

The Holy Spirit and New Life

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[0 : 0 0] Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

These things are excellent and profitable for people. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[1 : 1 6] Thank you. Hello, everyone. Oh, good job. Let's try another one. Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He's risen. Alleluia. Very good. Very good. Keep your service sheets open, and we're going to be looking actually at both of the readings, but we're going to look at the second reading first.

Let's pray. Father, in that first reading, you promised Israel so long ago such a glorious promise.

You promised them a new heart. You promised them your Holy Spirit. And in the second reading, we hear about how we've received that.

And, Father, I ask that now you would increase the activity of your Holy Spirit within us. You promised that you're with us wherever two or more are gathered in the name of Christ.

[2 : 2 9] And so we know that the Holy Spirit is here, but we ask that the Holy Spirit would become more active in our hearts, that you would clarify our vision of Jesus and clarify our understanding of the Holy Spirit in order, not just so that we would have puffed up minds, but that our hearts would receive the Holy Spirit in greater depth.

So that's what we ask, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, we are continuing tonight our series on the Holy Spirit, and we're each week from...

We started last week, and we're going to go on until Pentecost, which is towards the end of May. And each week we're going to look at a different aspect of the Holy Spirit and the Christian life.

Last week we talked about how the Holy Spirit enables us to live in this wonderfully close communion with God, the Father, and God the Son.

It's just a remarkable gift that the Holy Spirit actually causes us as Christians to enter into and taste and know the love that has always existed between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 50] It's extraordinary. Tonight we're looking at a different aspect of the Holy Spirit's work, but it actually fits into that quite well. We're looking at the very beginning of the Spirit's work within the Christian life.

So we're looking at how the Holy Spirit gives us what the Bible calls new life. Sometimes the Bible calls it new birth. It uses a few different metaphors.

Now, one of the objectives of a series like this on the Holy Spirit, one of the things you want to get out of a series like this on the Holy Spirit, is I believe God would want to expand our esteem for the Holy Spirit.

Now, if you've been around the church for a while, you'll know that quite often the Holy Spirit kind of gets shortchanged in our conversations. If you hang around the church for a little bit, you'll hear a lot about the Father, God the Father, and God the Son, a lot about Jesus, and a lot about what God has done.

So you'll hear things like, you know, from all eternity past, God the Father has loved us and has set forth a plan for how we're going to be saved, how he's going to bring us into fellowship with himself.

[5 : 11] And then you'll hear about how Jesus, the Son of God, came and through his incarnation and his death and his resurrection, he procured everything necessary, just everything necessary, so that we could be forgiven of our sins and come into that perfect relationship with the Father.

And quite often it stops there. And the next phrase will be something like, you know, isn't God wonderful? Don't you want to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

Don't you want to follow God? Now, in one sense there's nothing at all wrong with anything that I just said there. But there's another sense, there's another sense in which if we stop there, we end up shortchanging God's mercy and grace and love towards us, and we end up shortchanging our understanding of our salvation and our appreciation of our salvation.

Because there's no way that you can get the full picture of God's mercy and grace and love and glory without considering the work of the Holy Spirit.

You just can't do it. And if you ignore the Holy Spirit, you ignore one of the sweetest aspects of God's love and mercy towards us. And you will have a diminished discipleship.

[6 : 37] Because, of course, it's very, very true that God the Father from all eternity past loved us and set a plan for salvation.

It's very, very true that Jesus procured everything necessary for us to come into a totally reconciled relationship with the Father. But it is also true, this is also part of our salvation, that God the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us in such a way that the Spirit comes into the heart, into the human heart, and recreates us, almost causes us to be a new sort of person who has power to accept the gift that Jesus offers, to love Jesus more than anything else, to trust Jesus more than anyone else, and to live for His glory.

And so if you don't understand the Holy Spirit, you will never understand the Christian life, and you will be shortchanged in your walk with God. So tonight, what I want to do is consider the Holy Spirit in order that our esteem for the Holy Spirit and God's mercy and grace would be increased.

So we're going to talk about how the Holy Spirit gives us new life. And what we're going to find is that the Holy Spirit comes in and gives us new life by giving us a new preference for Jesus.

