



## Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia

"your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" psalm 119:108

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### Sermon Meta Information

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| Preacher:      | Trevor Marshall   | Location:      | Brisbane South   |
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## Sermon

### Introduction

- a. *Some years ago a crowd of men and women were gathered in Hyde Park, listening to a young orator tell of the blessings of socialism. He grew eloquent as he told of all that socialism could do for men and women. In his enthusiasm he cried out, "Socialism can put a new coat on a man." In the crowd was an old man who had recently experienced the saving power of God in his life. He cried out, in answer to that challenge of socialism, "Jesus Christ can put a new man in the coat. Better a new man in an old coat, than the old man in a new coat. Any tailor can make a new coat, but only God in Christ, operating in a human heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, can make a new man.'* The change salvation through Christ Jesus makes to an individual is both wonderful and mysterious. Wonderful in that we see the positive fruits of a new life, mysterious in that we do not know how a sinner is changed by the power and purpose of God.
- b. To be changed from being a person who lived life as if God did not exist to being a person who loves, worships, serves and delights in God with all their heart, mind and strength is awesome. The work Jesus did in his suffering and death on the cross at Calvary fully and completely made propitiation for the sins of all those given to him and whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world. How is the completed work of Jesus applied to individual sinners in order to give them the glorious benefits the work of Christ secured? How does his work in paying the full penalty and ransom become mine so that I can be reconciled to God? How do I become a saved sinner? The apostle Paul tells us in **Titus 3:4-5**, listen to what he says; *'But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.'* The work of Jesus is made effective in us by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work in you changes you from being a condemned sinner to being a saved sinner. Only the Holy Spirit can do this work of change or conversion in an individual. Some think that by becoming a church member, whether through baptism or confirmation they become Christians. This is totally incorrect. **Billy Sunday** was right when he said, *"Joining the church does not any more*

*make one a Christian than entering a garage will change one into an automobile.” There is only one way a sinner is made a Christian and that is through the work of the Holy Spirit.*

### **1. The amazing work of God the Holy Spirit in saving sinners in regeneration**

- a. The word translated as ‘*regeneration*’ means to receive *new life* or to *be born again*. Jesus in **John 3:3** makes a categorical statement to Nicodemus and all those listening to him saying, ‘*Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*’ Sinners need to be born from above, by the mighty power of God. God alone can make a sinner dead in trespasses and sins alive. No sinner is able to give himself new life; he is unable and incapable of giving life to himself. The very fact that you need *regeneration* declares that you are without life. Listen to Paul expressing this truth in **Ephesians 2:1-3**, ‘*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*’ We were without life and lived disobedient lives ignoring God.
- b. How does regeneration happen? All the Scripture tells us is that regeneration takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration occurs in an *instant*. It is not a process like the growth of a seedling over a period of months. A person is either regenerated or he is not. There is no gradual in-between-stage. A person who is dead in trespass and sin is made alive in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration gives new life *instantaneously*.
- c. In regeneration the Holy Spirit gives new life in an instant and also *changes* the heart, soul and mind. The Holy Spirit does not give new life and then simply present the truths and realities of the Gospel and then leave it up to the individual to reject or accept them. The Spirit does not come with external arguments and try to reason with the person to accept Biblical truth as preferable to the ideas and opinions of men, but *penetrates* into the deepest recess of the heart, mind, and soul to make an effective change. The Holy Spirit goes to the source – to the fountain from which all actions, words, thoughts, and desires flow. He goes to man’s inner-core and changes it. **Proverbs 4:23** says, ‘*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*’ The sin that dwells within and makes us full of sin resides in our inner-most-being and unless we are changed at that point we are not saved. A man by will-power and encouragement of others can *reform* his life and manage his life in a better and more productive ways. A reformed life of an alcoholic is wonderful, but it does not essentially change the man’s heart. Regeneration touches the heart, mind and soul and therefore changes the source from which all man’s activities flow. The Holy Spirit brings *new life* not just reformed conduct. Christians are not renovated they are given *new life*. New life has been implanted into the believer, this is not earthly life it is life from heaven.
- d. **Titus 3:5** describes the work of the Holy Spirit as *the washing of regeneration*. God the Holy Spirit comes from the outside to implant life and to wash clean the heart, mind and soul of the sinner. In the language of **Isaiah 64:4**, the old sinful life of sinners made them *like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags*. The picture the words *filthy rags* ought to present to your mind is of bandages that have come off gangrenous wounds that are covered in stinking rotting flesh and puss. The prophet’s words are designed to give you a sense of being abhorrent and repugnant. In the *washing of regeneration old things pass away, and all things become new*, in a moral and spiritual sense, not in a physical and natural sense. It is the same man but the old habits, dispositions and evil ways have lost their controlling, dominating and condemning power. The Holy Spirit in applying the atoning work of Jesus breaks the power of sin and sets the sinner free. Guilt is gone, the condemning sentence is removed and the compelling enslavement is ended. **Charles Wesley** captures this mighty work of the Spirit in the fourth verse of his Hymn ‘*And can it be*’.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound by sin and natures night,  
Thine eye defused a quickening ray. I woke the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free I rose, went forth and followed thee.*

