclean in physical terms, but that they had a dead heart that was unresponsive to God. Pouring water on their external body was not going to do anything to help the internal problem that they had inside and so God says in verse 27, "I will put My Spirit within you, inside you, cause you to walk in My statutes and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." And so there were two aspects to what he promised to Israel. He was going to cleanse them from sin and he was going to put his Spirit within them. And it should be obvious to everyone who reads this in an unbiased way that he is talking about a spiritual work, not a mere pouring of water onto a physical body.

Now carry that thought into the gospel of John 3. John 3 with me and we'll find a similar conjunction of terms being used by Jesus as he speaks to Nicodemus when he says in John 3:3, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus and said to him, "'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'" That is not a reference to water baptism. The ordinance of water baptism had not yet been established at that point in time. What he is telling Nicodemus, borrowing from the imagery of Ezekiel 36, is that you need a cleansing like water on your heart, you need to be cleansed from sin and you need the Spirit of God if you are to see the kingdom of God. You must be cleansed from sin as water cleanses the flesh and you must have the Spirit of God. Nicodemus needed new life with spiritual cleansing from the Holy Spirit. It was not enough for him simply to be born a physical descendant of Abraham, it was not enough for him to be the spiritual leader that he was in the nation, he was the teacher in Israel, and Jesus comes to

him and says, "Nicodemus, you must be born again." Verse 7 he says, "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." This is a spiritual matter that is being addressed, not a physical one.

In like manner in 1 Corinthians 6, if you would turn there with me. In 1 Corinthians 6 we read in verse 9, 1 Corinthians 6:9, "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." Now notice what he says in verse 11, "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 in the Spirit of our God." They were washed from their prior sins. They were set apart in the Spirit of God.

The water symbolizes and the imagery of washing symbolizes an internal cleansing that is going on. God provides the Spirit of God to secure conversion. Those passages do not describe a baptism ceremony, no matter how hard the proponents of baptismal regeneration try to make them. Beloved, it should be obvious to you that literal physical water, H₂O, cannot change the heart inside. Physical water cannot wash away spiritual uncleanness. It cannot wash away spiritual sin, and we'll have more to say about this as we go along in the exposition tonight. Baptismal regeneration is a badly mistaken doctrine. Christians should not work in conjunction with those who teach it because it is a different gospel altogether, and as much as they may use the same terms and echo some of the same language that we use, when you insist on baptism being necessary for salvation, you are teaching a different gospel and therefore we must be very clear and decisive on these things. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith, and the moment that a man puts his faith in Christ and receives Christ, a man receives Christ and rests in Christ alone, he is born again simultaneous with that moment, and he has new life and the Spirit has saved him, and that that is sealed in the moment. The thief on the cross was not baptized and yet Jesus said to him, "Verily I say to you, this day you will be with Me in Paradise."

And so we just need to put aside the whole reason that I'm emphasizing these things for purposes of the message tonight is to cleanse away a false view of what the washing is in order to prepare your heart for what the text actually means here in Titus 3. And so with that in mind, the Spirit cleanses like water, as we see in Ezekiel 36, Ezekiel 36, not talking about physical, literal cleansing, and that imagery being carried forward by the writers who were familiar with the Old Testament, now we see that this imagery of a cleansing is being used by the Apostle Paul in Titus 3, and the surrounding context and the flow of the thought in the passage will help us see that very clearly.

So point 2 for tonight is this, is that when you were saved, the Holy Spirit cleansed you with power. He cleansed you with power, but not your physical flesh, inside he cleansed you. Paul is describing the spiritual cleansing which happens at salvation. And look, if you just look at verse 3 with the context that leads up to this, you'll see in mind what Paul

was thinking. Paul had said, just said in verse 3, "We also once were foolish ourselves disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hating and hating one another." You look at verse 3 and you could sum up looking at our prior lives, looking at an unsaved man's heart today and say that is just so dirty. That's just so dirty compared to the holiness of God, compared to the loveliness and the purity of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's just so dirty by contrast. It is so ungodly. It is so unlike God to be like that, as we see described in verse 3.

