



## **New Life & New Identity**

**Intro:** Human nature, now corrupted after the fall of the first man, is much more sinful and desolate than most of us would like to admit. What does the natural man think of God? How does the natural woman view those things that are truly good? What is the natural posture of every human towards God's good authority? Your answers to these questions will color what you think of many other things. God's grace is one of those things that will arouse some kind of reaction from all people. Some will think little of it; others will cling to God's grace as though there were nothing more important in the entire universe. Who you are now has much to do with who you once were and the perceived value you place on God's grace. This passage seeks to pull back the curtain to reveal human nature, God's good grace, and the glorious inheritance that awaits all those who place their confidence in Christ.

**Passage:** Titus 3:3-7

### **Background / Set-up**

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- There are many who would be quite happy to avoid ever speaking or thinking in disparaging terms regarding human identity or value. "Self-esteem," one might say, "is much too fragile a thing! Therefore, we must speak well and not ill of all people at all times." While there is merit to the concept of speaking well of others, to avoid the obvious errors or bad in anyone is to do both yourself and others a disservice. In fact, the Bible often takes the antithetical approach in addressing sinners. To give sinners a right view of themselves is to bring God's gracious gift of salvation into proper perspective. This is exactly the intent of this passage.

## Exposition of Major Ideas in the Passage

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### Outline:

#### (1) Our Natural Identity of Moral Decay

#### (2) God's Goodness and Loving Kindness has Appeared, and He Makes New The "Appearing" (the third mention of appearing) Regeneration from God

#### (3) Our New Identity as Children of God - "heirs"

*3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

### 1. Our Natural Identity of Moral Decay

- *"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray"* (v3)
  - Note the three-fold condition of sinners apart from grace.
    - *"foolish"* – *anoētoi* – non-thinking, thoughtless, foolish
    - *"disobedient"* – *apeitheis* – disobedient because incredulous
    - *"led astray"* – *planōmenoi* – deceived, wandering from correct path
- *"slaves to various passions and pleasures"* (v3)
  - Sinful indulgence is not without consequence. Not only are humans born with sinful desires, sinners also reinforce their slavery to such desires as they give in to them. The more the sinner indulges sin, the more sin dominates him/her and compels him/her to indulge sin all the more. It is a vicious cycle indeed.
    - Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin"* (Jn. 8:34).
    - Peter says that false teachers who promise freedom while living in sin *"are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved"* (2 Peter 2:19).

- Speaking of the foolishness of sinful pleasure, Spurgeon said, “Alas, alas, that we were so far infatuated as to call it pleasure! Looking back at our former lives we may well be amazed that we could once take pleasure in things we are now ashamed.”<sup>1</sup>
- *“passing our days in malice and envy”* (v3)
  - Malice and envy are two sides of the same sinful coin.
- *“hated by others and hating one another.”* (v3)
  - The two words translated “hate” in this passage refer to attitude and action. On the one hand, the natural attitude of sinful humans is that of hatred – namely hating that which is truly good. On the other hand, the natural action of sinful humans is hateful towards others.

## 2. God’s Goodness and Loving Kindness has Appeared, and He Makes New

### A. The “Appearing” (the third mention of appearing)

- *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us”* (v4)
  - This third “appearing” in the letter to Titus is also found in the third condensed doctrinal statement. God’s grace appeared in 2:11 (the work of salvation), Christ’s glory in 2:13 (the destination of salvation), and here we see the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior (the motivation for salvation). This is the appearing of that which motivates God’s grace for sinners.
    - The bleak and dirty picture painted in verse 3 is in stark contrast to verse 4. “Goodness” and “loving kindness” are beams of light breaking in upon the deep darkness of malice, slavery, foolishness, and hatred. Thanks be to God for His goodness and loving kindness!
- *“he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness”* (v5)
  - Paul takes away human pride by refusing to allow anyone to imagine that his or her effort is that which motivated God towards grace. Salvation comes to sinners, but not because of any work of theirs.

