



The Allegan Congregationalist

August 2023

Our church exists to introduce people to Jesus Christ and train those who already know Him.

Jesus' Promises about the Holy Spirit

by Todd Wagner

Calendar Events:

- 8/25 Dine In Fundraiser Fish Fry for the Congregational Kitchen 4–7 PM



- Sept. 8-16 Volunteers needed to host the info table at the Fair for the Congregational Kitchen
- 9/24 Special Celebration to honor Leah VanOrder



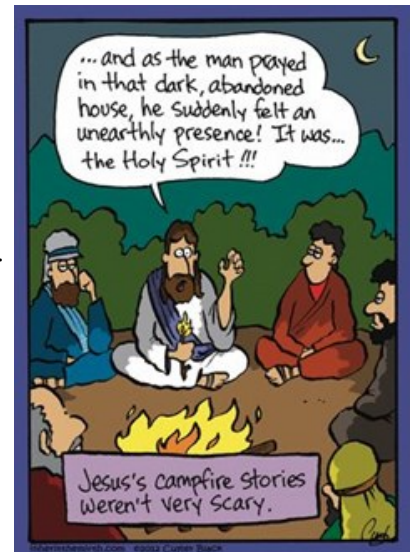
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As believers, one of the greatest blessings we have is God's promises. But have you ever taken the time to reflect on some of these promises? When we read the Bible, we find multitudes of promises made by the Father specifically for His people. In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus made many more which bring great joy and peace to all disciples who believe in Him. However, in the book of John, we find a promise which contains additional promises within the promise. Wait, what did you just say? Promises in promise, what does that mean? Well, it means exactly what you think it means. Let's take a quick peek in the book of John for a moment, shall we?

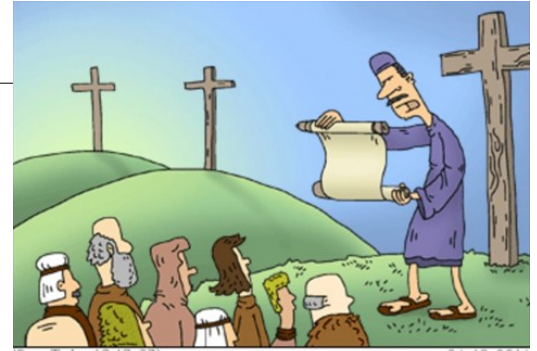
Now, we know from Scripture that Jesus' disciples were saddened when He told them it was time for Him to ascend to the Father. They had just endured the trauma of the crucifixion, and the death and burial of their Lord. Then on the third day, they got Him back. Now, He drops the bombshell that He was leaving them again. Can you imagine the emotional roller coaster they must have been riding? But we know Jesus wasn't going to leave them hanging like that. Instead, He promises that in His earthly absence, He was going to send the disciples a Helper, the Holy Spirit. Beginning in John 14, we read that the Holy Spirit will come to believers. Through the next four chapters (14-17), Jesus speaks of and teaches the purpose of the Spirit's coming and the promises of His work. Not only did He promise to give His disciples (then and now) the Holy Spirit, but He also explains the additional promises about the Spirit. These are the "promises within the promise." Let's look at these additional promises as I briefly list them according to John's Gospel.

1. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit in His absence (Jn. 14:16; 16:7). Jesus refers to the Spirit as an advocate. In Greek, it is *parakletos* which refers to "one who helps" by controlling, encouraging, or mediating on behalf of another (Barbieri et al 1648). In addition to His promise to send the Spirit, Jesus also promises He will "help you" and "*be with you forever*" (14:16).



Jesus' Promises about the Holy Spirit (cont.)

2. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit is **the Spirit of Truth**. He promotes and spreads the truth and agrees with none other than a divine person.
3. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will live within the believer (v.17), unlike the OT where the Holy Spirit was only “with” someone temporarily.
4. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will “...**teach us all things and remind us of what Jesus has said to us** (the disciples.)” Found in v. 26, the Spirit instructs believers leading them to follow God’s will. The Spirit gives believers access to God, His plans, and His wisdom. He can do so because of Jesus’ sacrifice for sins.
5. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will testify about Him (Jn. 15:26). This is linked to the command that the believers must testify also. The Spirit will inspire the believers to witness to others about who Jesus was and His teaching.
6. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16:8-11). The Spirit will accomplish this task through the believers (Barbieri et al 1651-52). The Spirit exposes sin both generally and by people’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah. Unbelief is the primary sin leading to all other sins. Proving righteousness describes the truth, right actions, and being in the right standing with God. It also declares Jesus righteous by His crucifixion, death, and resurrection, proving He is whom He said He was. Judgment here refers to how the world judged Jesus, condemning Him to death. He will now judge the world to determine who accepts Jesus as Messiah. The Spirit’s work in the world concerning judgment will be a reminder of Jesus’ previous actions (Barry et al).
7. Jesus promised the Spirit will **guide us** into all the truth (16:13). The Spirit will inspire the disciples in writing NT Scripture to further Jesus’ ministry.
8. Jesus promises the Spirit will speak only what He hears. The Spirit declares the things of Christ, honoring the Father and the Son, and never Himself. His work is Christocentric (Young 130).
9. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will tell the apostles (and us) of what is yet to come. John Hart states the Spirit will “disclose what is yet to come, referring to prophecy as Christ reveals the book of Revelation (Barbieri et al 1652).”
10. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will **glorify Him** (v.14). The Holy Spirit never takes credit Himself, but only glorifies the Son (Jesus). He promotes and orchestrates God’s will, taking the truth that comes from Jesus and disclosing it to believers. In this way, the “economy of grace gives a place of ‘executive leadership’ to the Holy Spirit” so He can honor the Father and the Son (Young 130).
11. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will **sanctify us** (Jn. 17:17). Jesus identifies the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth (Jn.14:16). To sanctify means to be “set apart,” to be made holy just as God is holy. Jesus was the way for believers to interact with God since their sinful nature prevented them from direct interaction. Like Jesus, the Spirit is sent to do the same work. This is one of the Holy Spirit’s many tasks he was sent to do. “The Spirit is the one who prompts and tends to this work” (Barry et al).

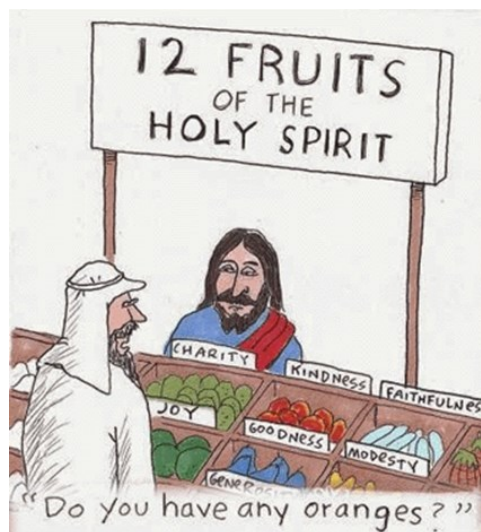


(See John 19:17-37)

04-18-2014

"I, JESUS, HEREBY BEQUEATH MY CARPENTRY STUFF TO ZED, MY GOOD TUNIC TO ROB, AND I'LL BE BACK TO PICK UP THE REST. TO EVERYONE IN THE UNIVERSE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE ... I LEAVE LIFE."

Jesus' Promises about the Holy Spirit (cont.)



In the end, Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit to His apostles, and all those who would come to believe in Him through faith. The Holy Spirit is to empower followers to accomplish the great commission, taking the message of salvation to the nations and teaching in truth. The same Spirit Jesus was endowed with during His earthly ministry, now is given to the church. I encourage all of you to listen to what the Spirit is telling you and to follow His lead. The next time you get “that feeling,” it just very well may be the Spirit speaking to your heart. Take a moment to listen and discern what He may be saying to you, and as always, test it according to God’s perfect will.

Annual FCC Picnic



The First Congregational Church family gathered at Little John Lake Park on Sunday, July 30, for our annual outdoor worship service. The choir and ukelele band helped to lead songs of praise while the warm sunshine filled the pavilion. We had the joy to witness the faithful testimonies and baptisms of Sue Belden, Lisa Letts, Carter Wagner, and Carson Wager. The day was concluded with a potluck feast.



Before & After: A Life Transformation Story

Will Dickerson's
August newsletter



When I was young, I had an impressive comic book collection. One of the mainstays of these “graphic novels” was an ad on the back cover touting the benefits of Charles Atlas’ amazing muscle-building regimen. The ad used a before-and-after story to show how Atlas’ technique could turn a 98-pound weakling into a perfectly formed, muscle-bound hunk. I suppose you could call this the “comic book” version of salvation. The apostle Paul, in Titus 3:3-8, presents us with a very different, but very real, before-and-after story. Paul begins by telling us that before, “we were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” Paul then tells us that afterward those who entrust their lives to Christ are justified by His grace and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.



