

Titus 3 – Rich and Deep Truths

Last week we addressed the basic commands for daily life that we have as Christians: be submissive to authorities, be obedient, be ready for good works, speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle and courteous. As some of you noted afterward, that raised questions about where civil disobedience or standing against an unjust government fits. We will come back to those questions after we finish going through Titus. For today I want to revisit the long and theologically deep sentence that we introduced last week from verses 4-7.

This sentence addresses God's goodness and mercy to us in salvation, as the pattern and reason for us to offer the same to others, even though they don't deserve it. I want to re-read starting in verse 1, as it lays out the commands for us, followed by the reason.

As we think through the basic commands we are given, we could categorize them all as giving honor and showing grace to others, regardless of extenuating circumstances. That is the basic rule, and we must understand its foundation and application before we can examine any exceptions to that rule. Why are we to give that honor and grace to others? Because that is what God has given to us when we were foolish, disobedient, etc. Now I want to dig into the theological depths of that mercy, as expressed in vs. 4-7.

Goodness and loving kindness – this is what God showed to us in Christ. Goodness is sometimes translated kindness, and expresses goodness in actions. This same word is found in Rom 2:4, "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance". In Eph 2:7 we're told "in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." We deserved punishment for our sins, yet God extended kindness to us, giving us good things, even to the extent of offering forgiveness for our sins. God intends at some point to use that as an object lesson, showing how extravagantly kind He has been to us. "Loving Kindness" is actually the word *philanthropy*, another way of demonstrating love for others by actions. Jesus went about doing good, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, welcoming the outcast – and He has continued doing that through all the ages since.

Verse 5 gives the true application of that goodness and kindness – "He saved us." The word also means to heal or to make whole. Sin is a destructive force in our lives, leading to death. When we talk about being saved, we really need to remember that it is more than "just" being forgiven of sin – we are restored to perfect wholeness with God. Man was created in God's image and likeness, with the intent of being in perfect relationship with God, but sin broke that relationship, separated us from the God who made us, and marring the image of God in us. It also brought sickness, sorrow, disease, and death into our lives. God's act of salvation reverses those things and restores us to all that God intended for us. If you think about the 23rd Psalm, we find the phrase, "He restores my soul" – that is the idea. We'll look at the results of that salvation in just a little bit.

First, a reminder that this wonderful gift of salvation was not because we deserved it, earned it, or any such thing. It was all according to His mercy. Mercy carries with it the idea of pity, having compassion on someone who is helpless. Mercy describes God's attitude toward those who are in distress because of sin. Eph 2:4 says that God is rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, and Rom 15:9 says that we should glorify God because of His mercy. Luke 1:50 tells us that His mercy is for those who fear him in every generation. This indicates God's prerequisite – that we recognize our guilt and our deserved judgment; then God's love acts in mercy toward us. What is the act of loving kindness that

He does for those who fear Him? “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” When we acknowledge our sin, our guilt, and cry to Him for help, in His mercy and love He washes us, gives us a new birth, a new life through the work of the Holy Spirit, who was given richly, abundantly, through Jesus Christ. The “renewal” speaks of a fresh working of His Spirit in us, enabling us to live our lives for Him.

What is the result of this regeneration and renewal? “Being justified by his grace...” To justify means to declare righteous. We, who previously were guilty sinners, deserving of God’s judgment, are not only treated with grace and kindness, but in saving us, declares us to be holy in His eyes. This, of course, is through His grace, an undeserved favor. What’s next? Once we are declared righteous, we “become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” An heir is one who inherits the family property. Our inheritance is life eternal with God as His children.

In one sentence, we have so many rich theological truths presented. God’s goodness, kindness, and mercy which saved us, washing us, giving us new life in the Spirit, that we could be declared righteous by grace, and become heirs with real hope of eternal life. We have received so much from God, and that should lead us to show the same kind of goodness, mercy, and grace to others, so we might lead them to receive God’s salvation also.