

***Titus 3:4-7. <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>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, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.***

God does the refreshing work of eternal renewal

- I. It is poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ
- II. Through the Spirit it produces eternal rewards
- III. It leads us to continual service

Renewal is a key word in the early stages of any year. At the start of each year people are in search of all sorts of renewal. Many are in search for a renewal in strength and health. People look to a new diet or a new exercise regimen as a new year begins. This idea of renewal at the beginning of the year is so ingrained into our way of life that gift certificates to health clubs are given as Christmas presents and gyms themselves can anticipate renewed interest and so they offer special rates and free trials at the beginning of the year. An instructor at a YMCA in Duluth recently reported that 60 new memberships at their facility were started just hours into 2013. In these early stages of the year many are looking for some sort of renewal.

People not only look for physical renewal in their lives through diet and exercise but also in areas of finance or relationships. New Year's resolutions or simply the change in the calendar lead people to set goals to renew efforts to get a handle on their finances or to work to better their relationships. In general people look for renewal by getting up and making changes, getting up and doing things in their lives to make a difference. People all across the country are looking to do something that will produce positive results in their lives.

All these types of renewal require action by the person involved, don't they? A person can't just sit on the couch and expect to see changes in their energy level and health. Wouldn't it be great if you could have more energy and lose weight and you wouldn't even have to do anything? Wouldn't it be great if you didn't have to make any financial sacrifices or put in any effort toward other areas of your life in order to see positive results?

Unfortunately, it just doesn't work that way. The fact of the matter is that in order to attain any real positive results action has to be taken by that particular person. Perhaps this is a big part of the reason that many well intentioned plans, New Year's resolutions, and anticipated changes are ended in frustration and fall through. People are unable to start or sustain such action.

How refreshing it is to hear about the unique and drastically different way that God offers and gives spiritual renewal. It is not by our own efforts. It couldn't be. By nature we were all once lost and hopeless creatures. We were destined for hell and eternal ruin and failure. We were dead in our transgressions and sins and action needed to be taken to save us. But this is what makes our God so unique; this is what makes his love and kindness so remarkable. He is the one who took action.

We were the sinners who needed to change. He was the perfect and holy God. And yet in his grace and mercy God did all the work. The sinless Son of God not only took on flesh to become one of us, he carried all of our sins in order to reconcile us to God. The sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, walked in our shoes, followed our commandments, lived our humble experience, and then went to the cross to suffer in our place. He is the one who stepped in. He is the one who took action and made a positive change for us.

Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one. He was the one chosen by God to get up and make the change needed. He is the one who reconciled us to God through his perfect life. He carried our sins to Jordan's stream and then strengthened by the words of the Father he continued to carry our sins to the cross. He served as our substitute. Worthless sinners are made precious in God's eyes through his redeeming work. The crushing weight of our sin that would have killed us eternally is now gone, taken away, without any effort of our own. Jesus died to pay the price, to remove the weight of sin, and he rose again to assure us that we have been justified before God. Through Jesus we filthy dead in sin sinners are reborn and righteous in God's eyes. He has supplied and given us his innocence. He has set us free to live without the cost of our sin hanging over us. He has removed all our guilt.

He did it all and now he has sent us his Spirit so that we might believe that he has done the impossible. He gives us his Spirit and that Spirit works faith in our hearts and because of this saving work of God we have crossed over from death to life. This is the refreshing love of God, this is the good news that only he can provide. This is all because of him and the action that he took. It is only because of his love and kindness that we are saved. ***<sup>4</sup>But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.***

How refreshing it is to hear this good news. Jesus is the one who could save us, and now he brings about lasting renewal in our life. He supplies the power. He supplies the change. Not because of anything that we have done, not because of our righteous efforts, or our ability to change and appease God, but it is because of his kindness and his love he saved us, he brought us to life spiritually; and now he generously supplies us with rebirth and lasting renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Gym memberships may be offered for free for a month at this time of the year, but it still up to you to make the change. In his grace the Lord gives us spiritual renewal without cost. In his mercy Jesus took on the action of salvation because we

could not. And now he pours out eternal blessings on us generously by means of his Holy Spirit. He saves us and changes us and daily refreshes us through the washing of water and the word. God gave us baptism as a means of grace. And by means of the gospel in word and sacrament the Holy Spirit works to continual change our hearts. He used word and sacrament to bring us to faith. He uses his precious word and sacraments to keep us in this saving faith. Baptism is a continuous powerful stream of his love. It is a tremendous source of power for our daily lives. God wants his love that to rush over us, to refresh us daily. He wants us to tap into that source of his kindness and love.

