

The Books of Titus, Philemon, and Jude

Lesson 5: Saved by the Washing of Regeneration -- Titus 3:1-11

Picture the person you were before Christ found you. Paul does not let his readers forget that person. "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another" (v. 3). It is not a flattering portrait, but it is an honest one. Before grace, every one of us was caught in a current we could not escape, carried along by appetites and resentments, doing harm and being harmed. Paul includes himself in that "we." No one in the room gets to feel superior.

And then come two of the most beautiful words in the letter: "But when." "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us" (vv. 4-5). Into that hopeless current, God stepped. Not because we had cleaned ourselves up. Not because we had earned His notice. "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (v. 5). The whole rescue is traced back to the goodness and kindness and mercy of God, poured out on people who deserved none of it.

Right at the center of that rescue Paul places a stunning phrase: "the washing of regeneration." God saved us by a washing that brings new birth. This is the new birth Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus, the being "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5), the moment Paul elsewhere describes as being buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). It is all of grace, all of mercy, never earned, and yet God has appointed a place where that mercy meets us, washes us, and makes us new. Grace and the washing are not rivals; they are friends.

Paul does not leave this truth floating in the abstract. Because we have been so freely saved, we are to live as new people: submissive to authorities, gentle, peaceable, ready for every good work, no longer the quarrelsome, envious people we used to be. The same grace that washed us is meant to reshape every relationship we have. As you read these verses, hold both halves together: marvel at a mercy you could never earn, and let that mercy send you out gentle, humble, and eager to do good.

Group Discussion: Paul says God "saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (v. 5). How does this single verse hold together both the truth that salvation is entirely by God's mercy and the truth that God saves us through the washing of the new birth? Why is it important to keep both halves and not lose either one?

Personal Reflection: Paul makes every Christian remember who they once were: "foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions" (v. 3). Spend a moment honestly remembering what your life was, or would be, apart from Christ. How does remembering the

“before” deepen your gratitude for the “but when God” of the gospel, and how should that gratitude shape the way you treat people who are still where you used to be?

Read Titus 3:1–11

Study Questions

1. Paul tells believers to “be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work” and to “speak evil of no one” but be “gentle” and “courteous to all people” (vv. 1–2). What does this teach about how Christians are to live in society, and why does the gospel produce this kind of citizen and neighbor?
2. Paul calls believers to “show perfect courtesy toward all people” (v. 2), including those who oppose them. Who is the person you find it hardest to be gentle and courteous toward right now? What would it look like this week to let the gospel govern the way you treat them?
3. Paul reminds us that “we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions” (v. 3). Why does Paul insist that Christians remember their former condition, and how does an honest view of what we were apart from grace shape both our humility and our gratitude?
4. Paul describes the old life as being “slaves to various passions and pleasures” (v. 3). Slavery to a passion often hides behind the language of freedom and choice. Is there an appetite or pleasure that has quietly become a master in your life? What would it mean to bring that to the One who saves us from such slavery?
5. Paul says, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us” (vv. 4–5). What does this turning point reveal about why and how God saves, and what do the words “goodness,” “loving kindness,” and “mercy” tell us about the heart of God toward sinners?
6. Paul roots our entire salvation in God’s mercy, not our merit (v. 5). Where are you still tempted to base your standing with God on your own performance, feeling close to Him on your good days and far on your bad ones? How does resting in His mercy rather than your record change the way you walk with Him?
7. Paul says God “saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (v. 5). How does this passage present salvation as entirely by grace and mercy while also connecting that salvation to the washing of the new birth, and how does this exclude both salvation by works-merit and a faith that bypasses obedience to God?
8. Paul says God poured out His Spirit on us “richly” so that we might “become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (vv. 6–7). What does it mean to you to be an heir of God, and how would living each day as an heir of eternal life reshape the way you handle today’s worries, disappointments, and decisions?
9. Paul follows the gospel with sharp instructions: “insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works” (v. 8), while avoiding foolish controversies and warning a divisive person twice before having nothing

more to do with him (vv. 9-11). What does this teach about the proper relationship between sound doctrine, good works, and the unity and purity of the church?

10. Look back across these verses. Paul has moved from who we were, to the mercy that saved us, to the washing that made us new, to the new life of good works that flows out of grace. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Titus 3:1-11 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 3:1-8, being born again of water and the Spirit; Romans 6:1-7, baptized into Christ's death and raised to new life; Acts 2:37-41, repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins; Ephesians 2:1-10, made alive by grace, not by works, yet created for good works; 1 Peter 3:21, baptism that now saves through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.