Now, I'll explain what that means. But the first thing I want to do is I want to talk about a problem and a solution. The problem is that there's something very, very deep within the human heart that is terribly problematic.

[8 : 17] And we're going to consider what that is, and then we're going to look at the solution that God offers. And when we see the problem correctly, what we'll understand is that the only solution that we need is the Holy Spirit.

Okay? So let's think about the problem first. Look at Titus. It's chapter 3, verse 3 also. I'm not going to be able to go through this entire passage in detail, but we'll look at bits of it.

This is the Apostle Paul writing to his friend Titus. Now, Titus had been left by Paul on the island of Crete, Mediterranean island.

Not a terrible place to be left. But he had been left there in order to establish leadership structure in the various churches that Paul had established. And so Paul's writing this letter to him.

And right at this verse and at this passage, Paul is describing a problem with the human heart. And it's the problem that once we understand it, it's the problem that makes us absolutely need the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 23] Just absolutely need it. Look at verse 3. For we ourselves were once foolish. We were disobedient. We were led astray. And then note this phrase.

Slaves to various passions and pleasures. Passing our days in malice and envy. Hated by others and hating one another. Now, I want you to know something about that.

Quite often when we talk about sin, what we mean is behaving badly.

Is that right? Like when you think about, you know, answer the question, what is sin? My guess is that most of us think of sin as doing bad stuff. You know, stuff that feels good makes you feel guilty.

You know, but the interesting thing here is that in this verse, Paul's talking about sin. But he's not just talking about bad behavior. He's talking about something deeper than bad behavior.

[10 : 26] Look back at there. Look at the line, slaves to passions and pleasures. He's talking about that there's something in the human heart at the level of our motivations that has enslaved us.

He's saying that there's just a terrible, terrible problem in the human heart. The human heart is profoundly, by default, oriented towards self.

Right? We're enslaved by selfish passions and selfish pleasures. So we're driven by selfish desires and selfish cravings, selfish motivations.

You could put it this way. The human heart, the kind of default settings for the human heart, is that we prefer ourselves over and against anybody else.

Now, according to Paul, it's just a massive problem. And it's a massive problem partially because it ruins relationships.

[11 : 40] I mean, think about the selfish people that you know. Of course, you're not selfish, but you know. I mean, think about the selfish people that you know. Selfish people, if you have somebody whose default heart is oriented towards self-protection, maximizing self-pleasure, self-passions, whatever.

That kind of person will never be able to learn to love. And the reason they'll never really be able to love is that they'll use all the relationships in their lives as means for their own self-gratification.

Right? They'll prefer themselves over the people around them. And so they'll enjoy relationship with somebody for as long as that relationship suits them. But the moment the relationship stops suiting them or they stop deriving a certain kind of pleasure from it, they'll start resenting the relationship.

And Paul mentions that, you know, very quickly the relationships fall apart and they're filled with envy and malice and hatred.

See, as long as our hearts are self-oriented, we prefer ourselves over other people, our relationships are never going to be able to go deep and they'll never last for very long. Okay, so that's part of the reason that our selfish inclinations are so terribly problematic.

[13 : 05] But the other problem and the bigger problem is that just like it ruins our relationships with people, it ruins our relationship with God. Because our inward self-centeredness continually betrays us.

And what happens is, you know, even if we come to believe that we should follow God, even if we come to believe that in principle following God is a good idea, when we begin to follow him, if our hearts are focused upon ourselves, if we prefer ourselves over anything else, we'll only follow him as long as it's easy or pleasant.

But as soon as anything becomes difficult, we're out of there. I don't know if you've ever heard of a guy called St. Augustine. Some of you will.

He was a philosopher and a theologian from the, he straddled both the 3rd century and the 4th century, or the 4th and the 5th, actually.

And he grew up in North Africa during the end of the Roman Empire. And his mother was a Christian. His father was not a Christian. And he struggled with Christianity for years and years and years.

[14 : 23] And this was his struggle. This was the thing that made it just so terribly difficult for him to follow God. Because at one level he knew that Christianity was true, at least after a certain point.

He decided, yes, following God is right. Following Jesus is the good thing to do. I want to do that. But he found that his preference for himself, his passion and his self-focused thirst and craving for pleasure, continually just wouldn't allow him to follow God.