The Holy Spirit is at work in baptism to bring us the benefits of God's kindness. He is at work to give us forgiveness and daily renew us to live for our gracious God and Savior; and the Holy Spirit is at work in Baptism to demonstrate and make known God's undeserved love for us. Consider the visual aid that Baptism supplies. Consider the visual aid of a child, an infant, a sinner who has no ability to please God or to reach out to him and so instead God reaches out and cleanses that child. With a few drops of water sprinkled upon his or her forehead a child born in sin is given rebirth. Even in the case of an older child or an adult, this is still a sinner who was born dead in transgressions and sins and through baptism there is a blessed change. Through the powerful word connected to that simple water he or she is reborn because of the goodness and loving will of God. All the glory goes to God, all that action is his. Just as a grown man cannot decide to enter the womb and be born again or a child cannot decide to be physically born the first time, those dead in sin cannot decide to have a spiritual rebirth. No, rebirth comes only from God. Our Lord God in his grace alone grants new birth and that new birth gives us lasting hope and an eternal reward.

The rewards we receive through Christ and through Baptism are strikingly refreshing because they are eternal. Another obvious shortcoming about physical renewal is so often it is temporary. For a while we might keep up, we might hit the gym, we might watch what we eat. For a while you might pay closer attention the wants and needs of your spouse. For a while you might pay closer attention and have a more disciplined reign on how you spend your money. And that might result in positive results *for a while*. But there is good reason that the beginning of the year is such a time of renewal. It is because somewhere down the line things get off track, things get overlooked. In our sinfulness we regress. We slide back into bad habits. We miss the mark on personal goals and positive results only have a temporary effect. But the blessings of God's grace are eternal.

Your baptism may have taken place years ago, but it will always have power. You can always draw strength and blessings for your life. A continuous stream, this living water will always be there to give you comfort. It will always be there to give you strength and renew you. Your baptism will bring you blessings through this life and into eternity. Through baptism, through this washing of rebirth and renewal by

the Holy Spirit we are made sons and daughters of God. He makes us his sons and daughter and thus our names are written on his eternal will, which means that we will inherit a rich reward of heaven where we will spend eternal life God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. We will be with our Lord forever.

This sure and certain hope of heaven, this destination that has been opened to us and made certain through Jesus, this gift of heaven sealed to us through the gift of Baptism changes the way that we live. We live each day with the sign of the cross on our hearts and our forehead. Each day we remember what Christ has done for us. Looking to our baptisms we are renewed by the refreshing facts of our salvation. God intervened. God took action. God saved us.

We could do nothing to save ourselves, but we are daily reminded of the great lengths our God took to save us. When we consider the loving action that he took to save us how can we not respond with love in return, how can we not respond in thanks! When we remember the free gift of salvation brought about by our compassionate Savior who willing suffered with us; when we remember the free gift of baptism through which God graciously made us his own; when we remember the free gift of faith that the Holy Spirit miraculously created in our hearts; when we remember all these deeds of kindness and acts of mercy how can we not gladly get up and live and move for Christ Jesus! This good news renews us to live for our compassionate God who saved us. In the cleansing waters of baptism we are connected to our Savior's saving work and we are clothed with Jesus' righteousness. He loved us first and so we are compelled to love him. God took action to save us so are we are moved to take action and show love to God and to each other. Compelled by the new life that he has given to us, compelled by the eternal life that we will one day receive because of Jesus, we live a life of obedience, a life of grateful love, a life of continual devotion. For we know that eternal reward, which Christ has given us, is ours only because of his unfathomable mercy. Just because he had pity and compassion on us, just because our Lord is kind, God sent his Son to pay for our sins and in love he gives us the means of grace so that salvation might be ours. A change was needed to save us, action was needed to rescue us, and we were unable to do anything to save ourselves. But thanks be to God, our gracious Savior Jesus Christ was ready, willing, and more than able.

In this time of the year when people look for renewal in so many different ways let us find renewal in Baptism. Let us find strength and power in those cleansing waters to serve our God now. Let us savor the joy that this living water gives us as we recall that it grants us life with our God forever. Let us look, today, tomorrow, and throughout the year to our Baptism, to the font and the cross, and realize that Christ Jesus did all the work to save us, to grant us blessings of forgiveness, life, and life eternal. Let us be renewed daily to serve our God and Savior who has supplied this refreshing news. Amen.