

Realities To Remember

Titus 3:1-8

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In Titus 3:1-8, Paul says, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish...” describing our preconverted days “... disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...” I like that “...through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.” That’s the behavior of belief. “These things are good and profitable to men.”

Paul had been giving Titus instructions on belief and behavior. If I were to theme the whole book of Titus, it would be “the behavior of belief.” What we believe determines how we behave. So sound doctrine leads to sound living. And in chapter 1, Paul talked about how we behave and believe in the church. In chapter 2, he spoke about how we behave and believe in the home. In chapter 3, he introduces how we behave and believe in secular society or in the world around us.

The pattern of chapter 3 is the same as that of chapter 2; it begins with ethical instructions on how Christians are to behave in a non-Christian world, in the society around us. Then it grounds our behavior in Christian belief and doctrine. We cannot separate doctrine from behavior; what you believe determines how you behave.

In verse 1, Paul says, “Remind them.” He was telling Titus to remind the believers on Crete of certain things. In the Greek, it’s in the present-imperative tense. That means he is commanding Titus to do it in the present tense but to keep on, continually, habitually reminding them of certain things. He’s saying, “Here’s your job as a pastor: to keep on reminding them of these things.”

Paul told Titus to do this because, number one, the teaching Titus was about to give was not new. They had heard it before. You’ve heard me say, “If it’s new, it’s not true; if it’s true, it’s not new.” So if it’s in the Word of God, I’m going to repeat it over and over again.

I’m also going to repeat it because one of the great dangers as Christians is forgetfulness. A repeated phrase in the Old Testament is, “They soon forgot.” Let us not soon forget. Let us not forget the horrible pit that God brought us out of. Let us not forget the love, mercy and grace of God that brought salvation. Let us not forget that He forgave our sins, that He gave us new life, that He gave us the Holy Spirit and that He gave us the hope of heaven.

We're never going to grow beyond those points. We can grow deeper in understanding of old truths, and we need new light shed on them, but we're not going to learn anything new. In the book of Jude it says that we should "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). So we repeat it over and over.

I like what John R.W. Stott said, "So also today's pastors and Bible teachers need to be delivered from the unhealthy lust for originality and take pains to make old truths new and stale truths fresh. Not only that, but the pew should be free from the unhealthy lust to have their 'ears tickled.'" They're wanting novelty rather than sound doctrine. "Give me something that's new and different."

I thank God for our church; that we come with the Bible, the Word of God open, and we're ready to hear the Word of the Lord. So you're not going to hear anything new today; it's been in the Bible for many, many years.

Now what did Paul want Titus to remind the believers of on the island of Crete? Three things. I've reduced all eight verses to three things. Number one is to remember your civil obligations, verses 1-2. Paul says, "Remind them..." continually and habitually "...to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey..." "magistrates," it says in the King James translation "...to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men."

As a Christian, your citizenship is in heaven. We are pilgrims and strangers on this earth. But that doesn't free us from the responsibility of being good citizens on earth. If you get pulled over for speeding by a policeman, you can't say, "This world is not my home; I'm just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." We do have to obey the laws that be. The powers that be are ordained of God. He has ordained human government.

It's interesting that in chapter 1, we have the church; in chapter 2, we have the home; and in chapter 3, we have the government and the world. Those are the three divine institutions that God has ordained. God hasn't ordained any particular form of government, but He has ordained human government. In Romans 13:1, it says, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." And 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."

It's hard to pray for leaders and rulers who are evil and when you have laws we don't agree with. But we need to be obedient and submit ourselves to the Word of God.

I want to break it down for you. There are two sections in these first two verses of our text. First, it is to rulers, verse 1. And second, it is to all men in society, verse 2. Toward rulers, we are to be "subject." But there are times when the government tells us to do something that is contrary to God's law. Then "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

However, we need to make sure that obeying the government's command forces us to disobey God. You can't be driving down the street speeding, get pulled over and tell the policeman that God was leading you by the Holy Spirit so you just floored it. No, He wasn't. That isn't contrary to God.

In Acts 5:29, Peter and the apostles were told not to preach in the name of Jesus. What were they going to do? They're going to disobey the law. "We ought to obey God rather than men." So there are times when we must practice civil disobedience.