So there needs to be a cleansing that takes place, and that's what Paul is describing in verse 5 when he says, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." There again in that statement alone, you see that it could not possibly be referring to the act of water baptism because Paul is saying it's not based on something that we did that we received salvation. It excludes human activity from the saving action of God in redeeming sinners one by one. And so he saved us, he immediately says not on the basis of anything that we've done but by something else, by the contrast, he takes it out of the realm of human activity, this is not by human activity but by contrast, and he puts it into the realm of the activity of God. God is the one who saves. Man does not save himself by stepping into a river, a pool, or, you know, a filled horse trough. God saves and he saves according to his mercy, it says in verse 5. And then he goes on and expands, "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." He says God is motivated to save us not by our works but by his mercy, and then he goes on to expand how it is that God accomplished that work of salvation in the hearts of his people.

And so he says it's by the washing of regeneration. The washing of regeneration, by giving new life, by giving a clean new life to his people by his Holy Spirit, God cleanses us from the defilement of verse 3. He cleanses us – watch this, this is so precious – the Holy Spirit when he saved you, he cleansed you by changing your nature inside under the sound of the word of God. That is what Ezekiel said that God would do, "I will take away the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will take away that which is dead and cold and dirty and I will put something living and warm and responsive and clean within you that is responsive to the word of God, that is capable of exercising repentance and faith." In other words, God gives us new life in order that we might respond to him. The Spirit, as it were, breathes into us new life, and in response to that new life comes forth the repentance and faith that is responsive to the word of God. In other words, beloved, and for those of you that, like me, have a past that you are mindful of and that if you think about it for very long, it pains you to remember what you once were like when you were dead in your trespasses and sins and you were walking in rebellion, and you look at verse 3 and you say, "Yes, that is what I was like." Well, rejoice in the fact that when God saved you he removed by the power of the Holy Spirit, he removed the pollution of your disobedient nature. He broke the power of sin in your heart and in your life in a gracious gift that you did not deserve and that there was nothing that you could do to prompt God to do it. God gave new life to you that was willing to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ. He washed you. He took that nature, he washed it, he renewed it, he changed it. He gave you new life. I'm just multiplying word pictures to give you the sense of it, that what happened in your salvation was not a physical act that you did in the power of your human motor skills, it was a supernatural act by God on your very nature,

on your very inner man that changed you from what you were in verse 3 to what you now are in Christ.

And so he washed you by regeneration, regeneration, the giving of new life. He imparted new life to you as a free gift and he joins that together at the end of verse 5, look at it with me, "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Washing and renewing by the Holy Spirit, not by literal physical water. And so renewal, the idea of renewal is closely related to the act of regeneration. Renewal describes – this is so sweet – it describes the transformation that took place in the deepest recesses of your heart. God changed you at the very core of who you are when he saved you and the Holy Spirit did this by a sovereign act of grace and gave you spiritual power to live the Christian life. Stated another way, beloved, we're just saying the same things in different ways in order to do our best to convey the truth to you, in the idea of washing, when God saved you he cleansed you. He made you new and that is why for a true Christian, especially one saved in their adult life, that's why when at the moment of your conversion and going forward, that's why your life changed. There was a newness of power. There was a new life in you that changed you on the inside and the external things of your deeds and your words and your thoughts started to flow from a different fountain, a fountain that had been placed inside you by the Holy Spirit. God removed that controlling defilement of sin found in verse 3 in a way that resembles, that parallels the cleansing of dirt from a physical body. Your hands are filthy from having worked in the garden, you go and put them under water and you wash them and they come out clean. Well, in a manner that resembles that, in the unseen realm your dirty heart was placed under the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit so that what was once defiled comes out clean and changed as a result of it.

So it's a parallel to something that we understand in the physical realm to help us understand what happened in the spiritual realm. And so when God washed you, at the same time he gave you a new power to live righteously. The Holy Spirit came in and took residence in your heart. He came and indwelt you and started to bring forth the fruit of his own power and his own nature in your life. And that's why those of you who once were a profane person like I used to be, there has to be some of you in here that have a like testimony as to what happened, at one time in my unsaved days I had the most foul mouth, and the way that I blasphemed the Lord using his name in vain, cursing in such condemnable ways, and then the Lord saved me and he washed my heart, and without me even trying, the pattern of my language changed. I was speaking from a new heart now. I didn't say, "Oh, now I need to stop cursing. Now I need to stop using the Lord's name in vain and so I've got to try to start doing that." I did need to do that, but the power for that did not come from my own will. The power to change and the power that transforms a new Christian from what they were into what they are now becoming in Christ, the power comes from on high. They are born from above. God does a work by his sovereign Spirit in order to change us, and therefore the fruit that comes from that is to the glory of God, not to the one who has been born again. I could not have changed my own mouth any more than you could have changed your own sinful nature on your own.

