

God and Savior Jesus Christ. What could we do for ourselves? What did we *deserve* for ourselves? But what did *he* do for us? He appeared! He, the goodness and kindness of almighty God in human flesh and blood – the goodness and kindness of God appeared! His name is Jesus Christ (!) and *he saved us!* He saved us out of the living hell which we had created for ourselves and the eternal hell to which we were deservedly destined.

What a great verse! “*But* when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior (Jesus Christ) appeared, he saved us... .” By the way, that word translated “loving kindness” in the ESV is literally, in Greek, literally the word we know in English, *philanthropy*. The *philanthropy* of God appeared! It literally means “love of humanity.” In our English usage, we think of philanthropy as financial generosity, magnanimity, freely giving of one’s exceptionally bountiful resources and riches to do good for others, out of a dis-interested, self-less love of humanity. Now, think about the *philanthropy* of God! Out of the inexhaustible resources of his goodness, kindness, mercy, and love, he has freely and magnanimously poured-out upon us his saving grace through Jesus Christ. And the incredible thing is that he has poured-out this saving grace upon wretched sinners who were “foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing (their) days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). This is the philanthropy of God ... toward you and me.

And now, do you see how doctrine and ethics really fit together? How God’s grace and our good works really fit together? Why, why does God command us to “be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy to all people”? Why? Because that’s how God has treated us: graciously, magnanimously, kindly, helpfully ... when we didn’t deserve it. And when we imitate him, we show the world what the true God is really like.

This wonderful sentence concerning our salvation through Christ continues:

But when the goodness and loving kindness (philanthropy) of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy ...

This verse echoes Ephesians 2:8-9,

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works

Please do not let verses such as this pass over you to quickly or too lightly. We should always marvel and rejoice at what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Every other world religion presents man with some means by which he must save himself, by which we must make ourselves acceptable to God, by which we must work our way and earn our way into heaven or some other form of eternal blessedness. But not the gospel of Jesus Christ! No, the gospel is what God has done for sinners who could do nothing to save themselves, by sending his eternal Son in the world in human flesh and blood to live a perfectly sinless righteous life and to offer himself as the full, perfect, and all-sufficient, atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world; so that, forgiveness of sins might be freely granted through his shed blood, and unrighteous sinners might receive his perfect righteousness

through faith. The goodness and philanthropy of God appeared in Jesus Christ, and he saved us, not because of our works, “but according to his own mercy ...” – mercy, full and free, mercy undeserved, mercy poured out from the very heart of God.

If this does not continually cause us our hearts to rejoice, and does not move us to seek to live lives for his glory, if such kindness does not melt our hard hearts with a spirit of repentance such that we want to please and honor him; if we have no desire to serve this Savior, no aspiration to press forward in faith to know more of him and his grace and love, then surely we are dead in our sins; and I would plead with you, do not neglect so great a salvation, but give yourself to the One who has given himself to you and for you, in goodness and kindness toward you. Do not reject the *philanthropy* of God!

This wonderful verse concerning salvation continues further:

...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, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our savior ... (Titus 3:5-6).

“...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” – this is the new birth that comes by the working of the Holy Spirit, personally in our lives. “The washing of regeneration” is the washing away of our sins by the blood of Christ, signified by the sacrament of baptism. The water of baptism is likewise the sign of the Holy Spirit, who gives new birth and new life. The washing of regeneration is the imagery of cleansing and new birth, and the “renewal” is the new life we are given by the Spirit, in which we are “renewed” in the image of Christ and grow in his likeness. This is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, who is given to us through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And, “born again” by the Spirit of God, through the Son of God, we are the children of God --- justified by his grace (forgiven by his grace, accepted by his grace, counted as righteous in his sight by his grace, his freely given free gift); and, as the children of God, by his grace, we are “heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Our salvation is all of grace, from beginning to end, through and through. And what is our response? The Apostle Paul made it clear to Titus:

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works (3:8).

There again we have the connection: the connection between sound doctrine and godly living; the connection between theology and ethics; the connection between belief and life; the connection between grace and good works. We who have trusted in Christ have the assurance of our salvation by his grace, through his goodness and philanthropy toward us. But we have been saved not for the sake of ourselves, but for the sake of God’s glory – for the sake of God’s glory being made known throughout the earth. We have been saved for service; we have been saved to serve God in the world for the transformation of the world. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world; let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Amen.