There are, of course, some significant differences between these two “before-and-after” salvation stories. The comic book version tells you that you can save yourself. It tells you that by using the correct technique — that is by doing the necessary “good works” or by performing the proper rituals — you can turn yourself into a super-spiritual hulk. In other words, you save yourself. Scripture, however, tells us otherwise.

Look at the adjectives Paul used to describe us before we are transformed by Christ. He says we were “foolish,” “deceived,” and “enslaved.” If you understand the meaning of these words you will realize that we simply cannot save ourselves. Not only are we enslaved by our desires and sin, but we are foolish and deceived. In fact, we are so foolish and so deceived that we don't even know that we are enslaved. We actually think that we are free! Therefore, as Paul declared in verses 5-6: “[Christ] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit . . .”

Perhaps you know something about the life of Martin Luther. Luther began his religious career as a monk. He became a monk because he knew that he was a sinner, and he was afraid of God’s judgment. Luther had grown up being told that salvation was earned by doing the necessary “good works.” He was told that by following the proper religious rituals he could make himself just. So, Luther did everything he could to earn his salvation. In his heart, he knew that he was still an unrighteous sinner. So, instead of growing closer to God through all of his so-called “good works,” he grew more and more frightened of Him. Eventually, Luther was appointed professor of theology at the new university in Wittenberg. There he began lecturing on the books of Psalms, Romans, and Galatians. As he studied these books, he began to realize that salvation is not something earned through the performance of any so-called good deeds. He began to understand that God comes to us while we are still sinners. We don’t look in the mirror one day, realize we are the equivalent of 98-pound spiritual weaklings, and then decide to engage in a special training program to transform ourselves into spiritual hunks.

God came to save us while we were still sinners — while we were still His enemy. This fact has two important implications for us. First, it means that God knows your every fault and every sin, and yet He loves you. He did not wait for you to clean up your life. Therefore, you do not have to fear that you are not good enough; for your salvation depends on God’s love and faithfulness, which remain the same day after day. God loves you just as much today as He

Before & After: A Life Transformation Story (cont.)

did the day Jesus was crucified on your behalf. Second, it means that you have no reason to boast or to consider yourself better than anyone else. All of us are sinners. And just as God loves us, He expects us to love one another.

Many people imagine that life is just a long series of simple choices between doing that which is good and doing that which is evil. They think that if we choose to do that which is good more often than we choose to do that which is evil, then somehow we will be able to tip the scales of divine justice in our favor and earn eternal life. But this scenario is wrong on two accounts.

First of all, our deeds have no intrinsic merit in themselves. Let me give you an example. Let's say that one day while I am coming home from school I get off the tram to go the Post Office. While I am walking toward the Post Office, I see an old lady trying to sell some flowers from her garden. She is obviously just trying to earn enough money to make ends meet. What do I do? Well, down deep I really don't want to buy her flowers. Being a teacher, it is hard enough to pay my own bills without being nice to other people. But then out of the corner of my eye I see one of my students walking down the street, and I notice that the student is watching me. I want the student to think that I am a nice guy. So, knowing that I am being watched, I buy the flowers. Have I done a good deed? Will my actions earn me any spiritual merit points so that I can get into heaven? The answer to both of these questions is no! In one sense, yes, this may be a good deed. Certainly, some needy person will benefit from my actions. But why did I buy the flowers? Did I do it because of my love for God or because of my love for my neighbor? No! I did it for selfish reasons. I did it because I wanted to enhance my reputation. I wanted others to see how good I was. But as God looks at me, this deed is worthless in His eyes. He looks at my heart, and He sees how hard, selfish and sinful it is. He looks at me and He sees a self-serving worm — a hypocrite. The deed that I have done has no value in and of itself.

What counts is not the deed, but the condition of the heart of the person doing the deed. The second false assumption people make about salvation is that life confronts us with a series of simple choices between what is good and what is evil. In reality, we are never just confronted with two opposite choices. In fact, at any given moment each of us has an infinite number of choices we can make. For example, at this very moment I can do any number of things. I can continue working on this newsletter. I can jump up and dance. I can watch a ballgame on TV. I can go next door and hit my neighbor over the head with my Bible. I have countless choices. In fact, all of us are constantly confronted with an endless selection of choices. However, before Christ enlightens our souls, each and every choice we make is made in darkness and for selfish reasons; everything we do will be done to serve ourselves.