The Bible is dogmatically clear on this fact. Jeremiah 13:23 asks the rhetorical question, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good

Who are accustomed to doing evil." It is impossible for an Ethiopian to change his skin from dark to light. That is his skin by nature. It is impossible for a leopard to change from the spots of his fur to the stripes of a zebra. It is embedded in the nature of the leopard to be like that. In like manner, sin is so embedded in the sinner's nature, so deeply rooted in his heart, that he has no ability to change it on his own. That is why New Year's resolutions never last. It is why bad habits control people, even when they know that they are destructive and people continue doing that which they know is destroying their physical health, destroying their marriage, destroying their, you know, everything else about their lives. It's because sin controls them. Jesus used a different metaphor to describe it when he said, "Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." Sin is the master, man is the slave, the servant of that which controls his heart, and he does not have the ability to change that on his own. You did not have the power to change yourself, and it didn't, look, it doesn't matter how much you tell people that they need to change, if they don't have the power to change then they're not going to change. They might make some modest efforts at moral modification, but a real change to bring forth the real fruit of the Spirit, the power to bring about a real Christlikeness in life, that's not within the sinner's power to do. God had to save you and by his Holy Spirit, that is what he did.

Look back over to Ephesians 2 for a parallel sense of these things. Ephesians 2. It's helpful to see these passages side by side. Verse 2, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature," by nature, by nature, "children of wrath, even as the rest." In Titus 3:3, in Ephesians 2:1 through 3, you see clear biblical testimony that the sinner cannot save himself, he cannot change himself because he is subject to spiritual forces inside him and outside of him as enslaved by Satan and then controlled by the world environment in which they live.

The sinner is unable to change himself and so human ability, human merit is utterly excluded because the sinner is a slave to his sin and his desires. Dead. Enslaved A heart of stone. When you understand what Scripture is describing about the inner state of the man, you can understand why water baptism could never answer to the problem. One of the reasons that people can be satisfied with a shallow gospel, one of the reasons that men can teach that it's in the sinner's power to repent in and of themselves, one of the reasons that people would teach that baptism can save you or baptizing an infant can remove original sin, the reason they say that is because they have an inadequate understanding of the depth of the depravity that is in the human heart and have not seriously taken into account what Scripture says about the spiritual state of the unbeliever. When you realize that change is beyond human capacity, that we do not have the ability to deliver ourselves from sin, then the way has been prepared for you to understand that salvation must be a supernatural act from God because we who are accustomed to doing evil cannot change our nature so that suddenly we begin doing good.

Now one other thing, one other aspect about this. Go back to Ephesians 2:1-3 for a moment because this is so stunningly clear. This text taken seriously, studied seriously,

turns Arminians into those who believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation. Ephesians 2:4, "But God." Again, there's this contrast, "But this is what it used to be like. But," word of contrast, a clear contrast between what was and what happened, not from man but God. And what was it about God? Verse 4, Ephesians 2, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions," dead, unresponsive, unable to do anything, when we were like that flat on our backs as a spiritual corpse with the coffin closed and sealed around us, when we were like that God did this, he "made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." God is the actor here. We are the recipients of the action, not the ones doing it to ourselves. And so when you drop the interim clauses it says God made us alive and raised us up and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. God did it. God did it all.

Now with that point made, go back to Titus 3. Another way that you can see this is to ask the question: what was it that was poured out upon us? When God saved us, what was poured out on us? Verse 5, "He saved us...according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." It was not water that God poured out upon us in order to change and renew our natures. He poured out the Holy Spirit upon us. That's what the text says. There's not a drop of water in these verses. This is about a spiritual work done by the power of God poured out upon us.