Sin is washed away, and cast into the depths of the sea and God remembers it no more. This washing of regeneration does not only deal with the past, but with the present and the future. Sin will never have the power to condemn, dominate and render the sinner guilty ever again.

- e. The *washing of regeneration* brings life and cleansing in the sense of destroying the power of sin. The Holy Spirit does not add anything new to the sinner's heart, or give more spirit, or even new faculties enabling new thinking and faith. God the Holy Spirit changes the disposition from love of sin to love for God. When the washing of regeneration takes place you do not receive a new intellect, will or emotions, but the Holy Spirit implants a disposition of grace which inclines, and sways, governs and makes the man a new man, a new creature, having new thoughts, desires, and affections, a new desire for a holy life. Without this change of disposition brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit the salvation of the sinner cannot be accomplished. It is this new disposition that causes the sinner to know, understand and fear the dreadful consequences of sin – it is this disposition that brings the need to be forgiven as a matter of importance and urgency to the heart – it is this disposition that makes finding forgiveness, cleansing and acceptance in Christ the cause for trust, hope and dependence. The *washing of regeneration* by the Spirit makes the offer of the Gospel wonderfully desirous to the sinner and animates him to embrace the Saviour.
- f. There are two additional points concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing new life and cleansing to sinners that need to be emphasised.

**Firstly**, in regeneration the Holy Spirit is absolutely sovereign. He does exactly what he desires according to his perfect and holy will. Jesus makes this point in **John 3:8** by saying, 'The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Who can control the wind? If men could redirect the winds the droughts would end at the command of men. As Jesus said the wind blow were it wishes, and so it is with the work of the Spirit in bringing regeneration to the hearts of men and women.

**Secondly**, regeneration is not preceded by faith. Faith is a fruit and evidence that regeneration has already taken place – the person who was dead is now alive and able to respond to the call of the Gospel of Jesus. The church cannot and does not produce Christians that is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit alone, he brings new life that leads to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. Being a Christian is not essentially about you making a decision to accept Jesus as your Saviour and Lord it is about being made alive by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. There is great encouragement and assurance in knowing that you believe because the Holy Spirit has given you new life, you believe because of his work and not through the manipulation of your emotions.

## **2. The awesome work of God the Holy Spirit bringing renewal to fallen men and women**

- a. When the Holy Spirit works in a sinner he gives new life and brings renewal to his inner-being. The Greek word translated as *renewal* is very close in concept to *regeneration*, but has a very important difference in emphasis – *regeneration* focuses on the change brought about by the giving of *new life*, *renewal* has its focus on *vitality*. Renewal prepares you for action. Scripture speaks of us being born of the Spirit, to be quickened and sanctified by the Spirit, to be led and guided, strengthened and helped, by the Spirit. Through him we put to death sin, perform duties, walk in God's ways, love one another and promote the Gospel. By the renewing power of the Spirit; all the acts and operations of the *renewed life in us*, the *works and fruits of righteousness without us*, are all done through him who is called the Spirit of life, of grace and holiness; all grace is from him. We must not underestimate the change the *renewed life* brings. We are told in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, 'Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things are new.' What does the Apostle mean by this? Think about how much you change in regeneration – you were dead, but now you are alive, - you were part of the kingdom of darkness, but now you are in the kingdom of light – you were under the dominion of Satan, but now Jesus Christ is your Lord – you were strangers from the covenants of promises, but now every covenant promise is yours in Christ – you were without hope, but now your hope is life eternal – you were without God, but now you are a son and joint-heir with Christ Jesus. You have been given the power to put off the

*old man* and put on the *new man* and walk in the newness of life. You have been renewed; you have a *new purpose to life, new ambition, new longings, new aspirations, new desires, new passions, new affections, new hope, new goals, new joys, new priorities, and a new relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.* And that's the renewing work of the Spirit.

