

Text: Titus 3:4-7

Title: Salvation, the work of God

Truth: If You are a Christian...Who did it, Why, and How did it happen?

Date/Location: Sunday August 29, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Titus 3:4-7 ⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The “but when” phraseology points back to verse 3’s “we ourselves were also once foolish...hating one another.” And that fits with 3:1-2 where it defines proper Christian conduct. We live godly (1-2) because we were at one time sinners (3) but are now delivered from that by Christ (4-7). Who we are in Christ is a complete transformation from our prior state, and that transformation is explained in great detail in the verses 4-7.

I. Who: The Triune God, v. 4, 5, 6

- A. The Trinity is here: God the Father appears in verse 4. Jesus Christ is in verse 6, and the Spirit is in verse 5. Notice also that verse 4 says “God our Savior” and verse 6 ends with “Jesus Christ our Savior.” Both are Savior. “God and Savior” referred to Jesus Christ in 2:13, and in verse 4 it is “God our Savior” which seems to refer to the Father. The apostle Paul *clearly* believes and teaches the deity of Christ. Jesus is God, the Father is God, Jesus is Savior and in a sense the Father is Savior as well.
- B. It is also notable that Paul says “He” (start v. 6) poured out the Holy Spirit (end v. 5) through Jesus Christ (end v. 6). Each member of the Triune Godhead is part of a chain of causation that brings salvation to humankind. God the Father is the *ultimate* cause. The Lord Jesus Christ is the *meritorious* cause. The Spirit of God is the *effective*

cause.¹ Furthermore, *instrumental* cause of salvation is the gospel, and the *obtaining* cause of salvation is personal faith.

II. Why: The Lovingkindness of God, v. 4, 5

- A. We see everywhere around us the *cruelty of man*. Let us focus our minds for a few minutes instead on the *kindness of God*.
- B. When the kindness *appeared* specifically refers to the first coming Christ, just like did in 2:11. In that verse, Jesus is described as the very manifestation of divine grace to human-kind. Here, Jesus is the incarnation (en-flesh-ment) or embodiment of kindness, love, and mercy. Very love in the flesh, divine kindness displayed in human form, perfect mercy exhibited in a perfect man.

There is a sense in which the “when” idea subsumes two points in time: the first is when Jesus came, and the second is when God saved your soul. As such, if in your mind you combine all the various moments throughout history in which people are washed and renewed, the “when” covers all time since Christ came. That’s all a bit theoretical, but what you can take away is this: basically, when you learned who Christ was and really grasped the salvation that He offers, that’s *when* He appeared in your spiritual eyesight. That was the time you realized Jesus came for your benefit and died for your sins and rose again to justify you!

- C. The basis of spiritual salvation is God’s kindness, love, and mercy. This is why God did what He did for us! God is good, generous, and kind. God is also philanthropic—thus his “love toward mankind.” According to the LSJ Greek-English Lexicon, this “philanthropy” is benevolence and tender-heartedness. God has an interest in the well-being of mankind, something like (but far greater than) a rich philanthropist who gives to help people with basic necessities.

He is the opposite of an inhumane person, who treats life as expendable and delights to shed blood (like a terrorist or abortion doctor). God loves mankind, but those who demand to live in sin do face God as an enemy, as one who is highly displeased.

¹ See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 447, and my notes “What Must I do to be Saved?” <https://www.fbcaa.org/Docs/bulletins/BiblicalConditionsOfSalvation.pdf>

III. How: Washing and Renewing, v. 5-6

The agents of salvation and their motivation for it were explained above. The method or “how” of salvation is given next—negatively and then positively.

