

Introduction

Often the point of Titus chapter 3 is popularly reduced to verse 5, how God's grace saves us apart from works. And how true that is. But the context tells us far more than just that. Before reading through the notes in detail, read the major headings one right after the other (I, II, and III).

I. We believers must be reminded to live properly... – v. 1-2

How needful it is to be reminded of Bible truth. Most of have good memories...they are just short! Seriously, the flesh, that is, the sinful nature that we retain even as believers, does not want us to remember and practice godly things. So it is important to put yourself under the "reminding ministry" of the Word of God on a frequent basis so that you do not go astray. Paul tells Titus here that he must (imperative) continually (present tense) remind the people. It is an ongoing thing. It is just the way it should be in the church. Here are the things we need reminding about:

- A. To be subject to rulers and authorities. The idea here is not just to "be submissive" but to "submit yourselves," that is, willingly submit yourselves to those authorities over you. Primarily in view here are governmental authorities. This would include speed limits, taxes, hunting and building permits, you name it—anything that people normally fudge or cut corners on. Christians are not supposed to be looking for ways to get out of these things. That is the entirely wrong attitude. We should be looking for ways to make sure we do things the right way.
- B. To obey magistrates. This is similar to the previous point. There are different levels of authority in life, and each one is to get his due respect (Rom. 13:7). Home life is a particularly important place for this to start. Children are to be obedient to parents, and wives are to submit to husbands (Eph. 5:22, 24, 33; Col. 3:18). See Rom. 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 for more details on the general concept of being subject to governmental authorities. Note: The obedience that is commanded here does not contradict other explicit commands of God. That is to say, if someone in authority over you commands you to sin, that is exempted from this command. Why? God is not the author of sin, and to blame him saying, "Well, I had to sin because you told me to obey my authorities" is itself sinful and shows a lack of discernment. Consider the apostles in Acts 5:29. Or the midwives in Exodus 1:17 who did not kill the Israelite boys as they were commanded by Pharaoh, because they feared God. The Bible explicitly tells us that God blessed the midwives because they disobeyed Pharaoh (Exodus 1:20-21)!
- C. To be ready for every good work. This means to be prepared, and for *every* good work. This is not limited to government or society (previous context), but good works in general. Maybe you find yourself prepared for good works relative to yourself but not others? Well, prepare for the latter as well!
- D. To speak evil of no one. This means to malign or blaspheme or slander or revile or treat someone with contempt. Such is not to be on the lips of Christians.
- E. To be peaceable (not a fighter). What this says is that you are not to be one who goes looking to pick a fight (not even a "spiritual" fight). Such would seem to fall under the teaching of James 4:1. Not only that, but you are one who actively avoids quarrels and contentions.
- F. To be gentle. Oh the beauty of a gentle saint. This is one who is forbearing, reasonable, fair, considerate, yielding, not stubborn.
- G. To show all meekness to all men. Finally on our list is the quality of humility or meekness. This is a person who is mild, patient, not self-assertive or harsh. The word "showing" means to demonstrate the quality, not just talk about it. The word "all" indicates that we are to do the whole job, not just sometimes.

II. ...For we formerly were ungodly... - v. 3

The emphasis is clearly that we *were* full of ungodly behavior, we *used to be* bad (but we should not be now!) We practiced these kinds of evil traits, not just "sometimes" as the KJV might seem to indicate on a surface reading, but "at one time," that is, during the time before we were saved.

- A. We were foolish. We had no understanding. This is not surprising, since we were dead in sin. See Rom. 3:11. The wisdom of God was foolishness to us.
- B. We were disobedient, that is, insubordinate and unbelieving, of God, and of authorities. Certainly some people have more trouble with "authority" than others, but externals have little to do with what we are talking about here.
- C. We were deceived. We were led astray, as by a false guide. We thought all the wrong thoughts about God and His Word and His people, etc.
- D. We served various lusts and pleasures. The word "serve" here really means "enslaved." We were slaves to all kinds of evil passions. See John 8:34.
- E. We lived in malice and envy. "Lived" means "spent our time in." What a truth that we wasted time living in evil and jealousy!
- F. We were hateful to others. This may be somewhat hard to understand, but the term means detestable, loathsome, or despicable. This seems to indicate that we were hated by other people. It is strange, since all unbelievers are united against God, that they would hate one another. I suppose their hatred one for another is only exceeded by their hatred for God and His followers.
- G. We were hating others. Ditto above. "Hate crimes" are a hot button today. But these have been going on ever since there were people!

What we should understand from these three verses is that:

1. Unbelievers *are* this way *now*. We ought not be surprised that they behave like this. We are not to treat them hatefully (or any other way listed above), for we were this way once too (Ex. 22:21, 23:9; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19, 15:15, 24:22).
2. We *were* this way if we *are* a believer. We ought to be surprised that we would fall back into such behavior. And we are *certainly* not to treat other believers this way!

III. ...But God saved us! – v. 4-7

The grand point is this: there has to be a marked difference in the life of the believer after salvation as compared to before because God did some tremendous work in saving the believer.

Note an interesting thing in this text. If you read carefully, you will see that verse 4 says "But when...appeared" and verse 5 says "He saved us." Both verbs are past tense. The *when* and *appeared* seem clearly to go together, referring to the incarnation and cross-work of Christ. But what about the *saved* part? Were we saved back then too? Well, yes and no (don't throw the tomato just yet!). As far as the *provision* of salvation occurs, it was made once and for all at the cross of Christ. We can say this is the objective basis of our salvation. But as far as the *application* goes, that did not occur until the washing of regeneration and renewing work of the Holy Spirit. So then, the "timeline" of salvation is compressed so that the past work of Christ, the present application of it, and the future hope resulting from it are all spoken of in one place.