And so he is talking about a work of the Spirit of God on your heart, not water baptism. And beloved, just step back from it all and ask yourself a question: which of those two alternatives, a water baptism ceremony, or a work of the Holy Spirit in the deep nature of man, which of those most impress you with the glory of God? Which of those best explains how a man can change from the inside out? Which makes you bow in wonder and awe at the holiness of God and the power of God to work on the heart of a man? Well, just, you know, let's have a baptism service tonight and save a few folks, versus what Scripture describes by the Spirit's work. When you have a biblical understanding of regeneration and the work of the Spirit of God in saving someone, the idea of robbing the Spirit of God of his glory and attributing it to an external ceremony of baptism is abhorrent to the believing heart. You look at that and say, "You're robbing the Spirit. You're misleading men about what saves them. You're causing men to trust in their own works rather than in the testimony of Scripture and you are robbing the Spirit of God of his glory, attributing to the hands of man in a baptistry that which the Spirit of God alone can do by his power in the heart." To me, it's not even close. This is so clear from Scripture. It is so obvious in its implications. It's so obvious by contrast.

Now, so we've said that the Spirit cleanses you like water. 1. It cleanses you like water, not with water. We see that the Spirit cleansed you with power by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. It took a powerful act by the Spirit of God to change a man enslaved to sin to make him into a slave of Jesus Christ. Thirdly, I want to show you that the Spirit cleansed you abundantly. The Spirit cleansed you abundantly, and if you remember what we read in Ephesians 2, God being rich in mercy according to

the great love with which he loved us, rich mercy, great love, the adjectives just start to build a colossal monument to the amazing grace of God upon his people. Rich mercy, great love. You see the same kind of extravagance described in verse 6 in Titus 3 when he says, "renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon us in order to ensure our salvation. He didn't measure out a little portion, a little bit of it. This was an abundance. This was richly done. It was extravagant in his grace. And beloved, mark it well, Christ does not hold back the Holy Spirit for a select few of his people to receive the Spirit in a second blessing after their conversion, he pours out the Spirit on everyone that he saves. He is gracious and abundant to everyone that he saves and pours this out upon every single believer in Jesus Christ.

Look over, if you will, at Romans 8. Romans 8, just wanting to see that the Spirit of God is within every true believer. In Romans 8:9 it says, "you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." If you do not have the Holy Spirit, it's not a matter that you need a second blessing as a Christian. What Scripture says if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you don't belong to Christ at all. You don't need to turn here. 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Every true Christian has the Spirit of God dwelling in them. The fullness of the Godhead comes to us in the person of the Spirit and indwells us as the seal, as the down payment, the earnest payment that the fullness of our salvation will be realized in eternity. God does this richly, gladly, rich in mercy, great in love; so abundant is the salvation that he gives us in Christ that he gives us the fullness of himself in the person of the Holy Spirit and we become co-heirs with Christ, and we become co-heirs with him, and all that belongs to Christ is made to belong to us.

And so what we see here, beloved, is that to be a Christian is to be cleansed from all of that defilement in Titus 3:3, and we are the unworthy beneficiaries of a gracious work of God by his Holy Spirit which cleansed us, gave us new life, and empowered us to live a new life going forward. It's wonderful to think about. It shows us, it reminds us that the unseen things, these invisible things of the Spirit are the things that are of great worth, not the material things that are around us and so often and sometimes necessarily occupy our attention. The beauty of salvation is these riches that are given to us in the Spirit by a gracious God on unworthy sinners.

Now, one final question for tonight: how does that happen? How does that happen? How does it come to pass? Go back to Titus 3 with me and we'll set the broader context here. How is it, what does God do, what is the mechanism that he uses? What are the means? What means does he use in order to bring a sinner from spiritual death into spiritual life? That's a vital question. How is the work of redemption that Christ accomplished on the cross applied to the human heart today? How does God do that? Well, it brings us to our fourth and final point here this evening and it's this, it's that the Spirit cleanses with God's word. He cleanses with God's word. That is why Paul has made such a point about the importance of teaching in this book of Titus. When he speaks about elder qualifications

in Titus 1:9, he says in order to be qualified to be an elder, he must be a man, verse 9, "holding 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." Elder qualification is bound up in the ability to teach the word of God in one manner or another. As you read on in the book of Titus, you see this emphasis on teaching and doctrine and the word of God. Titus 2:1, "as for you," speaking to Titus who is to establish elders in all the different cities on the island of Crete, "As for you, Titus, you've been set apart. You have a unique responsibility that you are to focus on. You speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Titus, teach the truth. Teach the word of God. Teach the faith." So that people can understand it, so that God would work through the proclamation of the word in order to accomplish this spiritual work of which he speaks.