- b. Paul in **Titus 3:6** tells us that the Holy Spirit has been *poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.* When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in a sinner, he moves in with all his might and power, he comes with power to wash and regenerate and to renew the heart, mind and soul to empower you to glorify God. Everyone who is *regenerated* has the Holy Spirit living in them – the believer is baptised, filled, anointed and renewed. The baptism, filling and anointing of the Spirit are not optional extras that you appropriate later on by faith because you have a sense that you need them. The fullness of the Spirit is given when you are regenerated. You do not embrace Christ as your Saviour to a life of frustration in trying to serve the Lord and fight sin without the needed power to honour God. When the Holy Spirit brings new life and causes you to embrace Christ he also gives you the power you need to be obedient to all the commands Jesus has given his people. You do not go through the so called first and second blessings in order to be able to serve and glorify God. The first blessing of knowing Christ as your Saviour and Lord is received **simultaneously** with the second blessing of being empowered by the Spirit for service. God has poured out his Spirit *on us abundantly.* *Renewal* by the Spirit equips you for service and sanctification.
- c. You may be wondering why, if you have been given an abundance of God's Spirit you seem so ineffectual and spiritually lethargic. Believers on Crete might have said to Titus, *'If we have the Holy Spirit living within us abundantly, then why do we still want to conform to our culture?'* This is a very important question and needs to be answered. There are three parts to the answer:

**Firstly** the problem may simply be one of *ignorance.* Christians need to be told repeatedly what is right and what is wrong in God's eyes. In almost all the epistles of Paul there is a call for believers to stop living according to the flesh and to live according to the Spirit. Perhaps the clearest example of this is found in **Galatians 5:16-26**, *"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."* Paul not only tells them what is right and wrong, but also tells that they are involved in a real fight to do what pleases God. This is the struggle of sanctification that believers fight throughout their earthly lives. This is a God given fight and he has given us everything we need to be victorious. We must not be ignorant of the fight or the means God has given us to be victorious.

**Secondly** the problem may be a *sour relationship with the Holy Spirit.* In **Ephesians 4:30** we are told, *'And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.'* In the context it is abundantly clear that Christians grieve the Spirit by sin. Paul lists the sins of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, lies, malice and theft, and calls on believers to stop doing these things. The word translated as *grieve* means *to be sorrowful, to be offended and to be in heaviness.* When we grieve the Spirit we sour our relationship and frustrate his work of making us more and more like Christ. Your progress in the Christian life depends on maintaining an enjoyable relationship with the Holy Spirit.

**Thirdly** the problem may be a problem of trust. Exercising trust is very difficult especially when the emotional elements of fear and doubt are present in the situation. We need to trust

the Holy Spirit in our fight against sin; it is by his power that we are to *put to death the misdeeds of the body*. (**Romans 8:13**) We need to trust the Holy Spirit to give us strength when we face daunting and difficult situations. Stephen preached to the Jews and they responded in anger taking up stones to stone him. How did Stephen respond? **Acts 7:55** tells us, *'but he, being full of the Holy Spirit gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.'* Stephen did not depend on his own strength but trusted the Spirit to give him enabling grace. In **Ephesians 4:18** Paul says, *'Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation: but be filled with the Spirit.* In the context of **Ephesians 4-6** believers need to be continually filled with the Spirit in order to: *submit to one another, honour God in the marriage, obey parents, respect employers, and be dressed to do battle with the Devil.* You need to trust the Holy Spirit to give you strength to live according to the Word and not trust our own abilities. Trust the Spirit to give you the grace to glorify God.

### **Conclusion**

Believers must stop living according to the *old man* enslaved to sin. Believers must start living according to the Spirit who dwells within them, who made them alive and who has renewed their lives for God's glory. Trust the Spirit and live according to the truth and give Christ the glory.