

Our Past, Present and Future Position in Christ

Titus 3:3-7

Titus 3:3-7 *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”* ⁴ *But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,* ⁵ *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,* ⁶ *whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,* ⁷ *that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

Background Notes

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to Titus, who was serving the churches and teaching the believers on the island of Crete. When reading Titus 3:3, we might get the idea that Paul was describing the Cretans before they became Christians: *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”* Historical records describe the Cretans as ungodly people, and this verse certainly describes the Cretans - apart from Christ.

But notice - Paul did not start the verse with **“you** [Cretans] yourselves” but with **“we** ourselves were **also...**” Paul linked *himself* with this description of ungodliness! If you know about the rigidly religious background of the apostle Paul before he became a Christian, it was far from the lifestyle of an ungodly Cretan in verse 3! And you would scarcely describe Paul in his unsaved days as a liar, an evil beast, or a lazy glutton – but that was the description of the Cretans apart from Christ (Titus 1:12).

What’s the point here? The point is that, compared to God’s *perfect* standards of righteousness, *all of us* can be described in this way. Apart from Christ, you, me, the apostle Paul, Mother Theresa, Billy Graham, the pope - anyone and everyone - can be described this way.

Here’s an illustration. If God’s standard of righteousness and holiness were represented as being one hundred miles away from here, how far along the way towards God’s standards do you think you would be placed (in your own righteousness, apart from Christ)? Half way? Fifty miles? How about ten? How about one mile? Forget it. The Bible is teaching here that we are all within the first inch! That’s the teaching of Scripture. Read Romans 3 in this connection. Compared to God’s perfect standards, we’re nowhere! Even the best of our good works can’t begin to measure up to God’s standard of perfection!

One commentary put it this way: *“While the veneer of civilization often obscures the bleak truth, the slightest crack in the surface of society reveals the reality behind the façade. The painful truth is that apart from God, people degenerate into little more than animals wrangling over bones.”* The ear biting in the heavyweight fight last night is just one of many degraded examples that could be given here.

So, verse 3 is not just describing the ungodly unbelieving Cretans - it's a description of *everyone* - *apart from Christ*. If you're not a Christian, it's describing **you**. Whether you realize it or not, apart from Christ you're really enslaved to various lusts and pleasures. You may think you're free, but apart from Christ you don't really have freedom at all. The only escape from slavery to sin is to realize that there's nothing we can do to work our way to Heaven, and come to Christ, trust Him for salvation, and truly become a Christian.

Doctrinal Points

1. God loves people, but He hates their sin.

Verse 4: *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared.”* You're probably aware that there's more than one Greek word that is translated “love” in the New Testament. There is *agape* - the highest form of love. That's the kind of love God has for us, that He demonstrated when Jesus came to earth and gave His life for us. *Agape* is the word that's used in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son.”*

Phileo is another Greek word that is translated “love,” and it means tender, affectionate love. It's the warm and close affection that exists between members of a happy family. *Phileo* is used in verse 4 in reference to God's love for mankind. God not only loves mankind with *agape* love, but He has a warm, tender *phileo* affection toward us.

God doesn't just tolerate people - He *loves* people. The coming of Jesus Christ to earth proved God's kindness and love towards people. That's the meaning of *“the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared.”* God's love appeared with the coming of Christ.

God's kindness and love was certainly seen in the Old Testament, but it visibly appeared with the coming of Christ and the life of Christ. God didn't change from the Old Testament to the New Testament, but the love of God was **seen** through the coming and the life of Christ. We can look at the way the Lord Jesus loved people and cared for the needs of people, and thus we can see God's self-giving *agape* love and tender affection *phileo* love for people that appeared in Christ.

God loves people - but God hates sin. Verse 3 is not just Paul's description of people apart from Christ - it is **God's** description. People try to hide their sin by wearing masks, but God sees behind the masks. God sees behind your mask. You need to renounce your sin and respond to the love of God in Christ. God loves people but He hates their sin.

2. God saves people, but He rejects their works.

Verses 5-7: *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved 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."*

There is important teaching about the Trinity and salvation in these verses – **the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all involved in our salvation.**

I hope you're don't think you can be saved by doing enough good works, because the Bible clearly declares that **good works cannot save us.** Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."*

Another important verse that shows that we don't attain salvation by doing good works is Titus 3:5 - *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."* The point here is not that we have done works of righteousness. The point is that there are no works of righteousness that will get us to Heaven. We are saved by God's mercy *alone* (v5). We're justified - declared righteous - by His grace *alone* (v7)! His mercy and grace - plus nothing!

God saves people, but He rejects their works as a means of salvation. However, **after** salvation we *are* to be involved in good works (v8). And verse 14 says that we are to do good works to meet urgent needs. Fruitful Christians will be involved in good works - but our good works do not save us.

The "package of our salvation" is more than just the forgiveness of sins! There's the *"washing of regeneration"* (v5). There's the *"renewing of the Holy Spirit"* (v5). And there's the reality of our *"future inheritance"* (v7). The "washing of regeneration" in verse 5 is **not baptism.** Baptism does not give new life. *"Washing"* here is a figurative expression for the cleansing from sin that we receive when we believe God's Word and put our trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. Psalm 119:9 says, *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."* So, we see that *"cleansing"* and *"washing"* are used in a figurative way for "salvation" in Scripture.

And notice that as a result of our salvation, we are given **new life.** We're *regenerated.* We're cleansed from our sins, and then we're renewed by the Holy Spirit. This is not an action of the Holy Spirit that happens to us subsequent to salvation,

or a “baptism of the Holy Spirit” that is *subsequent* to salvation. The Holy Spirit begins His renewal work in our lives the moment we’re regenerated.

This is “*sanctification*.” This is the work of God the Holy Spirit in our lives to renew us and make us more like Christ. Sanctification goes on throughout our entire lives. Philippians 1:6 says, “*He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” And at “the day of Jesus Christ,” the package of salvation will include the wonderful reality of our future inheritance. Verse 7, “*That being justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*” We’re not just going to live forever – we’re the heirs of a rich inheritance!

In this connection Romans 8:16-17 says, “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ... that we may also be glorified together.*” Amazing! We’re not only going to live forever, but we are heirs of a rich inheritance! We will be part owners of the New Heavens and the New Earth, and we will share in God’s glory forever. What more could we ever want?

All this is part of God’s gift of salvation to us. It’s by His grace, not our works. God saves people, but He rejects their works.

Practical Application

Let’s love the sinner but hate the sin

In our first doctrinal point we mentioned that God loves people regardless of their sin - **but He hates the sin**. This same attitude should characterize us. We should love sinners but we should hate their sin.

What about the drug addict? What about the homosexual? What about the ex-con? Let’s love the sinner, but hate the sin. Many Christians have a hard time with loving sinners. Even when people of these backgrounds become Christians and stop sinning in those areas, some Christians still will not reach out to these people with love and care.

This is wrong. We need to draw a distinction between the *sinner* and the *sin*. The Lord always did. In John 8, He reached out in compassion out to the woman who was caught in adultery - but He didn’t ignore her sin. He said to her, “*Go and sin no more.*”

I hope we as believers have already begun to show love to sinners in the way the Lord Jesus did. If not, somewhere along the line, God will force us - as individual Christians and as a church - to deal with situations like this.

Let’s remember to hate the sin – but love the sinner!