As we examine our lives, if we are really honest, we will quickly admit that we are sinners; all of us are far from perfect. Even as Christians, as those who have embraced Christ as our savior, we continue to stumble; we continue to sin. We continue to struggle with our selfish desires. If Christ had not atoned for our sins by dying in our place, we would all still be enslaved in the darkness of our ignorance. But as Paul tells us here: "When the kindness and righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"

Here, Paul gives us a picture of what life is like after we allow Christ into our lives. So, what should our lives look like then? First of all, we must recognize that we are all, each and every one of us, sinners who deserve damnation and who are unable to save ourselves — that without Christ we are foolish, deceived, and enslaved. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ now offers atonement for those who put their trust in Him and follow Him. When we

Before & After: A Life Transformation Story (cont.)

put our trust in Christ, we enter into a personal relationship with Him. The Christian faith, therefore, is not simply a theoretical concept. It is not something that you do for a few hours one day a week. It is not a business agreement or a spiritual life insurance policy. It is a personal relationship built on love and trust. It is a relationship that must affect every aspect of our lives, including the way we think.

Down through the ages, there have been some who have reasoned that since Christ has set us free from the condemnation of the law, since He has offered up a sacrifice for our sins, we are now free to sin all we want because Christ has already taken care of these sins. But here in Titus, Paul says that this is just wrong. In fact, someone who thinks like this doesn't have the slightest idea of what the Christian faith is all really about. This person is still very much a slave of ignorance and desire. As I said earlier, Christianity is not some kind of legal agreement or business arrangement; it is not some kind of eternal life insurance policy. It is a personal relationship based on love and trust. And if you love someone, you will do everything you can to please the other person. If you really and truly love Christ, you will now do everything you can to please Him. When we let Christ into our lives, He frees us from ignorance and blind desire. We are set free from our self-centeredness, and we become Christ-centered. So how should we use our freedom? We should use it to serve God and to serve our neighbor. As Paul says: "This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these 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 to all."

Do we earn our way into heaven by doing good deeds? No! We do what is pleasing to God out of love. When we look at this "before and after" picture which Scripture paints for us here, we see a great contrast. On the one hand, we see individuals whose small worlds revolve only around themselves, thinking of little else but satisfying their own urges and desires. We see individuals who are foolish, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. On the other hand, we see those whom Christ has rescued from that darkness, those who in the light of divine truth have recognized their sinfulness and who have turned to Christ for help. And we see that they have not turned to Christ in a cold and dispassionate way. They have not turned to Him as a criminal might turn to a lawyer; but they have given their hearts to Him. They love Him with all of their heart, mind, soul and strength. And this love changes them. It changes the way they think and the way they act. And out of this love we see good deeds blossoming.

Hence, we see quite a difference between the two pictures. We see quite a difference between those before Christ has come into their lives, and those after Christ has come. Unlike, the comic book version of salvation, however, this transformation is not something that we ourselves can effect. We can not turn ourselves into spiritual musclemen. Yes, we are new creatures. But we are new creatures because of what Christ has done in us. And now we have been charged with the task of letting this light — this new life — shine through us for the world to see, so the world might know how good and great our savior is.

Once again, we would like to express our deep thanks and appreciation to you for taking the time to read our letters. Thank you, too, for your prayers and support. Please continue to keep our grandson Reese in your prayers. We are thankful for good results on recent blood tests, but Reese still needs your prayers. Thank you!



8/3 Ivy Belden
 8/7 Ray Harris
 8/11 Al Letts
 8/12 Judy Ewing
 8/12 Terry Misner

8/17 Sue Belden
 8/23 Aiden Letts
 8/24 Erica Quiñones
 9/9 Janet Siegler
 9/10 Austin Letts
 9/11 Stephan Allen
 9/30 Cathy Morgan
 9/30 Randy Sneller



8/9 Scott & Karen Ehrich
 9/4 Ray & Gerry Harris
 9/25 Denny & Leah VanOrder



Please call the office if there is an anniversary or birthday you would like to add to the list.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner	4 8 Food Warehouse	5
6 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship CE Mtg	7	8 7 Diaconate Mtg	9 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	10 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner	11 8 Food Warehouse	12 8:30 Men's Breakfast 
13 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Trustee Mtg	14	15	16 5:45 Prayer Mtg	17 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	18 8 Food Warehouse	19
20 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	21	22	23 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	24 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	25 8 Food Warehouse	26
27 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship CE Meeting	28	29	30	31		LITURGIST: Todd W. GREETER: Sue B.

The First Congregational Church of Allegan



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Worship with us on Sundays at 10:30 AM!

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Come Join Us at the Fish Fry

Come out and Dine in
to support the
Congregational Kitchen's
annual fish fry fundraiser.

Suggested donation is \$10 / meal.

Friday, August 25

4:00—7:00 PM