- A. First, the “not how.” Notice that works of righteousness were not considered as the entry-point into God’s plan of salvation. They are irrelevant for obtaining salvation.² They are not a basis or cause of salvation. In fact, verse 3 makes it clear that we did not do good works before we were saved. Instead, we were foolish, disobedient, deceived; we served lusts and pleasures, we lived in malice and envy, we were hated and hateful toward others. By any measure, these are *not even close* to works of righteousness! 1:16 tells us that we were *disqualified* from good works—unfit for doing anything good. Examined for qualification, we were rejected.
- B. Note the contrast: not what WE have done, but what HE did. God does the action; we receive the benefits, not the other way around. When you abandon all your self-righteousness, “what I did,” and “how I have faith” and that “God will accept me like I am or because of what I have done,” only then you will be in the blessed state of understanding the free salvation God offers. Grasp that and you will understand true Christian salvation. It spells the end of all personal effort and reform and moral improvement as a means to gain God’s favor. The convicting work of God will show you that your impure efforts cannot be fruitful or pleasing to God. Before you were redeemed, you were unable to do real good.
- C. So what exactly did God do? The text expresses it in three words: washing...regeneration...renewing. These are interconnected and happened in one grand moment at the beginning of your salvation. Let us examine them one at a time.
- D. Washing. Please do NOT go down the road that so many commentators do. They say something like this: “the washing of regeneration refers to the rite of water baptism which was emphasized in the early church.” NO!!! This is *not* water baptism.

² You can see in verse 8 that good works are not entirely irrelevant. They are *required* for all who believe—*after* they believe.

This is not the “washing of baptism.” It is the “washing of regeneration.” The closest “baptism” to the initiation of regeneration is *Spirit* baptism, not water baptism. But even that connection is not theologically precise, because Spirit baptism refers to the placing of a person into Christ and the body of Christ.

It cannot be the washing of baptism, because that would make regeneration equal to baptism. There are regenerate people who have not yet been baptized in water. There are saved people who never were baptized in water. This includes all Old Testament saints, the thief on the cross, some disobedient people, and those who converted in the last moments of their lives when their eyes finally were opened to the need for Christ. Anyway, baptism does not wash away the filth of the flesh (1 Peter 3:21).

So if washing is not *that*, what is it? John 3:5 and Ezekiel 36:25 explain it. Washing is cleansing from sin. It washes away the old you, the old sinful unredeemed self. It purifies, like Ephesians 5:26. It washes away the stain of sin and all impurity. It is the bath of salvation after which you only need the ongoing foot washing (John 13:10).

- E. Regeneration is the imparting of spiritual life to a spiritually dead person. It happens in an instant, it is supernatural,³ and it renders a sinner who is dead in sin (Eph. 2:1) as a person who is alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5, Col. 2:13).
- F. Renewing. The idea is found in Romans 12:2 and Titus 3:5 and Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:23. It is a spiritual changeover from old to new, to different, transformed. It is a refresh—but not like a new coat of paint. Instead, it is a build of the sub-structure of the wall so that it functions differently *and* looks new. It is like a reprogramming of the mind, a firmware upgrade that changes your basic operating methods.

One thing about renewing: it starts definitively at the time you become a Christian. But it also continues throughout your life. As you engage with Christian truth in church meetings³ and in reading

³ I am fine with using the term ‘miracle’ for this act of God. It is not normal or “natural.”

the Word and praying, your mind will continue to be transformed so that it thinks in more spiritual terms.

- G. The work of washing, regeneration, and renewal are done in your life by the Holy Spirit, at the direction of God and Christ. When the text says that God poured out on us abundantly the Spirit through Jesus, it means that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is extensive, rich, dramatic, all-encompassing, far-reaching. John 3:34 teaches that God does not give the Spirit with a stingy measure—but rather in a big way.

IV. Benefits of Salvation, v. 7

- A. Justified by grace. To be justified is commonly understood to mean that a favorable verdict is passed on you. In Christian theology, to be justified is more than that—it is the *making* of a person righteous in standing before God and then rendering that favorable verdict—despite the sin that the person did, because that sin has been removed and placed upon Jesus Christ. The fact that God justifies sinners is amazing (Exodus 23:7). He does so on the basis of plain undeserved favor. It is a complete gift, unwarranted, to unworthy people.
- B. Heirs with eternal hope. God’s design in salvation—toward humanity—is to change us from lost heirs of corruption into inheritors of eternal life. We who were poor He has made rich. Our hope is the certainty of expectation of life eternal. This is what carries you through deep trials all the way to the end of life. Think of this compared to the puny temporal hope of this short life.

The only way you get to be such an heir is to be justified by grace (above).

Conclusion

This section describes the gracious work of God whereby Christians are redeemed and cleansed and renewed. This is how we escape a foolish, disobedient life, and are transformed by God into good citizens and upright people while we await the second coming of Jesus and His kingdom.