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon’s sermon, pg3

- Notice that Paul also adds the qualifier, “done by us in righteousness.” This excludes not only the works of sin that may obviously be tainted, but it also takes away those works done by humans even in righteousness... Absolutely nothing of the sinner motivates God’s grace.
- *“he saved us... according to his own mercy”* (v5)
  - Paul explains that what did motivate God towards grace is “His own mercy.” God’s mercy and His goodness and His loving kindness are all intermingled such that it is not helpful here to separate them. Paul saying that God was motivated by mercy is to say the same as he said in verse 4 – mercifully, God’s goodness and loving kindness appeared!

## B. Regeneration from God

- *“he saved us... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”* (v5)
  - Paul here pulls back the curtain to show us the mechanics behind God’s saving work. How does God save sinners? Well, He washes them of their sin, regenerates or makes them new, and continually renews them; and all of this is done by the power of the Holy Spirit.
    - The washing here is a doing away with the old, and the regeneration here is a bringing of something entirely new. It is vital that the Christian understand his or her estate of newness in Christ.
      - 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 – “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself...”
    - To make the concept even weightier in the mind of the Christian, the word translated “regeneration” is only used here and one other place in all of the New Testament.
      - Matthew 19:28 – “Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the *new world* (or regeneration), when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit

on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

- Regeneration, then, is the recreation of all things. Regeneration in the life of a sinner is to make the sinner entirely new. What he or she was is no more, and he or she is now recreated as a new thing.

### 3. Our New Identity as Children of God - “heirs”

- *“being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (v7)
  - And so Christians are indeed “heirs” of “eternal life!”
    - The label “children of God” is not rightly given to all humans everywhere, but it is the special designation for all those who are justified by God’s grace.
    - The hope we have is not a wishful thinking, it is a certain anticipation.
    - All Christians are now justified by grace, and this gives regal status as heirs of the King.
    - This passage is meant to be worshipful motivation for godly living; therefore, Christians are to act as they are now declared to be – Children of God.

## **Application**

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- What is God commanding us to BELIEVE here?
  - We are utterly hopeless in ourselves
  - We are totally undeserving of God's goodness and loving kindness
  - God is truly gracious and merciful towards sinners
  - All who trust in Christ are justified and heirs
  
- What is God commanding us to DO here?
  - Trust in Christ as the good Savior He is
  - Rest in the wonderful promise that God has made to complete that which He has begun
  - Live as though we really believe we are now heirs of eternal life

## **My Prayers**

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- May God grant us life and recreation
- May God assure us of His ongoing love for all His children
- May God continue to renew us by His Spirit

## Pastor Marc's Commentary

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- Outline of the Letter:
  - Salutation (1:1-4) *\*doctrinal statement #1*
  - Organizing the Churches in Crete (1:5-16)
    - Order and Qualified Elders (1:5-6)
    - Qualifications of Elders/Overseers (1:7-9)
    - Dealing with False Teachers (1:10-14)
    - Stark Distinctions and True Intimacy with God (1:15-16)
  - Instructing Various Groups (2:1-14)
    - Instructions for Titus and Others A (2:1-6)
    - Instructions for Titus and Others B (2:7-10)
    - Theology for Life (2:11-14) *\*doctrinal statement #2*
  - Instructing on Doing What is Good (2:15-3:11)
    - Initial Charge (2:15-3:2)
    - **Human Depravity and the Grace of God (3:3-7) *\*doctrinal statement #3***
    - Final Charge (3:8-11)
- Closing and Benediction (3:12-15)

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- “*For*” (v3)
  - The placement of this word indicates that what follows is the basis, ground, or foundation for what has preceded it. Indeed, what precedes this word is the flat command towards counterintuitive godly living. Such living will require strong motivation, because people are naturally inclined away from it.
- “*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray*” (v3)
  - Note the three-fold condition of sinners apart from grace.
    - “*foolish*” – *anoētoi* – non-thinking, thoughtless, foolish
      - The utter hopelessness of sinners could not be better described! Sinners, in their natural condition, are non-thinking indeed. Sin is irrational. Sin is rebellion against the cosmic King, and sinners fool themselves into thinking that such treason will not end in their destruction but their joy and reward... What ludicrous thoughts are in the mind of fools!
    - “*disobedient*” – *apeitheis* – disobedient because incredulous
      - Because the sinner is foolish, he/she is also incredulously disobedient. The sinner cannot be persuaded that his/her thoughts or actions are in error because he/she will not be persuaded. Foolish thinking, in an arrogantly ignorant, can only result in disobedient living.
    - “*led astray*” – *planōmenoi* – deceived, wandering from correct path
      - Picture the scene: there is a path, which is marked out by various signs and trekked by various travelers. Though it is strangely simple, the path is consistent and it leads to great reward. Somewhere in the panoramic view, your eye catches individuals scattered about the picture. They appear confused, frustrated, and even a bit downcast that they are