He just lacked the ability to choose to follow God. Listen to how he puts it. This is from his autobiography. It's called The Confessions of St. Augustine. Story time now.

So listen up. I was held back from Christ. Not in fetters clamped around me by someone else. But by my own will.

And my own will had the strength of iron chains. The enemy held my will in his power. And from it he made a chain and he shackled me.

[15 : 31] For my will was perverse. And lust had grown in it. And when I gave in to lust, habit was born. And when I did not resist habit, it became a necessity and it became a need.

This was my chain and it held me fast in the duress of slavery. I was quite sure that it was better for me to give myself up to God's love rather than to surrender to my own desires and preferences.

But while I wanted to follow God and I was convinced that following God was right, I was still a slave to the pleasures of my own heart. You see, the problem was not in his intellect.

The problem was in his will, in his heart, in his preferences. He preferred himself. He was addicted to certain kinds of pleasure. And even though he knew following God was right, he just couldn't do it.

Now, here's the thing. This is the problem that Paul's talking about in Titus. And Paul's claiming that this is our problem. This is the problem that all of us face. And friends, this is why, I hope you can see this.

[16 : 49] This is why things like behavior management, self-help, religious duty, good works, they never are enough. They never solve the problem.

Because outward conformity, outward behavioral management, in whatever variety, it can't touch the heart. It can't change the will. It can't free us from the slavery that our hearts are bound with.

And that's why we need something much, much better and much, much stronger. It's why New Year's resolutions are always a joke. Okay.

So, if that's the problem. The problem. Some of you are very mad at me about the New Year's resolution. I'm sorry. You can keep on doing it.

But anyways. Okay. If the problem is that we have a tendency to prefer ourselves over everything else, what's the solution? Okay. The solution is found over in Ezekiel.

[17 : 51] Look at Ezekiel 36. First reading. Again, I'm not going to go through it in detail. But this whole, the problem I've been describing was a massive issue in the Old Testament.

You know, the Old Testament is about the relationship between God and Israel. And Israel had, God had given Israel everything they needed to follow him. But Israel just couldn't pull it off.

Israel just could not follow God for any length of time whatsoever. And their problem was the same as Augustine's problem. They had all the outward ceremony in front of them.

They had all the information. They had the scriptures. They had everything you would think you would need to be godly. But their will, they preferred themselves over God.

And so they followed God for a little bit. But, you know, before long they'd be running off and doing something else. And so God's got to fix the problem. And how does he fix the problem?

[18 : 49] He makes a big promise. Look at verse 26. God promises Israel to give them a new heart and a new spirit. He says, I'm going to take away, Israel, your heart of stone that is so committed to yourself, that prefers yourself over everything else, and has led to all sorts of relational problems and war, and has caused you to reject me time and time again.

I'm going to take this heart of stone, and I'm going to give you a heart of flesh. I'm going to take my spirit, and I'm going to put it in your heart, so that you begin to love the things that I love, and you're going to begin to hate the things that I hate.

And when that happens, you'll be free, Israel. You'll be more free than you were free from Egypt. Now, I should say real quick, hopefully it's clear that the word heart in Ezekiel, it's not a literal heart, right?

It's a metaphor. He's not talking about a blood pump. He's talking about the heart is the center of the personality. The heart is where our will is and where our preferences reside.

And so what God says that he's going to do is he's going to send his Holy Spirit into our hearts in such a way that our preferences, which have been turned in on ourselves, our preference gets turned inside out.

[20 : 23] We used to love ourselves more than anything else, and now God's Spirit is going to turn that around so that we love God, and we prefer Jesus over everything else. When the Holy Spirit gives us new life, he gives us a new preference, a preference for Jesus.

We prefer him over and against any other alternative. Now, that's what the Bible calls new life, and it's what Paul is talking about in Titus.

Now, flip back over to Titus. Sorry, it's on separate pages, but... Look at verse 4. This is what he's talking about. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, who saved us?

Who? He saved us. God saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, because we couldn't pull any of them off. But according to his own mercy, and then get this, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Okay, that renewal and regeneration of the Holy Spirit, that's the fulfillment of Ezekiel. That's the new heart and the new spirit. Get this, friends.