Verse 7 and 8 he says, "in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach." Verse 10 speaking about slaves, they need to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." Verse 12 speaks about instruction. Verse 15, he says to Titus, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." And as if that were not enough in this short epistle of 46 verses, all of these references to teaching that I've taken you so quickly through, he says again in verse 8, he says, "This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently," I want you to speak confidently about these things, "so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds." The teaching, the doctrine, what you speak, what you say.

Go back to 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness." Look, look, in his private conversation and in his public teaching the man of God, the pastor, the elder must exemplify sober-minded speech and teach the things that are in accordance with the Scripture and devote himself to understanding them so he will explain them accurately so that the people who hear him can understand it and the Spirit of God is given the means that he uses in their hearts to convert a sinner to Christ and to sanctify a Christian into greater Christlikeness. It's a serious, sober matter that leaves no room for a clown to be a pastor, leaves no room for a teacher to occupy himself with series talking about trying to find the gospel in secular movies, trying to find biblical teaching in Andy Griffith and the acts and works of Barney Fife. That material is out there and it makes a mockery of everything that Scripture says about itself and about the office of one who would teach the word of God.

Verse 14 of 2 Timothy 3, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known," what? You have known what? What has he known from childhood? He's known "the sacred writings," the word of God, "which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for

training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

What's the consequence of that? What is the call upon biblical elders to do? Those that aspire for the office of leadership in the church, what is to preoccupy their hearts and their minds? What is the apostolic charge from Jesus Christ through the Apostle Paul to the church at large? What is to preoccupy the church? Chapter 4, verse 1, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word," preach the word, "be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Notice that the teaching ministry is not simply, it is not simply the enunciation of doctrine but biblical elders are charged with the responsibility to help and to require even people under their charge to recognize the application of Scripture to their lives and to obey it. Reprove them, rebuke them, exhort them with great patience and instruction.

There is a great, great danger in ministries like ours, not just at Truth Community Church but in anyone trying to conduct a biblical ministry and to preach the word of God with whatever giftedness the Lord has given the man who's primarily responsible for that. There is a great, great danger for the audience that is attracted around that. And after 30 years of ministry, I think I'm entitled to have an opinion about what I'm about to say. So many people, there are people that are attracted to a pulpit ministry that like the intellectual engagement that perhaps like a biblical ministry taught by someone that is teaching and believes what he's saying. There's a certain attraction to that but, beloved, not everybody that comes to hear preaching actually wants biblical ministry in their lives and it shows up when they reject the accountability that biblical ministry implies. What we have to see, beloved, as a church, what you have to see is an individual, is that real biblical ministry is not simply teaching, Scripture is not just profitable for teaching but for reproof, coming to someone and saying, "You are in sin. You need to repent. You are not thinking rightly. You are not living rightly." And the word of God brings that reproof and then brings correction. "This is what you're doing wrong, this is how you correct it. This is what you need to do and think and believe instead," so that we're all growing and being trained in biblical righteousness. Someone who rejects the reproof and correction is showing that at that time at least in their lives, they don't want the teaching because these are not separate units to be taken in a cafeteria style. "I'll have the roast beef, but not the potatoes. I'll have the teaching but not the reproof. Stay out of my personal life." That's not a biblical response to a biblical ministry.

Look at verse 2. 2 Timothy 4:2, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Why? Because "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." Beloved, all I'm articulating here is that the fullness of biblical ministry goes beyond listening to someone in a pulpit, it involves responding to the word of God when it convicts you otherwise it's just listening to something that you find pleasing at the time, even if it's biblical truth.

