

Devoted to Good Works

It's so good for Coach Green to take interest in our boys," I said Rashona to Eleesha, the young mother next to her.

Their two 13-year-old sons were in the outfield on the baseball diamond on this sweltering August day in St. Louis.

"My Demery talks about Coach Green all time. He can't get enough of him," continued Rashona.

"It doesn't hurt that he is handsome and is in such good shape," purred Eleesha.

"I'm grateful he formed this baseball league to give our boys something to do and to help keep them out of trouble," Rashona replied, steamrolling past Eleesha's remarks. "And then to teach our kids about the Negro Baseball League. He is just such a good guy."

After the game, excited that their boys' team won, the mothers quickly headed to Coach Colby Green for two very different reasons.

"We really appreciate you, Coach Green," said Rashona. "You're such a good person."

"Thank you," said Colby. "But there is none good but God. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the love and goodness of God. I was steeped in my sins and mess before the Lord saved me. It's because of the Holy Spirit, who enables me to do good things."

"Really?" asked Rashona.

"It's the Lord who makes me look good." Colby smiled as he stepped back to gain more space.

1. *How would you describe someone who has been living a worldly life?*

2. *How would you describe someone who has been reborn in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit?*

3. *How would you explain the Holy Spirit to a new believer?*

Because of His Mercy

Titus 3:3-6, KJV

3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Titus 3:3-6, NIV

³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

While there are many types of conversion stories, they all have one thing in common: “Before Christ” and an “after Christ.” Paul describes the “before Jesus” state by using several provocative words, which might, at first, provoke a defensive response. But as we look closely, we might concede, “Yes, that applies to me.”

Being “foolish” (vs. 3) is Paul’s first “before Jesus” trait. Foolishness is simply the rejection of wisdom. Foolish people pursue self-interest above everyone else, including God. The second trait, being “disobedient,” is the willful decision to go against what God commands in a situation. Many times we know the right thing to do, but we decide to carve out a different path, a shortcut.

Paul also stated that before Christ, we were “deceived and enslaved” by a variety of desires. These include the abuse of power, sexual immorality, and out-of-control

appetites. These temptations hold out an empty promise of ultimate satisfaction. While indulging our desires may feel good in the short run, the resulting guilt and natural consequences of sin deflate us and leave us feeling terribly empty.

These sinful actions always lead to tensions in our relationships, especially in our friendship with God. When others see worldly success in us, they are prone to attribute dark motives to us and a bent toward selfishness that ignores the reasonable needs and interests of others. And they are often not wrong. Still, it upsets us when critics challenge our narratives. When we see success in others, we can become envious of the ways God has been generous to others—but not to us. You can imagine that this does not do a great job of generating good will between people. Paul described the resulting emotions as “being hated and hating one another” (vs. 3).

What a contrast when a person accepts Jesus’ offer of salvation and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to abandon those destructive patterns of behavior! Instead of pursuing the world’s version of happiness, one who is redeemed is able to be devoted to the advancement of God’s kingdom, using the gifts and abilities God generously bestows on all believers.

4. *From what does Jesus save all people who trust in Him?*

5. *What is the basis of our salvation?*

Justified by Grace

Titus 3:7-8, KJV

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou

Titus 3:7-8, NIV

7So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. **8**This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these

affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Building on the idea of the “newness” of life given to the person who trusts in Jesus, Paul gives insights into what can be expected on this journey.

The result of this new beginning is the promise of heavenly inheritance that cultivates the “hope” (vs. 7) within us for eternal life. This is no mere idealistic platitude. Paul emphasizes this by reminding us that what he’s teaching is “trustworthy” (vs. 8)—you can go “all in” on this biblical truth without mental reservation. This type of heavenly hope is a daily motivator for serving God and loving others. It fuels the endurance needed during times of suffering. This promise provides an unwavering sense of well-being deep within our souls, no matter what we’re experiencing, or the emotions that those difficult circumstances stir up within us.

Paul wanted Titus to remind those under his spiritual care that they needed to make the expression of these truths a daily practice, especially in the context of their relationships. It is truly in our interactions with others where the integrity of what we believe is tested. Then, according to Paul, the final results will be excellent and profitable—not only to the one who puts these ideas into practice, but also by those who are impacted by the godly and compassionate actions of others. Those who put these things into practice see the fruit in the relationships with friends, coworkers, spouses, children, extended family—and even those who might harbor hostility toward us.

