

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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The Washing of Renewal

by Dan Trygg

“He saved us, not out from works of righteousness which we have done, 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...” Titus 3:5,6

“And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order that you may prove out what the will of God is, that which is good and well-pleasing and mature.” Romans 12:2

“Do not lie to one another, putting aside the old self with its evil practices, ¹⁰ and putting on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him...” Colossians 3:9-10

“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” II Corinthians 4:16

Titus 3:5 describes two important, but separate, aspects of the salvation process. There is the washing of regeneration, ...the birth of a new, different and superior form of life within us..., and the washing of renewing of the Holy Spirit. This “washing of renewing” seems to be more about a *process* of making new, instead of a one-time event. It is also about developing something new, different and superior in our lives.

There are two basic root words for “new” in the NT. One is *neos*. It occurs 24 times in the NT, and it refers to newness in time, of recent origin. It is used of new (freshly-made) wine, a new (recently built) city, a new (fresh) lump of dough, a new (recent) covenant, and of the new man or new self (newly or recently born). The other word for “new” is *kainos*. This root occurs over 50 times in the NT. It can also refer to what was recently made or of recent origin, but it refers more to the new quality and nature of what is being referred to. It is “new” in the sense of “unknown, unused, unheard of, and of a superior essence; a better kind”. It describes fresh, flexible wineskins; fresh insights; a new, unused tomb; unheard-of teachings; new, unshrunk cloth; a new and better covenant; newness of life (a higher quality of life); a new (fresh) commandment; new life of the Spirit; becoming a new (unheard-of, radically different) creature; a new (drastically different) creation; a new (of higher essence and moral quality) man; a new (remade without defect or sin) heavens and earth; we will receive a new (different) name; a new song, a new Jerusalem, and “I make all things new”. The word translated as “renew” is based upon this latter root, with the prefix, *ana*, which means “again” or “up”, and can imply a thorough-going distributive effect or completeness throughout. The meaning of “renew” is (1.) to restore to a previous, higher quality; to make new and fresh again; or (2.) to make even better than before, to cause the effect of “newness” to spread and extend throughout the person or object being “rejuvenated”. To “re-fresh-en” or bring about a deeper, more extensive newness.

In Titus 3:5,6, the regeneration is about being born again. It refers to a spiritual birth that comes with the washing of the Holy Spirit. James, the brother of Jesus, said that “being desired and intended by God, He spiritually birthed us (lit., ‘from the womb’) by the *message* of truth” (Jas. 1:18), the message of His love and salvation. This *message* was the imperishable seed described by Peter that caused us to be born again (II Pet. 1:23). Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born from above, born from the Spirit. **Spiritual birth is a miracle.** Just as those bitten by the poisonous snakes in the wilderness were miraculously healed when they looked in faith upon the bronze serpent (Num. 21:4-9), in a similar way we are miraculously born-from-above when we trust in Jesus. **It is God’s miraculous gift, activated and applied to us as we believe the offer of grace He extends to us.** As John had written earlier, “As many as *laid-hold-of* Him, to the ones *trusting* into His name, to them God gave the authority to become children of God. This is not by human pedigree or physical descent, nor by fleshly desire or determination, nor by human desire and control. Instead, these are people who are born out from God (Jn. 1:12,13). **The washing of regeneration is not a result of works, but of God’s grace, activated by faith.** The product of this regeneration is an entirely different, higher quality of life, ...a new self, a new creation..., brought into being by the word (message) of God’s grace, incorporated by faith into someone’s life, and energized by the Spirit.

What about the washing of renewal? In the three passages besides Titus listed above, renewal seems to be about the process of growth into maturity as a Christian.

Often, the word “renewal” is thought of as being like “revival”, as calling believers who have wandered, or grown cold in their spiritual fervor, back to a vibrant, healthy faith. Others think of “renewal” as an evangelistic campaign, or as a new interest in spiritual gifts. While these may all be examples of contemporary usage, these images do not accurately reflect the Biblical meaning of these words. Modern people may use Biblical language, but mean something entirely different from what the words originally signified. Sometimes this is an intentional misrepresentation, and a false teacher will attempt to lead people in a path other than what God intends. More often,

however, we tend to obscure Biblical language because our own level of spiritual experience is so far removed from the plain language of scripture. We look at ourselves, and our fellow church-goers, and we adjust the words of the Bible to fit *our experience*, rather than allow the clear light of scripture *challenge us* and *drive us* to go deeper.