And when you think about the priority of this, you don't need to turn here but you'll remember in Acts 6 there was a necessary dispute over feeding some of the widows in the church. They came to the apostles and said, "Oh, you know what? We've got to get this problem solved." And so the apostles handled it this way in verse Acts 6:2, "the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.'" As the apostles had a unique responsibility for the word of God from which they should not be distracted to lesser things. And they said, "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." You tell us who you want, we'll appoint them to the task. Verse 4, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." We see it throughout the book of Titus, we saw it in 2 Timothy, we could look at it in other places in the pastoral epistles as well. You see it in the book of Acts. You think about Psalm 19, "The word of God is perfect, restoring the soul." And you just see this consistent emphasis on the word of God. Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible devoted over to what? Scripture. The word of God.

And so coming back to Titus 3 now, you see the centrality of Scripture in biblical ministry. The whole context of the Bible points us in that direction. The context of the book of Titus points us in this direction. And what does that have with God pouring out the Spirit upon sinners in order to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ? Simply this, beloved: the Spirit of God works through the proclamation of the word of God. The word of God is the tool, is the means that the Holy Spirit uses to accomplish this great work of redemption in the hearts of men.

Look at Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having," oh look, the language from Titus 3 again, "having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word." He washes us like water washes flesh, and he does it with the word so "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory." Christ washing his bride with the word of God.

And then in 1 Peter after the book of Hebrews and after James, 1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1:23 through 25, and the point that we're illustrating from God's word at this moment is that the Spirit uses the word of God in order to apply redemption to the hearts of men. 1 Peter 1:23, "for 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, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you." You were born again through the living and enduring word of God. The Spirit of God uses the word of God to bring about the new birth in the children of God and so there is an application, there is a responsibility for the people of God to have. Beloved, you have a responsibility every time you come to hear the word of God preached that I cannot do for you, that no teacher can do for you, that is uniquely your responsibility if you are going to hear the word of God with profit in your life. You can't just roll out of bed at 5 till 9, show up on Sunday and expect something, a sanctifying work to take place. You can't stay out on

Saturday night until 2:00 in the morning, come in bleary-eyed and expect a great work of the Spirit of God. You have a responsibility to prepare yourself for the hearing of the word of God.

Peter says in 1 Peter 2:1 because of the precious nature of the word of God and its vital place in the people of God. Therefore, 1 Peter 2:1, therefore you have a responsibility, "putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander." In other words, you come to the word of God with a repentant heart not holding onto your cherished sins, not blaming others for your failure to walk with the Lord, not having other earthly priorities that are more important to you. You put all of those things aside, chapter 2, verse 2, and then "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." In our church Sunday morning, Tuesday evening, you have to prepare yourself. You have to prepare your heart. You don't just walk in off the street. You spend some time. "God, forgive me of my sinfulness. I repent of this or that. God, prepare my heart to hear it. God, work in me that I might grow in respect to salvation." You have a spiritual work to do in order for the word of God to have an effect in you. We have a responsibility in other words.

In the book of James 1, I'm going to all of these different Scriptures so that you will see that this is not an isolated theme and what I just said from 1 Peter 2 being built upon here in James 1, preparing yourself spiritually for the word of God. James 1:19, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." And he's talking about hearing the word of God, hearing the word of truth, because you see it there in verse 18, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." God exercised his will to bring us to Christ, and he did it through the preaching and the proclamation of the word of God, therefore, because the word of God is so critical in the life of the church and in the life of an individual, it is important to prepare yourself spiritually to hear it and adopt the posture of one teachable, one who is willing to listen, so that you are quick to hear, slow to speak against what you are told, slow to anger in response to it because the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."

There is a lot of work that goes into a true ministry of the word of God on both sides of the pulpit. 2 Timothy 2:15, the man on my side of the pulpit has to study to show himself approved, do the hard work of preparing the word of God in content and delivery and all that stuff. And it's hard work. That's okay but, beloved, what I want you to see tonight, what I want you to see for yourself is that there is hard spiritual work for you to do in the receiving of it. Listen, we've seen it here, the attitudes that the people of God are to bring to the teaching of the word of God. Repentant. Humble. Slow to react against it. Quick to hear. Quick to apply. That's a spiritual work all of its own, a work noble in and of itself. And for an effective ministry of the word of God to endure it takes both. It takes both. It

takes a teacher doing the work on his end. It takes, I say it gently, beloved, I say it to encourage and help you, it takes you on your end preparing it.

