

Titus 3:4–8

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

Two Motives — What We Were and What God Is

Scripture presents motives for Christian conduct. Chapter 3, verse 3 supplies one: we were once the same as all others — foolish, disobedient, led astray, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy. That is a humbling reminder. And then verse 4 gives the other: *but after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared*. What we were makes no claim on God's goodness. What God is explains everything that followed. These two together shape the Christian's view of himself and of God — and from that right view, ordered conduct flows.

The Kindness and Love of God Our Saviour — Appeared

In chapter 2:11, the grace of God carrying salvation had appeared. Here it is the kindness and love toward man of our Saviour God that has appeared. The Greek

word rendered love toward man is philanthropy — but this is a divine philanthropy, not a human one. Human philanthropy has man at its base and operates in human measures. Divine philanthropy has God at its base and operates in divine measures. What appeared is not the kindness and love of some evangelist, or of some institution of Christian charity — it is the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man that appeared. That is the source and the character of the whole.

Not by Works of Righteousness — But According to His Mercy

The basis on which this kindness and love appeared is stated plainly: *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us*. Works done to earn favour with God — even the most sincere and devoted of human efforts — are what Isaiah called filthy rags. They are like the fig leaves Adam and Eve resorted to in the garden — ineffectual, inappropriate, evidence that something was wrong rather than fruit flowing from something that was right.

Mercy and grace are distinct. Grace is God acting according to what He is, in spite of what we are. Mercy looks at the need that God sees in us and meets it. Grace speaks from the character of the giver; mercy speaks to the condition of the receiver. Both are present in what God has done: He saved us according to His mercy, and being justified by His grace.

The Washing of Regeneration and Renewing of the Holy Ghost

The instrumentality of our salvation is expressed as the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. The word regeneration appears only twice in the New Testament: here, and in Matthew 19:28 where it describes the millennium — the new state of things that the Lord's appearing in glory will bring to the earth. In both cases the thought is of a thoroughgoing change, not a superficial

washing that only touches the outside, but a bringing of what is washed into a new sphere, a new state entirely.

This is not a resuscitation of the old — as if the old nature were taken and gradually improved and conformed to Christ. That error — the denial of two natures — leads to viewing Romans 7 as the normal Christian state, which is not the truth. The old nature remains unchanged; it is corrupt and will not improve. What God does is implant a new nature and bring the believer into a new sphere entirely, where the Holy Spirit operates. The renewing of the Holy Ghost speaks of that constant and ongoing action of the Spirit in this new sphere, making good to us all that is found there — not a stirring up of something that was languishing before, but the continuous operation of the Spirit in the new place into which God has brought us.

And He shed the Spirit on us abundantly, richly — not in some measured quantum, parcelled out according to capacity. John says He gives not the Spirit by measure. The gift is according to God's measure, not man's — an excellent sufficiency, far beyond what we might think to ask or imagine. This is through Jesus Christ our Saviour — and the Trinity is implicit throughout: God our Saviour acts, the Spirit is poured out, the channel is through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Justified by His Grace — Made Heirs According to the Hope of Eternal Life

The purpose: *that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* Darby's marginal note indicates that the *His* refers to God our Saviour — it is by the grace of the Saviour God that we are justified. Romans 8:16–17 speaks to the same position: *the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.* From being lost sinners, we have

been brought into the place of heirs of God, sharing the inheritance with the very Son of God. That is the intimacy of the relationship we have with the Lord Jesus — we are one with Him, loved with the same love, given His place before the Father.

Eternal life here is not denied as a present possession — John's Gospel makes very clear that it is the present possession of every believer. But the apostle Paul characteristically looks at the full completeness of what is before us — when not only our spirits and souls but our bodies are transformed into conformity with the body of His glory. The hope of eternal life is a positive expectation, not an uncertainty — a deferred certainty, the completion of what is already ours.

This Is a Faithful Word — Good Works as Fruit

Verse 8 insists that these things are to be affirmed strenuously. The word is faithful — these are not religious ideas about which reasonable people can differ. This is the exclusive doctrine of Christianity: there is no justification, no washing, no renewing, no inheritance in any other way. All roads do not lead to Christ — this is the one Name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

And those who have believed God — not merely believed *in* God, acknowledging the existence of a supreme being, as demons do — but believed God, received what He has said, taken His side against themselves as sinners and received His word about Christ — such are to be careful to maintain good works. These good works are not the works of verse 5, done to earn favour before God. They are the fruit that flows from the new sphere into which God has brought us. They flow because the word is faithful and operative in the soul. Goodness itself is of God — the Lord said, there is none good but one, that is God — and therefore works that are truly good flow from the action of God within us. Without the faithful word received and operative, there are no good works. With

it, they are the natural, living, ongoing fruit.

— *Study ends* —