[21 : 39] Becoming a Christian is an absolute, total miracle. It's a miracle from first to last.

I mean, it is all because of God's mercy. It's not because of your goodness. I hope you're clear on that. The Holy Spirit has to break into our wills precisely at the moment that we don't really like him that much.

He breaks into us and changes us in such a way that we prefer Jesus and we trust Jesus and we love Jesus more than any other alternative. Now, let me read to you how it happened in Augustine's life.

Okay? This is back to his autobiography. Augustine has been struggling with God for months now, and he's been trying to overcome sin. He's been trying to follow God, but he just can't do it.

He just cannot choose to do it. So he's in his backyard at this point, and he's weeping. I felt that I was still the captive of my sins, and in my misery I wept, and I kept weeping all the while with the most bitter sorrow in my heart, when all at once I heard the sing-song voice of a child at a nearby home.

[23 : 07] Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl, I cannot say. But again and again it repeated the refrain, take it and read it. Take it and read it.

There you go.

Augustine said it. So I hurried back, and I seized the Bible, and I opened it. And in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell.

Now he opened to Romans chapter 13, and this is the verse that he read. Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in quarreling and jealousy, but then the key phrase, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

Augustine says, I had no wish to read more, and I had no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart, and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.

[24 : 25] And he was never the same again. Now, do you see what happened? A couple things happened here, but apparently as he was reading that piece of scripture, it's almost as if when he came to that phrase, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, it's almost as just as he read it, the Holy Spirit broke into him and gave him the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was like he couldn't put Jesus on himself, and so the Spirit broke into his heart and gave him Jesus as a gift. He turned around his preferences so that from this point on, Augustine wasn't perfect.

Don't even let that thought come into your head. But from this point on, where previously he had had a tendency to prefer himself over everything else, from this point onward, he had a tendency to prefer Jesus over anyone else, and his life never recovered in the good way.

Now, friends, this is a gift that the Holy Spirit wants to give to you and I. The Holy Spirit wants this for us. And I want to be careful here because it happens differently for different people, right?

For Augustine, it was like lightning. It was like power and light now. And the Lord also gave him an instantaneous assurance, a gift of assurance, which we're going to talk about the gift of assurance in several weeks.

[25 : 59] So I'm not going to talk about that now. But for a lot of us, the Holy Spirit gives us new life, and it may not happen so dramatically as Augustine.

It may not happen instantaneously like it did for Augustine. Quite often for a lot of us, instead of kind of like a lightning, you know, where it's just immediate. It's more like how the sun rises on a cloudy day.

Cloudy day, sun comes up. You don't really know when it came up, but all of a sudden, you can see the light, and you can feel the warmth, and you realize the sun's been up for some time.

And for a lot of us, that's how we come to realize that we've received new life from the Holy Spirit. We're walking along, we're, you know, participating in church, we're reading the Bible, we're praying, and then all of a sudden we realize that, you know, Jesus used to be just a historical figure, a kind of good moral teacher.

But then you realize, now Jesus is my treasure. He's everything. And I prefer him over anything else.

[27 : 11] It doesn't have to be dramatic. But it's terribly important that it happens. And so, I mean, the question, I think, for a lot of us, I mean, the obvious question, I think, is have you experienced, have you received the Holy Spirit's gift of new life?

And if the answer to that question is no, then you need to hear that Jesus wants to give you a gift.

And Jesus isn't stingy, you know? You know, the cross, if the cross means anything, the cross means that Jesus ain't stingy. Okay?

He gave you himself. And if he gave you himself, then he'll give you the Holy Spirit. And so, if you're not sure that you've received new life by the Holy Spirit, then, friends, immerse yourself in the Bible, first of all, is what I would say.

Because it's quite often, just like in Augustine, it's as we read the Scriptures, oftentimes, it's as we consider Jesus, as we sit at his feet, that the Holy Spirit breaks in and makes Jesus our treasure.

[28 : 28] So, the first thing is, immerse yourself in the Bible. The second thing I would say is immerse yourself in Christian community. Join a home group, join Christianity Explored, somehow, become friends with Christians.