Salvation in this section is emphasized to be totally revolving around God himself, not us! This is how Christianity is, particularly from God's perspective. If we can get this same perspective, we will shed any puny, man-centered ideas of salvation and the Christian life and instead take on God-honoring, Christ-centered thoughts of salvation.

A. The Basis – v. 4-5a

God's Kindness, Love, and Mercy

God here is called our Saviour (is he *yours*?) because the Father too is involved in the work of our salvation. The point of this section is to say that salvation cannot be based on good works. It is based on three character traits of God: kindness, love and mercy.

These speak of the goodness, lovingkindness, philanthropy, and benevolent concern that God has for mankind. He by mercy withholds from us deserved punishment. These great characteristics are not left in the abstract for us, but they “appeared” at a point in history of which we have already spoken (Titus 2:11, same verb “epiphany”). In fact, if you want to know anything about God, then look at Jesus Christ. He is the perfect embodiment of all that God is!

Salvation came “in accordance with” His mercy toward us. In other words, arising out of his merciful pity on us, and operating in conformity to that mercy, he did something for us.

Salvation did NOT come “by works of righteousness.” Let me put it simply this way: Salvation could not be based on good works, because we never did any truly righteous works, nor were we able to do so. Titus 1:16 says that unbelievers are disqualified from doing any good works. Jesus said that there was only one Good, and that was God (Matt. 19:17; Mark 10:18). Jesus Himself was the only human being that consistently always did good (Acts 10:38).

The issue is this: are you trying to take a flimsy step-ladder to heaven, or are you riding the elevator of God's mercy which is hydraulically powered by the work of Christ?

B. The Means –v. 5b-6

The Holy Spirit's Regeneration and Renewing

Neither can salvation be obtained through good works. Do you follow the difference from what I said above? Above what I emphasized is that good works do not merit a favorable standing with God. Here I'm saying that good works cannot be the channel through which any other kind of favorable standing with God can appear, NOT even the work of Christ! This is the way to answer to the Mormon who says that “we are saved by Jesus Christ after all that we can do.” In other words, they try to make a basis of salvation the work of Christ, but the only way to achieve or obtain it is by good works. No way Jose! This adds to Christ's work and ignores what we've already said about the possibility of doing good works in the unregenerate state (nil).

Rather salvation comes through two other means, both of which resolve down to the work of God. That is to say, salvation is monergistic—One is doing the work. It is GOD-CENTERED, GOD-ORIGINATED, and GOD-IMPLEMENTED. (Think about this carefully please—monergistic comes from the roots mono, one, and ergon, work. We say salvation is apart from our own works. Therefore, the “work” of salvation is done by one person, not two. And that person has to be God, not us!)

1. The first means is regeneration. This is not the naturalistic idea of “new life in the spring” that comes from the old life that was there last fall. It is not that there is a divine seed or spark in each person that simply needs to be resurrected or freed from the prison house of the body. It is not a cosmic regeneration at the end of all things. It is the impartation of a new spiritual life in the person. In other words it is personal. This is the John 3 “born again” idea. Accompanying the regeneration is the cleansing from sin (forgiveness). This is *not* a reference water baptism. Water baptism does absolutely nothing TO you or IN you. In it, you are doing something, not it doing something to you. It most certainly does not wash away or mute original sin (the sin nature), nor does it cleanse from the imputed guilt of Adam. These sin problems can only be dealt with by the sacrifice of Christ being applied to your life through faith.

2. The second means is the renewing done by the Holy Spirit. I understand this to presuppose that we become indwelt by the Spirit. He initiates this “making new” process, and while we are genuinely new creatures at that point, he is not finished. He *initiates* and *continues* this work of renewal (Rom. 12:2, Eph. 4:23, Col. 3:10). Thus verse 6 teaches that Christ poured out His Spirit on us abundantly, richly, generously. There is no lack of supply on Christ's part for our spiritual needs. If there is lack of anything, it is in us, not Him!

Both regeneration and the renewing work of the Spirit are experiential. They are not limited to the realm of judicial or legal, as if they are never felt nor ever make any practical difference. Much to the contrary, they are intimately related to life. They effect the teaching of 2 Cor. 5:17 wherein we are made new creatures. The old is gone, the new is come—rejoice!

C. The Hope – v. 7

God's Inheritance

The “that” at the beginning of verse 7 indicates a result of our salvation. Now that we have been “justified,” we have become heirs of a great inheritance.

To be justified means to be declared righteous. The NLT incorrectly translates this as “to be declared not guilty.” But a “not guilty” status is not enough for salvation—we need the removal of sin *and* the granting of the righteousness of Christ. That is what justification is all about. This comes only on the basis of grace, through faith, never of works (Rom. 3:28).

The contents of the inheritance is not directly referred to here, but it seems to be all that God has in store for us in glory. We are heirs “in accord with” what we hope about eternal life. In other words, our expectations about eternal life, based on what has been promised about it, will not be dashed. We will be heirs of all that, nothing less.

Conclusion

The point is, dearly beloved, that God has done such a wonderful work in us by regenerating and renewing us, and for us by justifying us, that nothing else logically follows than to live for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

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