6. *What did Paul want Titus to stress?*

7. *What did Paul describe as excellent and profitable?*

Avoid Arguing

Titus 3:9-11, KJV

9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

Titus 3:9-11, NIV

9But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.

¹¹You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

Respectful dialogue can be healthy. We come to understand our convictions and gain greater appreciation for those who are different from ourselves. A satisfying friendship is forged on this foundation. However, when conversations become “foolish” arguments about things that don’t matter, these are conversations to avoid (vs. 9).

Paul gave instructions for dealing with hostile and obstinate people. He told Titus to warn them once, warn them a second time, and then have nothing to do with them (vs. 10). God has called His people to a “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). But that does not mean we must endure endless patterns of divisive behavior or verbal assaults which only feed the appetites of difficult people, those who need to be the center of attention.

Paul did not mince words: There are people who are “warped” in their thinking, “sinful” in their disposition, and who stand “self-condemned” (Titus 3:11). Yet no one is beyond redemption. The goal of church discipline is always redemptive and always restorative.

8. *What did Paul want followers of Christ to avoid?*

9. *How was Titus to deal with relentlessly divisive people?*

No Longer the Backslider

Fred stopped believing in God. He believed that church was a waste of time and was only the white man's religion, given to African Americans because of slavery. As a successful account executive, husband, and father of four, he believed his good life was the result of education, hard work, and luck. Although he grew up in a God-fearing home and married a devout Christian, Fred remained adamant in his beliefs. The icing on the cake was that his lineage included three generations of preachers. Everyone thought Fred would be next. At 16, he was the youth pastor at his grandfather's church. The youth loved and respected him. He was their confidant and friend.

Sadly, things began to change when Fred went to college. His church attendance began to slack, and he eventually stopped attending altogether. It didn't help that none of his peers were Christians. Eventually he denounced God and the church, which broke his parents' hearts.

Twenty years later, Fred's daughter Clarise had a born-again experience which changed her life. Fred watched her renewal and remarked that she reminded him of himself years ago. One Sunday, Clarise ask her dad to attend church with them. Fred hesitated but eventually gave in to his daughter's request. He told his wife, "You know my baby girl gets me to do things I don't normally do." The Holy Spirit met him at the door. The choir was singing mightily; and his grandfather, who was now ailing, preached a heartfelt sermon. He felt the Spirit pricking his heart. His grandfather began to sing, "Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus right now. He will save you."

It wasn't long before Fred fell to his knees at the altar and rededicated his life to the Lord. His entire family rejoiced.

10. *Why would someone who grew up in church leave it?*

11. *Why is the leading of the Spirit essential for a person's renewal?*

12. *In what ways has the Spirit touched your life?*

The Renewing of the Spirit

In the world, there is foolishness, disobedience, and the desire to do everything that is against the will of God. Hate continues to increase. Destruction is on the rise. But despite all that, God continues to love His creation. God's arms are reaching out to everyone with love and forgiveness. His offer of love and kindness is open to all.

► *Pray this prayer or one like it today if you are a believer: "Holy Spirit, may I decrease that You may increase in my life, leading and guiding me to do the right things at the right time. Holy Spirit, my heart is open, and my ears are clear to hear what You are saying because You speak only what the Father says." If you are not a believer, pray that the Holy Spirit would come into your life after you pray the prayer of repentance your leader can give you.*

KEY VERSES

But after that the kindness and 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, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. —Titus 3:4-5, KJV

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. —Titus 3:4-5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 26 through September 1

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Corinthians 1:16-24—God's Promises Are Always "Yes."
- Tues.** Genesis 12:1-9—A New Life of Obedience.
- Wed.** Genesis 12:10-20—Fear Not Faith.
- Thurs.** Philippians 4:10-19—God Will Fully Satisfy Your Needs.
- Fri.** Colossians 2:6-12—Walk in Christ with Thanksgiving.
- Sat.** Psalm 16—God Gives a Goodly Heritage.
- Sun.** Genesis 13:8-18—Gratefulness for God's Promises.