“Justified by His Grace, Devoted to Good Works”

Titus 3:1-11

(#5 in a six-sermon series through TITUS)

THE PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Almighty Father, for the sake of the kingdom of your beloved Son, send forth your word in the power of the Holy Spirit, to rule in our hearts and minds; that our lives may be transformed and become more nearly conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ our Savior. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

For the past number of weeks, as we have been making our way through the Apostle Paul’s LETTER TO TITUS, we’ve seen that this little letter is “big” on doctrine and “big” on godly living. The “Big Idea” of this little letter is expressed in verse 1 – “...*knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness.*”

Before we look closely at this passage in chapter three, however, I want us to step back a moment and see the big picture, and how this passage fits with what has come before. Chapter one speaks to us about the connection between sound doctrine and godly living in terms of the internal life of the church: church government and discipline under the oversight of spiritually mature elders; sound doctrine taught; false teachers rebuked and silenced. Chapter two widens the circle, speaking about the connection between sound doctrine and godly living as it pertains to members of the congregation in relationship to one another and in their respective roles in the home and family: older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves. Now in chapter three, the circle widens even further, speaking about the connection between sound doctrine and godly living as it pertains to our relationships with the world, with unbelievers as well as believers; our public life as well as our private life; our civic life as well as our church life. But the important thing to remember, in each of these chapters, is that it all is based on the grace and mercy of “God our Savior.” And as we listen to this passage, think about these ethical instructions in terms of the overall transformative effect that they will have upon society in general. That’s very much in view here; these instructions are not simply about “Christian living” in terms of our relationship with God; they are about living as Christians for the sake of transforming the world.

Chapter three, like chapter two, begins with the ethical exhortations, the instructions for godly living.

Remind them [*the Christians in Crete, the Christians in Lynchburg*] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect

courtesy toward all people (3:1-2 ESV, *amplification mine*).

The first exhortation is to “be submissive to rulers and authorities.” In Romans 13, referring to political, governmental authorities, the Scripture declares that “...there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). Therefore the first obligation of Christians in relation to the governmental authorities is to live as good citizens in submission to the rulers, obeying the laws of the land. By being submissive and obedient to existing authorities (in most cases), we Christians can show to the world that we are a people of order and peace, not chaos and confusion, because our God is a God of order and peace, not chaos and confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). In this way, we are better able to effect a transformative change in the general society, as the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14).

Of course, there are times and circumstances when Christians “must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), e.g., if the laws of the land were to demand disobedience to God’s law, or prohibit worship of the true God, or require idolatry or ungodly acts of injustice. The general principle of submission to the state is not an *absolutely absolute* principle for Christians in all times and places; but it is a general principle, and it is the ordinary and general rule for Christians living in most times and places under a recognized, established government. But as we submit to the governing authorities, we remember that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20), and we live on earth to represent Christ’s kingdom in this world and his kingship over this world.

Living in the world, but not of the world, as “citizens of heaven,” we are, therefore, exhorted to be “ready for every good work”; that means, ready and willing to “do good,” to make a difference in the world, for the sake of Christ. By doing good in the world, we represent him in the world and bear witness to him as our King. It was said of Jesus that he “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), referring primarily to the way that he relieved suffering; and so, if we are following him, we will be “ready for every good work.” The encouragement here is for us to be ready at all times, anytime, to do good for anybody any way that we can. It doesn’t mean that you have to be involved in some big major project, but that in your daily routine, in those divine appointments that take place in our ordinary lives, you are ready to do good, to be helpful, and to bless the lives of others – for no reason other than the fact that God has “done good” to you; and as his child, you want to be like him and show the world what he is like.

Verse 2 teaches us, as citizens of heaven, “to speak evil of no one” (literally, to *blaspheme* no one), “to avoid quarreling, to be gentle (or, considerate), and to show perfect courtesy (or meekness, or consideration) toward all people.” Why don’t we take verse two, and commit ourselves to obey it in this week to come? Let this verse guide our daily witness for Christ. These adjectives cover a whole range of relational attitudes and behaviors which paint a portrait of Christ-likeness: not quarrelsome, not contentious, not argumentative, but peaceable; considerate, showing consideration and courtesy toward all people.

Today, in the media, we hear the cry for “civility” in our national discourse. We hear the lament over the coarseness of our society, the

rudeness and barbarianism that permeate popular culture. This is a reflection of the loss of Christian civility in our culture at-large, a result of the loss of Christian social graces, if you will: social graces which, by the way, are intended to reflect the social life, the social relations, of heaven. Take away the theological foundations, take away Biblical Christianity as the foundation of a society, and sooner rather than later you are going to see a society which falls back into a rude, crude, rough, course, barbaric paganism. That’s what we’re seeing more and more of in America.