Second, notice that we are told to "obey." So we are called "to be subject to" and to "obey," to be law-abiding citizens. And who do we "obey"? "Rulers and authorities" or "magistrates."

Third, we are to "be ready for every good work." This is running all through our text; it opens with it, and it closes with it, in verse 8. All throughout our Christian life, we are to be doing good deeds. If we believe in Jesus, we are to behave as Christians should. So not only are we to be law-abiding; we are to be law-spirited, public servants, eager to do whatever is good.

The "good works" mentioned in verse 8 could be civil duties, helping in the culture around you. It's not just serving in the church but going out into the world and being "salt" and "light" (Matthew 5:13-14).

The purpose of the state is to punish evil and to promote good. If the state starts to promote evil, then we cannot cooperate with it. I think of John Bunyan, who lived from 1628-1688. He was told in England that he couldn't preach the Gospel. They threw him in prison, where he wrote Pilgrim's Progress. He was told that if he stopped preaching, they would let him out immediately. But he said that if he was let out today, tomorrow he would be in the town square preaching the Gospel. He would never stop. "We ought to obey God rather than men." So we are to be submissive and obedient to the "rulers and authorities," and we are to "be ready for every good work."

But now Paul broadens his instructions to "all men." He says "to speak evil of no one." Don't slander anyone. But rather, "Be peaceable" or "no brawlers"—it's not a good idea for Christians to go around beating people up—"gentle, showing all humility to all men." Notice the repetition: "No one" is to be maligned or slandered, and "all men" are to be shown gentleness and meekness. Paul is telling us what the social attitude and behavior of the believer should be toward unbelievers, the unsaved, the non-Christian culture around us.

And negatively, verse 2 says we are not to speak evil of anyone. When the words "speak evil" are used to address God, it is blaspheming. When it is used to address people, it is slandering. So we are not to be bad-mouthing or slandering individuals, even people of other political persuasions. I know that's really hard to do.

These are the kinds of verses we wish were not in the Bible. "Do I have to?" Yes. God have mercy on me! Sometimes we end up hating the sinner instead of the sin. We are not to do that. We are to be meek, patient and kind toward all men. Don't be brawlers or contentious,

verse 2. Don't be quarrelsome; be peaceable.

We are to be "gentle," which means "considerate." I like that. You should be considerate, even of non-Christians around you. Show them clemency and be conciliatory. And what a great attribute meekness is. It means to show kindness and humility toward others.

Gentleness and meekness are singled out as being attributes of Jesus when He was on the earth. He was "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). We are to be like Jesus. As we move through the culture and the world around us, "God, help us to be like Jesus, gentle and meek." And it is to be "to all men." It's to be to unbelievers, no matter their race, religion or their political persuasion. It is hard, but God's grace in our lives should empower us to show grace toward others.

Paul now goes on to list the theological reasons why Christians are to have a social conscience and behave responsibly in public life. The second thing Paul wants us to remember is our former condition. Verse 3 says, "For we ourselves were also..." He uses the "we" here to include Titus, himself and the other believers on Crete. Paul puts this in the past tense, saying what they used to be before they put their faith and trust in Christ. "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another."

It's not a very pretty picture. But it is a picture of us before Christ. Here we are in the Bible in our BC days, before-Christ days, before-converted days. This is how we lived: "foolish, disobedient," which means we were mentally and morally depraved. We were "deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures" or enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. Read Ephesians 2. We were dead, depraved, doomed and disobedient.

Also notice, in verse 3, that we were "living in malice and envy." "Malice" is wishing people evil or harm, while "envy" is resenting and coveting their goods. Both disrupt human relationships, especially in a marriage relationship. We should never have malice in our heart toward our spouse or be envious of them.

Verse 3 also says being "hateful and hating one another." We lived in hatred and hated one another. You've often heard someone say, "I hate that person!" That should never be found in the heart of a true child of God.

This is how society lives apart from God and not knowing the Savior, Jesus Christ. They don't have a relationship with Him. They don't know the grace of God. They haven't experienced the mercies of God.

