

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 13, 2009

The New Birth is Meant to Lead to a New Life

by Dan Trygg

"Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ² to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all people. 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 humankind 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless."

Titus 3:1-9

This passage describes the change of heart, attitude, lifestyle, and quality of life that is the *purpose* of the new birth in Christ. Paul delineated this to Titus to clarify to him what his focus should be in caring for the new believers on the island of Crete. This passage, in particular, contrasts the difference between the motives and character of our previous non-Christian life with the motives and character of our new lives in Christ. It is obvious from the context, as well, that *this new quality of life does not just happen all by itself. It must be consciously nurtured and affirmed by intelligent choice, or it may not become evident at all.* If this were not the case, Paul's repeated admonitions to Titus would be unneeded. The clear truth should be plainly evident to us: **The mature, consistent Christian life must be chosen. It must be exercised and developed through hard choices against past habits and old desires.**

We don't like to think that following Jesus is going to be hard. We like the message of grace, that God is willing to accept us freely, right where we are, and that He paid the price for our sin. That is a comforting message, isn't it? Unfortunately, **we tend to skip over significant parts of the offer of the Gospel message. We skip over the "repent" part.** We don't like to face the reality that we have been wrong, or that our lives are under the wrath of God. "Repent" means to change your mind, your perception of reality, to conform with how God looks at things. God says we have been sinners. *To repent means that we acknowledge that, and want to be free of those things that are displeasing to God.* **We don't like the discipleship challenge of bearing the cross.** Jesus said we must be willing to deny our self-will and our selfish agenda, and lay our lives down before Him. *We must choose to give up our rights to our lives and be willing to follow where God would lead us.* **We like to call Jesus, "Lord", but we don't really want to come to grips with what that means, namely, that we are to obey Him.** Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ is more than belonging to a religious affiliation. He is a real, living person, the King of the universe, and "following Jesus" means to do His will. **God expects that our new life in Christ will produce tangible changes in our lives.** The reality of this new power in us must not be ignored. *We must decide* to incorporate it into our world view and navigational grid, or it remains powerless to change the outcome of our experiences. If we go on our way following our former world view and approach to life, the new power within us will be little more than a dream.

I repeatedly meet with Christians who ask in frustration, "Why won't God change me?" They expect that He will somehow do spiritual brain surgery to their minds, and they will automatically choose to live differently. Frankly, **He did not set things up that way.** Yes, He has supernaturally birthed a new life inside of those who believe in Him, those who have a new heart. This inner change must become the starting point of an entire pattern of life. **God leaves the discovery and outworking of that new inner heart and power for living largely up to us.** To experience what God has for us, *we have to apply ourselves* to learn to walk in that new creation reality (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15,16).

In Titus 3:3, Paul describes how we all formerly lived our lives. This was a state of being which we were immersed in, and operated out from. We knew nothing else, and could do nothing else. Look at what our condition was: We were being "**unperceptive**". We were unthinking, or without understanding, or not perceptive about reality to some extent. We were probably totally unaware of what we were missing, or even that our world view was riddled with misconceptions, at all. We were being "**disobedient**". This word means to be "unpersuaded" or "untrusting" of someone, hence unwilling or resistant to what they suggest, or ask you to do. It seems "right" or "natural" to follow the desires of our flesh, and "unnatural" to resist them. There is a sense in which we were trapped within the bubble of our own perception of the world around us. We were "**deceived**". The Greek word means we were "being led astray (by someone else)". Clearly, we did not realize we were being misled. We were also "**enslaved to various strong desires and passions**". We were in an ongoing state of bondage, serving as a slave. Not a description of free, willful, arrogant

disobedience, rather a pathetic, pitiful picture of being trapped, having no way out, and not even knowing enough to *try* to get out. We were "**leading our lives in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another**". The verbal form here emphasizes the ongoing state of being we were living in. Note the attitude toward others, ...and theirs in response. "Malice" can cover everything from a general "evil" (i.e., a selfish disregard for what is good), to an "ill will toward another person". "Envy" implies comparison and self-dissatisfaction. "Despicable" is actually a passive verbal form meaning "**being hated by others**". Ever feel *that* growing up? Ever feel that some people don't like you? What does that make you feel inside? Do you feel self-conscious, maybe resentful? "Hating one another" is one possible response. **If you put all of these pieces together, the quality of life and relationships described here is not too positive.**