Now, just think of what a difference daily life in America would look like if we, God’s redeemed people, would model this Biblical, Christ-like civility – this gentleness, consideration, courtesy, and meekness “toward all people.” Think about how this little verse once greatly influenced what we (“older folks”) used to recognize as “Christian civilization” in America (that doesn’t mean everybody was a born-again Christian, but it does mean that the mores of society were shaped and influenced by Christian sensibilities). “Speak evil of no one ...” – *if you can’t say something nice about somebody ...don’t say anything at all*. I love the social rule that my daughter Cole learned at summer camp, from the owner of the camp who was an elderly woman of Christian social grace: **“Humor at the expense of another person is no humor at all.”** But most humor portrayed for us today in television and movies (where our children learn humor) is humor at the expense of another person.

We are, further instructed to “avoid quarreling,” not to be “contentious” or “argumentative”; or to state it positively, to be peaceable, as Paul wrote to the Romans, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:8). Why? Because the Kingdom of Heaven is the Kingdom of peace and peaceableness, and we are called to show forth the reality of Christ’s kingdom on the earth. Practically speaking, in the life of the church and in relationships outside the church, this means that we Christians need to take the lead and “agree to disagree peaceably,” recognizing that reasonable minds may differ on matters of personal opinion, and to show the world that to disagree doesn’t mean that we necessarily dislike one another, divide from one another, or disdain one another or seek to destroy one another.

The last thing this world needs is a bunch of rude, pushy, combative, contentious, in-your-face, me-first people who have to have their way, and who call themselves Christians. The Scripture instructs us to live as witnesses for Christ by showing the world what life in heaven looks like. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, “...our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20); Jesus said that we are “in the world” but not “of the world” (John 17:11,16), and Romans 12:2 exhorts us not to be “conformed to this world.” The way we live our life on earth is to be patterned after the life of heaven, which is to say, the life of Jesus himself.

And so, parents, it is important for us to teach our children these Christian “social graces.” They are not merely “good manners”; they are ways that our children learn to follow Jesus in their interactions with all other people (and these are things that must be taught; they do not come naturally). We all must learn how (be disciplined) to show consideration toward others, kindness, courtesy, gentleness, meekness, thoughtfulness in relationships with others. And the best way for us to teach our children is

to model these Christ-like characteristics ourselves: in our own homes, in our marriage relationships, and relationships with our children; and in the world: in the check-out line at the grocery store; in the middle of heavy traffic (why do Christians drive like “the Intimidator”? *No more!*); and, in response to someone who acts rudely or speaks disrespectfully to us (didn’t they do that to Jesus?); and in “going out of our way,” taking the time and trouble, foregoing our preferred plans in the midst of our busy lives, to do something good and kind and helpful for someone else, seeking nothing in return. It’s not about being “nice.” It’s about being faithful and obedient. It’s about living a life that shows, in some small measure, the kindness and gentleness and goodness of Jesus Christ to the world. And it’s a powerful witness.

It’s a powerful witness because it is a striking contrast to the miserable sinfulness of this world, and it shows the difference that the grace of God through Jesus Christ makes in human lives. Listen to the way Paul says this:

For we ourselves [Paul includes himself!] were once foolish (mindless, senseless), disobedient, led astray (deluded and deceived), slaves to various passions and pleasures (enslaved to sinful desires), passing our days in malice and envy [John Stott writes that malice and envy are “very ugly twins.”¹ Malice wishes evil upon others; and envy resents and covets their blessings]; (now the passage continues) hated by others and hating one another (Titus 3:3).

What a horrible description of human society! What a horrible description of human relationships! Do you know what that’s a description of? It’s a description of two things which are ultimately the same thing. It’s a description of human nature and human society, left to itself in its sinful corruption, devoid of all grace. It’s a description of human nature and human society untouched by the grace of God. And do you know what that is ultimately? That’s hell. Titus 3:3 is a description of hell on earth: life without the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And the startling thing is that the Apostle Paul says, “...we ourselves were ...” Paul, who had been a righteous Pharisee, a “good Jew,” includes himself in this description. How could he do that? He could do that because this description is a description, ultimately, of fallen human nature, in and of itself, no matter how much it washes itself off on the outside, dresses itself up on the outside, and makes itself look nice on the outside. On the inside, fallen human nature without the saving grace of God is beastly and barbaric and hateful and hellish. Titus 3:3 is Romans 1 summed-up in one verse. And it tells all of us, each one of us, that that’s who we ourselves were, that’s who we ourselves would be (or, that’s who we ourselves *are*) apart from the saving grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ: enslaved to sin, at enmity with one another, alienated from God, without excuse, without hope, without any way to help ourselves.

“But ...” (**“But”**: there’s that wonderful word, the biggest little word in the Bible ...the first trumpet note of the gospel!) ... “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared (there’s that word from 2:11, “the grace of God has appeared,” the epiphany of grace in Jesus Christ), he saved us ...” There it is: the glorious gospel of our great

¹See John R.W. Stott, *THE MESSAGE OF 1 TIMOTHY & TITUS* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1966; *The Bible Speaks Today*), p.202.