

As we take a closer look at the language used in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, we see that the words *washing*, *regeneration*, and *renewal* are used sparsely in the New Testament, in fact only twice each in their current Greek syntax. Washing appears elsewhere in Ephesians, referencing how Christ sanctifies and cleanses the church with the washing of the Word. The Spirit washes us; the Word washes us. With regeneration, Jesus mentions this word in Matthew in conjunction with the world to come on a grand scale, whereas here in Titus we see it more so in the personal life of the believer. God desires and provides regeneration and rebirth both in the dirty details of life as well as the overarching atmosphere. This comes along what we toward the end of Revelation about there being a new heaven (overarching atmosphere) and a new earth (dirty details). Also in this word we're reminded of the Spirit's presence in Genesis, how He hovered over the dark, formless void. Just as the Holy Spirit was a key agent in the creation of the world, so is He in the recreation of the world. Lastly, renewal is not only found here but in Romans 12. It comes at the therefore moment following 11 chapters talking about God's work and love for us, where we're then being urged to become living sacrifices, not being conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewal of our minds. God works, we respond. We love because He first loved us.

[2] This brings us to the second observation, that of good works. Good works is interwoven throughout Titus. Paul writes how people profess to know God, but deny Him by their works and hence are unfit for any good work. Titus is to be a model of good works as he leads the church that he is in. This brings to mind James and how faith without works is dead, as well as Ephesians which says that we were created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Said like this, it almost sounds like good works is something of a privilege for us to be able to participate in. Seeing them as a privilege greatly contradicts our normal "religious" mindset of rule-keeping and heartless duty.

Titus talks about how we should be ready for every good work, learning to devote ourselves to them for Christ gave Himself up for us to redeem us, making us His own and purifying us to be zealous for good works. As God's children, as His heirs, we are light that is to shine before others so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. This isn't out of a spirit of payback or karma in which, either before or after our re-birth, we are trying to make things even between God and us, settling the score so no one owes anyone anything and hence earning our salvation or our place in His household. In the previous discourse dealing with the work of the Trinity in redemption, it specifically says that God saved us according to His own mercy and not because of works done by us in righteousness. N.T. Wright sums up the tension between grace and works well. He writes:

"It is one of the most important principles of biblical ethics, and one trampled in the mud again and again in contemporary debate: that God's grace meets us where we are, but God's grace, thank God, does not leave us where we are; that God accepts us as we are, but that God's grace, thank God, is always a transforming acceptance, so that in God's very act of loving us and wooing our answering love we are being changed; and, more dramatically, in baptism and all that it means, we are actually dying and rising, leaving one whole way of life and entering upon a wholly different one."

We must leave a "works of righteousness" Christian karma mentality and take up good works, devoting, receiving, and walking in them as a humble privilege. This is the Father's desire, that the Spirit leads us in, all through the sacrifice of Christ.

[3] While there are multiple characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit (seven to be exact), the one that shows up frequently in Titus is that of self-control. Paul lists self control in his qualifications for elders, as well as an essential part of the Christian character for all those which the grace of God has appeared to – men and women, young and old alike.

Self control, at its core, is to live and speak sensibly, to be of sound-mind, not giving into various passions. This means that the diverse powers and desires God has given us need to be held in dominion, for they are capable of misuse. Remember, God created everything good; but key aspect of sin is that there is a twisting and exploitation

of that goodness; the right use of gifts and passions and authority, as a commentator has suggested, demands the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Spirit of God.

There are many ways we let ourselves get out of control that are more obvious, whether it be with our words, our sexual behavior, our addictions, our anger, our outright disrespect and greed. Most things that we would ascribe to the self-fulfillment style of the younger prodigal son. But then there is the other part of us as well, like the elder prodigal son, whose lack of true self-control is eventually made evident in its passion for self-preservation. Here we let our passions overtake us by discriminately and unlovingly, even pridefully judging others, by allowing our heart to feed off of man-made rules rather than drinking from the spring of eternal life. We bow to self-preservation by living a bubble wrapped life, by keeping to ourselves with no need for vulnerability, by checking boxes on our morality list showing how much better we are than those “others” over there, hence falling into the game of “works of righteousness” rather than walking in the good works prepared for us. Both self-fulfillment and self-preservation lead to self-condemnation, for those who live by their law will die by their law, devoid of freedom. Self-condemnation is just another form of *autonomy*, which means one who makes up their own law, their own rules. Or as Judges puts it, when everyone does what is right in their own eyes. Autonomy is the antithesis of godly Character and self-control. Autonomy strangles the life out of being truly and fully human in the way God wants us to be.

In conclusion, the internal knowledge of the truth of who God is and what He has done must then come to realization in the fruit of our lives, such as good works and being self-controlled. We are called to live in the reality that God has provided for us, both in all the junk of the world and in His training and renewing and re-creating us from glory to glory by the Holy Spirit. We’re not talking about perfection, not yet at least (and surely not in the 21st century way), but about character, character that will even trust in the love of God so far as to know it can confess and own up to its own sin and mistakes. If there is no glimmer of external fruit from the internal truth, we need to ask ourselves what our faith really is in and what Gospel we’re preaching to others with our lives. Is it the self-fulfilling, self-preserving, self-condemning work we conjure up ourselves? Or is it the transformative work of the Holy Spirit?

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. [Titus 2:11-14]

Silver Sword

John McKenna

Awoke in the city

Late afternoon

Born soul surrounded

By poisons and by gold

There a sea of people

In need of one good reason

Lost hope in fairy tales

And the birth of each new season

Found I a silver sword

And a name to carry

Born soul a second time

When I knelt before my Savior

Promise of a kingdom

From the grace of a king

No more lying vanities

And no more broken dreams

.R E F E R E N C E S .

Titus

2 Corinthians 3

Ephesians 5

James 2

Matthew 5

Matthew 19

Genesis 1

Romans 12

Judges 21