Let's consider the passages above. **In Romans 12:2, we are commanded** not to conform or shape ourselves to this present age, but to transform, ... **to be metamorphosized, radically reformed, transfigured, changed from the inside-out into something dramatically different..., by the renewing of the mind.** The renewing of the mind, here, is *the gaining of a new perception*, a higher and better grasp of reality, a clearer and different understanding of things, *so that we might test out and discover the will of God in our lives*, that which is good and beneficial, well-pleasing and mature. **There are two linchpins here. The first is the renewing of the mind.** This entails gaining a different perception of things to enable us to see and grasp things in a radically different way than other people do. **The second linchpin is to put into practice, or attempt to apply, or experiment with the new insights you gain. Both of these ingredients are indispensable.** If you have no new ideas, no new insights or understanding, then you cannot make any changes in your life. You only know what you know, so you will only be able to do what you thought to do before. But, if you gain new perspective, new understanding, new ideas, and you *still* only do what you did before, then what benefit are the new insights? If you still just go through the same motions and procedures, follow the same patterns and methods, and take no risks or do nothing different, should you be surprised that *nothing changes*? No, **there must be both new perspective and new action, or there will be no new manifestation of the Kingdom, internally or externally.**

The Colossians passage is about learning to *apply* the principles of Romans 12. Paul instructs the Colossians that **since they did join themselves to Christ**, ... and *they were* put to death *with Him*, and raised *with Him* (Col. 2:12,13,20; 3:1,3), **now, they are to put to death the parts of their lives that are still earthly in their orientation**, ...the unrighteous behaviors and practices of their past lives: fornication, impurity, evil-desire, and greed, to name a few examples. **Now, they are to put away from them those unhealthy emotions and practices:** anger, explosive-rage, evil-intent, slander and filthy-or-abusive-speech from their mouths. They are to no longer lie, or be phony toward one another, *putting off the old self* with its evil practices, and *putting on the new self, the one being renewed* unto a true-knowledge according to the image of the One creating him or her. Note that some versions say "since you *laid* aside..., and *having* put on". This is not what the Greek actually says. They add a past time-element that is not there in the original. No. **We can't rely on a previous decision to carry us through a present struggle or test.** The previous decision is real, and it made possible some new opportunities and capabilities that we did not have before, **BUT we still have to make the decision NOW** to AGAIN put aside the old identity and the old way of doing things. The Greek is "putting aside (at a point in time)" and "putting on (at a point in time)". *We make the decision, in the moment, for the moment.* **Am I going to apply the reality of Christ-in-me? Then I have to make room, by NOT doing what I would have done** (and maybe *still* want to do). **Next, I need to consciously ask the Holy Spirit to teach and help me to respond differently. Then, I must choose to express Jesus' heart of love and humility, ...even if it kills the old me!** (That is *exactly* what we want, by the way, ...to put to death the practices of the old life, and learn to live differently.) This can be really difficult! The flesh rises up in me and I *want* to say those old things, ...but **if I want to discover and live out the new life, the life of the Holy Spirit in me, I have to bite my tongue, put aside those old thoughts and choice phrases, and tune in to the heart of God. Then, as I understand how to answer differently** (renewing the mind), **I can choose to express that new heart by a Spirit-led word or action. Then, I will experience the renewing of life that comes with obeying the Spirit.** *I become renewed, in my practical and emotional reality, according to the image of God, who saved me and made me a new creature.*

The II Corinthians passage takes this to an even deeper level. The principles are the same, however. Paul says that our lives are to display the radiance and glory of God. Not everyone can see this, because Satan tries to blind them to it. **God has put His glory in us**, even though we are like clay pots. That's the *point!* ...**as people see the radiance of God's life coming from us, in the midst of difficult things, they will recognize that God must be in us**, because we couldn't be joyful and loving like this on our own. Our very difficulties and hardships become the canvas that reveals the life of God in us. To us, however, it means we have to carry around the "dying of Jesus", meaning the death to our self-life, in order that the "life of Jesus" might be expressed and seen in us. In other words, like Colossians, **when we choose to die to our own human selfish interests, and choose to live in the purpose, power and joy of God's will for our lives, God's Spirit will renew and energize us with joy and peace, and people will see the same life in us as people saw in Jesus Himself.** No matter what life throws at us, we can respond in joy and surrender to God's will, and come out radiating the light of God's victorious life to others.

The washing of renewal is the *ongoing* cleansing, healing, restoring and maturing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is the *expanding* of the life of Jesus through our *entire* lives, so others can see Him in us.