"But when the kindness and love for mankind of our Savior God appeared, ...He saved us." This is the turning point in history that can change the dismal picture described above into one with hope and vitality. God's "**kindness**" is descriptive of His goodness and caring attitude toward us, expressed in loving, considerate, thoughtful action. It is a soft, tender word-picture, one where the giver sensitively accommodates his or her actions to the other person's sensibilities. There is no demand to change, to "clean up our act", *before* receiving help. God simply *accepts us where we are*, and does for us what is needed or helpful. The phrase "**love for humankind**" is actually one word in Greek, *philanthropia*, from which we get the word "philanthropy". It refers to tender kindness expressed toward people, especially those in distress (e.g., Acts 28:2). God's salvation, ...the en-fleshment of part of His own self to live among us and die in our place to redeem us out of bondage..., came *not* because we did anything to earn or deserve it. Instead it was freely given "**according to His mercy**". *This word for mercy means a compassion for someone in need that leads to action.* It has two components: (1.) *emotional identification* with their pain and need; and (2.) *an active response* to remedy the problem in some way, or to comfort the hurting in their pain. God is not presented as a wrathful, angry dictator, but as a caring, tender benefactor, who has taken steps to help us in our state of affliction. He knows what we are missing, though we might not even have the perspective to realize the misery of our own souls. He knows a much more fulfilling life, and would like us to experience that. Why? *Because He loves us.*

What form did His salvation take? We all know that He sent Jesus to die in our place, but what did that do for us? What does it mean? **Paul says this salvation has two aspects**, "He saved us by means of a bathing of new birth and renewal of the Holy Spirit... in order that... being justified... we might become heirs according to hope of age-type life". Paul is looking at the ceremonial washing as the symbolic entry-point into a much fuller picture. **First, there is the new birth**, literally, an "anew-birth", a different word than in Jn. 3:3,7. This word implies a regeneration, either a radical re-creation, or possibly a restoration of something to its original, pure state. **Second, there is a renewal.** This word is one part of a compound object of the preposition, "by means of", i.e., of washing ... *and* of renewal of the Holy Spirit. Seeing this as a two-part process agrees with Rom. 12:2, and fits readily with our experience. **There has been a rebirth, but there is also an ongoing renewing of the mind.**

Paul also says that the salvation has a direction, or purpose. It has come to make us heirs "according to the hope of age-type life". **We are to inherit a different quality of life**, life consistent with the Kingdom to come, the Messianic age. (This qualitatively different life is partially described in Gal. 5:22,23 and I Cor. 13:4-7.) It is easy for us to think of "eternal life" as something we will receive when Christ returns. The Bible is clear, however, that it is available *now* (e.g., Jn. 5:24), and God intends for us to learn to walk in it during our time on earth. In our culture, people inherit things when their parents die. In the first century culture, it was not uncommon for an heir to begin to enjoy the inheritance allotted to him while his parent was still alive (e.g., Lk. 15:12). In the same way, we are to begin to take possession of what has been given to us, now. We are to incorporate this new quality of life into our day-to-day experience.

The renewal process is the result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Again, however, **He will not just "zap" us.** *He wants to teach us, to counsel us, to help us, ...all of which implies that we are significant players in this process of renewal.* This requires a purposeful pursuit of spiritual growth. Paul tells us that we must put off old behaviors and thinking, and readjust our minds so that we can put on the attitudes and actions of our new inner heart (Eph. 4:22-24). **We can identify the differences in attitude, motivation, and action between our old way of living, and God's heart, and then allow the Holy Spirit to lead us in new thoughts and actions.** Where we were *unperceptive*, we can *apply ourselves* to renew our minds (our perception of life – Rom. 12:2; Jn. 8:31-36). Where we were *untrusting* and *disobedient* toward God, we can begin to yield to Him and His ways. We can determine to no longer be fooled or conned by the devil's lies. We can stop following our fleshly lusts and instead follow the Spirit's leading. We can stop comparing ourselves with others, looking for their faults. Instead, we can recognize that others are lost and hurting, and do what we can to help them.