Because as you interact with other Christians, as you talk about Jesus with Christians, oftentimes, that's one of the ways that the Holy Spirit breaks in on us. In fact, Augustine, in Augustine's experience, he had been hanging out with his buddy.

In fact, his buddy was just at the other side of the yard. But the third thing, and this is the most obvious thing, this is the most urgent thing, you need to ask for it. You need to ask for the Holy Spirit.

You need to ask Jesus to give you, you need to pray, ask Jesus to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit in such a way that Jesus becomes the best thing in your life. And that's a prayer that he likes to pray.

And he likes to hear and answer. And if you would like to pray with somebody tonight, over in my left, you're right, during the last songs, we always have people who would love to pray with you.

[29 : 31] And they'd love to pray with you about this. Now, for those of us who, we do have new life, and as we hear these things, your heart just kind of, you're like, yeah, that's my story.

That's what Jesus has done in me. I think that God wants to increase your love for him in at least three ways.

The first thing is, if you're a Christian, you've been walking with Jesus for a long time, God wants to increase your gratitude for the Holy Spirit. One of the disciplines of a Christian life is to continually rehearse the mercies of God.

And one of the really good things for a Christian to do is to just sit and think about how gracious God has been to you by giving you his Holy Spirit. Just thank him. Let your heart swell with praise and gratitude.

The second thing, if you're a Christian, is that God wants to increase your confidence in evangelism. Because remember what I was saying.

[30 : 39] The gift of new life is a miracle. And if God has given that miracle to you and has done that miracle in your life, then he can do it in anybody's life. And you need to, if you have experienced that miracle of new life, then one of the crucial duties that we have is to get on our knees and pray for the people that we know that need new life.

Your friends, family, people you work with, people you go to school with. So the Lord wants to increase your confidence and boldness in evangelism. And the third thing is that God wants to increase your dependence on the Holy Spirit.

We'll talk about, a little bit more about this in a couple weeks when we talk about the Holy Spirit and holiness, but the way into the Christian life is always the way on in the Christian life. And the Holy Spirit is given to us at the beginning of our walk with Christ.

But the Holy Spirit doesn't stop working. The Holy Spirit is the only reason we can endure and persevere. And so, part of being a Christian is waking up every morning and saying, Father, fill me with your Spirit today so that I would love Jesus more than anything else.

And that becomes the great motivator of the Christian life. Friends, the Lord wants to give a great gift and He has given us a great gift in the Holy Spirit.

[31 : 59] Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we were slaves.

Slaves! And slaves cannot free themselves by definition. And we could not free ourselves, but You, You broke the chains.

You opened up the door of forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ and His work upon the cross, but You broke the chains of our unwilling hearts by filling us with Your Holy Spirit.

So would You do that continually, continually fill us with Your Holy Spirit? And those here who know nothing of the sweetness of communion with You, will You grant that Your Holy Spirit will invade their lives as well.

Thank You. Thank You so much. Amen. Let's continue in prayer.

[33 : 26] Dear Father, we thank You that You remove our heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh.

We thank You for the gift of Your Spirit and for the ways that it teaches us what You're like and how to live as Your children. May we desire it so that we may serve You better in thankfulness and enjoy You more fully.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer. We thank You for the ways that You show Yourself through Your Church. We pray that we may be a church that reveals You to the world through our love for each other.

Show us where we must soften ourselves to the power of Your Spirit so that You may fill us as a community. We lift up areas in our own lives that we are failing to commit to You and pray that You may transform us as individuals and as a larger church body.

Bring healing to rifts in our relationships with our brothers and sisters and may each of us be focused in pursuing our relationship with You and with each other.

[34 : 50] Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer. Father, we lift up those tonight who are aching and burdened for those struggling with grief or anxiety, those who feel distant from You, those suffering in many other ways.

Heal us, we pray, and may we have confidence in the promise of Your Son, Jesus. may we come before You faithfully in prayer and know the joy of being filled with Your love and strength.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray that You will continue to protect us from the selfishness of our own hearts as You put a new spirit within us.

Thank You that You cleanse us in Your mercy and give us new life through Your Son. May we live out this new life this week and for the rest of our lives, we pray.

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, let us pray together. Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

[36 : 09] Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.