Our former life was the opposite of how we are now to live. John R.W. Stott said, "This is a deliberate antithesis. It seems to be the development between the kind of people Christians should be, verses 1 and 2, and the kind of people we once were, verse 3. It is a contrast between submissiveness and foolishness, between obedience and disobedience, between readiness to do good and an enslavement by evil, between kindness and peaceableness on the

one hand and malice and envy on the other, between being humble and gentle or being hateful and hurting.” So this is an intended contrast. This is how you are to be, verses 1 and 2. And this is what you were, verse 3.

The question at this point is, “How does a person break out of the old mindset?” It’s the mindset of being hateful, hating, despising, lustful and controlled by anger and hatred. How can we become new creations in Christ?

The answer is in verses 4-8. And this is the third thing to remember: your great salvation.

What a black picture is painted of us in verse 3. “But...” or “after that “...when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared.” You would think that “after that,” the judgment and wrath of God would appear. No, because God is kind and loving, and He sent the Savior to save us.

Verse 5, “...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” This is the answer to the question, “How can I be free of the old, sinful lust of the past?” The answer is, “He saved us.” This is Christianity in a nutshell. We can’t save ourselves; He saves us. Christianity is God’s rescue mission.

And how did He save us? “...through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God...” there’s the belief “...should be careful to maintain good works.” There’s the behavior. “These things are good and profitable to men.”

So the answer to leaving the old life of foolishness and disobedience and being enslaved by all kinds of passions is in verse 5 in the phrase, “He saved us.”

Are you glad that God saved us? Are you glad that Jesus came from heaven to rescue us? Salvation starts with God; it was all God’s idea. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the angels woke up the shepherds saying, “There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior” (Luke 2:11); not a politician. Jesus Christ came to rescue us.

In verses 4-7, Paul gives us one, long sentence in the Greek. It gives a full and comprehensive statement on salvation. When he says in verse 8, “This is a faithful saying,” that is a reference to a creed or a song, a hymn they sang in the early church. This could have been a creed that was sung by the early Christians. So there is a lot of doctrine packed into these verses.

He came to save. 1 John 4:14 says, “The Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” He didn’t come “to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

There are six ingredients or theological truths for salvation or how He saves us. First, we see the need for salvation, verse 3. We were “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts

and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” We need a Savior.

The Bible teaches what is called “the Fall of man”; all of humanity is fallen. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). When you look at mankind, you must understand Biblically that we are fallen. Yes, we are all made in the image of God; we have the great ability to do good and be like God. But we need salvation.

Secondly, we see the source of salvation, verse 4. “The kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared.” Praise God for His kindness! Praise God for His love! By the way, the word “love” is the word “agape.” The word here is “phileo,” from which we get our word “Philadelphia.” We also get our word “philanthropy” from it. So God is a philanthropist. He loves us and He wants to rescue us. So salvation has as its source the heart of God, which is kind and loving.

And we cannot save ourselves. You can’t save yourself by keeping the sacraments, by being baptized, taking communion, being confirmed, living a good life or being devout and religious. Have you heard the expression, “Pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps”? It doesn’t work. We can’t save ourselves; we’re dead, depraved, doomed and living in darkness. God must rescue us by reaching down in His kindness and His love. This is what God does; salvation is of the Lord. He shows us His kindness and mercy.

In 2 Samuel 9 David treated Mephibosheth, the lame grandson of King Saul, with great kindness. David brought him into his house. He fed him and took care of him. That is a picture of God’s kindness to us. So the kindness of God and the love of God is the source of our salvation.

Thirdly, the ground of our salvation is seen in verse 5. The negative says that it is “not by works of righteousness.” The Bible makes it very clear over and over again that we cannot save ourselves by good works.

Someone needs to tell President Donald Trump that you’re not going to heaven because you stop a war. You don’t get brownie points. We are saved by grace; not by good works. You’re saved by believing and trusting in and putting your faith in Jesus Christ.

So the ground of our salvation is not our “works of righteousness,” but it’s “according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” It’s at the Cross of Christ where we are forgiven, rescued and saved.