not on the path. As you look closer, however, you see that these dispersed wanderers seem utterly oblivious to the posted signs. You also see that some on the path are calling to the scattered ones, but the drifters ignore and even disdain the calls. Groping about with no aim, no ear for instruction, and no eye for correction, the foolish and disobedient sinner is lead astray from the path of righteousness.

- *“For we ourselves were once... slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy”* (v3)
  - Further describing the bleak plight of the graceless sinner, the Apostle Paul talks of slavery to sin and the common posture of sinful hearts towards others.
    - *“slaves to various passions and pleasures”*
      - Sinful indulgence is not without consequence. Not only are humans born with sinful desires, sinners also reinforce their slavery to such desires as they give in to them. The more the sinner indulges sin, the more sin dominates him/her and compels him/her to indulge sin all the more. It is a vicious cycle indeed.
        - Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (Jn. 8:34).
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    - *“passing our days in malice and envy”*
      - Malice and envy are two sides of the same sinful coin. On the one side, sinful men harbor anger for anyone who has wronged them or sometimes even anyone who may potentially wrong them. This angry posture is evidence of a sinful heart. On the other side of the

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<sup>2</sup> Spurgeon’s sermon, pg3

coin, sinful men are impatiently envious of any good or perceived advantage enjoyed by another, which they do not have themselves. Oh, the time and energy sinners spend on seeking out that which they perceive themselves to be owed but do not now possess!

- *“For we ourselves were once... hated by others and hating one another.”* (v3)
  - The two words translated “hate” in this passage refer to attitude and action. On the one hand, the natural attitude of sinful humans is that of hatred – namely hating that which is truly good. On the other hand, the natural action of sinful humans is hateful towards others. While we might like to think of ourselves as being much more kind and generally benevolent towards our fellow man, the actual results of sinful interaction is death and destruction. Poison delivered with a kind hand and a nice smile is still poison.
- *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared”* (v4)
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    - Paul takes away human pride by refusing to allow anyone to imagine that his or her effort is that which motivated God towards grace. Salvation comes to sinners, but not because of any work of theirs.
      - Notice that Paul also adds the qualifier, “done by us in righteousness.” This excludes not only the works of sin that may obviously be tainted, but it also takes away those works done by humans even in righteousness... Absolutely nothing of the sinner motivates God’s grace.

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- *“the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly” (v6)*
  - Every Christian has received the Holy Spirit, and not merely some of Him. No, “richly” God has poured His Spirit out upon His children, and “richly” they have received indeed!
  - *“the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us... through Jesus Christ our Savior” (v6)*
    - Again, we are reminded that Christ is the substance and instrument of our salvation. Jesus Christ brings Christians salvation and He is the Christian’s salvation. To have Christ is to have life, mercy, and regeneration!
  - *“the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us... so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (v7)*
    - If one understands “renewal” in verse 5 as sanctification and the reference in verse 7 to “the hope of eternal life” as glorification, then there are at least 4 of the elements of the more general term of “salvation” in this brief passage.
      - (1) Regeneration in verse 5 is the life from God that recreates the sinner, giving him/her new desires and new passions; (2) Justification in verse 7 is the legal or forensic declaration that the sinner has righteous standing before God; (3) Sanctification or ‘renewal’ in verse 5 is that ongoing work of the Holy Spirit whereby God continually transforms the sinner into the image of Christ; and (4) Glorification or ‘eternal life’ in verse 7 is that glorious existence that all Christians shall enjoy in eternity, but now they must simply rest and trust in the reality that they are heirs of this promised inheritance.

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