I haven't heard this for a long time, but you hear people say this in other contexts, other churches, "I'm just not being fed." You know, maybe the first question that should be asked in response to that is, how are you preparing yourself to hear the word of God in the first place? Are you living a repentant life? Are you praying for the speaker? Are you praying for your own heart to be responsive? Are you teachable when someone comes to you with the word of God and rebukes you? Or are you proud and resistant, quick to anger? It's none of your business? Maybe there's a reason that the nutrition is not taking root in your soul and it doesn't have anything to do with the teaching but rather the hearer. If it was only about the teacher, there wouldn't be so much in Scripture about the one who hears the word and what they are to do.

So all of that, beloved, the Spirit cleanses with God's word, the Spirit uses the word of God to convict sinners of sin, judgment and righteousness, uses the word of God to unveil the glories of Christ and his redemptive work, uses the word of God... Look, in all of it, we sing the song, "Brethren, we have met to worship," All is vain unless the Spirit of the holy one comes down. Unless the Spirit of God comes and works through the preaching and works in the hearts of those who hear, there won't be any fruit of it because the whole point of tonight's message is it's a supernatural work. We have our part to play in the preparation and in the hearing of the word of God but it takes the Spirit of God to change a heart. And so as we do what we do in ministry, if we're thinking about biblical ministry in a biblical way, we're mindful of pleading with God, pleading with the Spirit of God to come down upon the ministry of the word and to do the work which only he can do through the means that God has said he uses to work in the hearts of sinners.

When you think about the ministry of Truth Community Church, these things tonight, this is why we emphasize preaching at Truth Community Church. This is why we're happy to neglect virtually everything else by comparison is so that nothing dilutes the attention that is paid to the word of God. An approach to ministry that marginalizes preaching, that minimizes its importance for the sake of other things may be good in themselves but an approach to ministry that marginalizes the word of God is a deceptive waste of time because the Spirit of God uses the word of God to produce children of God who will adorn the doctrine of God. The Spirit of God saves men and women, boys and girls, through the call of the gospel which is the point of what Paul said in Romans 10. "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."

And so beloved, Christ himself said the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel. If you're under the sound of my voice and you're not a Christian, the Holy Spirit calls you to Christ through the word of God tonight. The blessed Lord Jesus paid the price of redemption with his shed blood on the cross and the Spirit calls you to repent of sin and to believe in Christ to be saved. With that said, in

keeping with what I was saying about preparing yourself to hear the word of God and with a heart heavy on thinking about the consequences of what I'm about to say for your sake, you're responsible for what you've heard. You're responsible to repent and to believe. It's a command. Jesus does not repent for you. Jesus does not believe for you. That's the command placed on you to respond.

And so, beloved, God brings you under a ministry of the word in order to shower his goodness on you dispensed through the Holy Spirit. Some 10 1/2 years into our ministry at Truth Community Church, let's renew our commitment to Christ, to his word, and to one another that will stay the course that God has set before us.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the work of the Holy Spirit who cleanses us and who works through the word of God to accomplish Your will. Thank You that the Spirit came to us at some point in time, convicted us of sin, judgment and righteousness, and through that that work of the Spirit, that turning of our hearts supernaturally by the blessed third person of the Trinity, Lord, You drew us to faith in Christ and saved us and brought us into Your kingdom, delivered us from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of Your beloved Son. Father, how richly You did that. How graciously, how lovingly You did that upon a child of wrath. We bless Your name and we pray that You would continue the work. Father, we know that not everybody that walks through these doors is saved, we know that some know that they're not, we know that some have turned from what they've heard and professed to believe and we beg You, Father, by the Spirit, by the Spirit of whom we've spoken today, we beg You that that Spirit would exercise power on the wayward, with power on the unbelieving and turn them, Father, to Christ. The consequences of rejection are too severe to contemplate. How much severer judgment is reserved for those who hear the gospel and walk away, Father? It's unthinkable and so we ask You for mercy by Your Spirit through Your word in the hearts of each one, may You sanctify Your people into greater likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ and, Father, may You please work in the hearts of the unbelieving that they would turn to Christ and be saved and join the chorus of those who give thanks to Father, Son and Holy Spirit with joyful hearts, redeemed and chastened hearts, willing to follow Christ no matter the cost. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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