Fourthly, is the means of our salvation, verses 5-6. This kind of breaks it down further. First is “the washing of regeneration.” This is what God does to save us. “The washing” speaks of being bathed and forgiven of our sins. Sometimes salvation is likened unto a bath. David said in Psalm 51:2, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” And in John 13:10, Jesus told Peter that he didn’t need a bath, because he had already bathed; he only needed his feet washed.

When we are saved, we have a bath. That's "the washing of regeneration." You can only be born again once. Sometimes people say, "Pastor, I need to be born again, again." No. If you've been born again, which is the regeneration, the washing, you don't need to be born again. But you might need your feet washed. And there are a lot of Christians who have stinky feet. When you sin as a Christian, you don't lose your salvation; you lose fellowship, communion. So then we need to confess our sins. Getting our feet washed, in the episode with Peter and Jesus in John 13, is 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So if you are a Christian and have dirty feet today, ask God to forgive you, to cleanse you and to restore fellowship with Him.

I like this "washing of regeneration." And the same phrase is used in Ephesians 5:25-26, where he talks about husbands are to love their wives: "...just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word." So the church is washed and cleansed with the water of God's Word. Salvation involves both the Spirit of God and the Word of God in bringing new life to the heart of the child of God.

What does the word "regeneration" mean? Jesus told Nicodemus, in John 3:5, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." That's regeneration. It's the same thing as being born again or being born from above. To be regenerated means to be given new life. You were dead and He gives you new life.

I don't believe that regeneration precedes faith. I believe regeneration happens at the moment of faith. The moment you trust in Jesus Christ, the moment you believe in Him—and that can only happen if God's Holy Spirit convicts you and convinces you of your sin and your need of a Savior—it is God's grace at work. He said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

How do I explain that? I can't. But it happens the moment you believe in Jesus Christ; you are given new life. In John 20:13, John said, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." So I don't believe regeneration precedes faith, but it happens the moment we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and are born again.

Notice also that we are renewed by the Holy Spirit, verses 5-6. It says, "renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit in you. The King James translation has "Ghost," but don't be freaked out by that. It means "Spirit." But all Christians have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit are the same Person. "Ghost" is just old English.

And I believe that the moment you trust in Jesus, you are forgiven, you are given new life and you are given the Holy Spirit. And how much of the Holy Spirit do you get? All of Him. That is why I don't believe Christians need to pray for "a dose of the Ghost." You already have the Holy

Spirit.

But does the Holy Spirit have you? You have Him and He's inside you. But does He have you? That's what it means "to be filled." It means to be controlled by Him. So you don't need more of the Spirit; the Spirit needs more of you. You need to surrender to Him.

That's why I believe the Spirit-filled life is the Word of God, the Spirit of God in you so you walk in obedient to God. When you accept Christ, you are complete in Him. You have everything you need for "life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). You just need to read and discover what you have and appropriate it all by faith. So the means of salvation is "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Fifthly, the goal of salvation is in verse 7: "having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." So at salvation, two things happen. First, you are justified. Read Romans 3. The whole book of Romans is about justification. What does that mean? Justification is the act of God—He does it; we can't justify ourselves—whereby the believing sinner is declared righteous by God, based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

If you are a Christian, you are justified, you are declared righteous and you are acquitted. You stand righteous because "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). It's called "imputation." The righteousness of Christ is imputed to you, and your sin was imputed to Him. He paid a debt He did not owe; you owed a debt you could not pay. Jesus gave you His righteousness and took your sins. So we are justified before God.

And second, the goal of salvation was that we become "heirs according to the hope of eternal life." This is John 14:2-3: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." If you are forgiven, washed, justified, regenerated and given the Holy Spirit, you are on your way to heaven.

All of this is in our text to motive you to live a godly life and do good works in society. All of these blessings are yours in Christ Jesus.

And sixthly, is the evidence of salvation, verse 8. "These things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works." That's it: "good works." All through Titus we have read about the "good works." Titus 2:14 says, "...who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." So our belief results in our behavior.

In summary, He saves us, verse 5; He washes us, verse 5; He regenerates us, verse 5; He gives us the Holy Spirit, verses 5-6; He justifies us, verse 7; and He makes us heirs of God, verse 7, and "joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

Isn't that good news? So go out and live the Christian life in the dark, sinful world around us.