

Titus 3:5-8

Pastor: Titus 3:5-8: He did not save us according to our deeds, but according to His mercy.

“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Yeshua the Messiah our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.”

3:5 Taking action on behalf of His human creations, Paul testifies to Titus and the Cretans, “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” (Titus 3:5, ESV).¹ Paul is clear how actions cannot save people: *ouk ex ergōn tōn en dikaiosunē ha epoiēsamen hēmeis* (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἃ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς), “not because of any works of righteousness that we had done” (NRSV). While these various works might pertain to a kind of Torah observance, as in Paul’s own experience he says, “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, [I was] found blameless” (Philippians 3:6), human deeds or works in general are more likely in his mind here in v. 5.

Philip H. Towner addresses how “Paul seeks the lowest common denominator and excludes all ‘righteous’ deeds—whether on Jewish terms, as possibly hinted at in the case of the opponents (1:15), or on Gentile terms—as a way to salvation.”² The point made is that people are redeemed **only** by the direct intervention of a holy and righteous God, who then requires His redeemed to demonstrate good works (Titus 3:8), but who saves people out of what He has accomplished for them. Titus 3:5-8 follow the same basic theme of Ephesians 2:8-10 where Believers are not saved *by* works, but created *for* good works. A sentiment witnessed in the Dead Sea Scrolls is, “You [God] rescued us many times because of Your mercy; not according to our works [*k’m’a’aseinu, כַּמְעַשֵׂינוּ*], for we have acted wickedly” (1QM 11.3-4).³ Ezekiel 20:43-44 further details God’s mercy in spite of Ancient Israel’s wickedness:

“There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done. Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel,” declares the Lord GOD.”

The promise of the New Covenant is that God will cleanse His people from their sins, and by His Spirit supernaturally empower them to keep His commandments (Ezekiel 36:25-27). Paul details this in v. 5, speaking of “the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” This *loutron* (λουτρόν) is simply “a bath, bathingplace” (LS),⁴ and regards how the power of God by His Spirit cleans or washes the sins of people away. While water immersion was an important practice for the early Believers as it helped identify saved persons with the resurrection of Yeshua (Romans 6:4), adopted from the Tanach practice of *mikveh* (מִיקְוֵה),⁵ it was not something that was viewed as an act of salvation.⁶ While debated among some interpreters of Titus 3:5, the washing of the Holy Spirit mentioned here is the cleansing of a Believer’s conscience which occurs via the reception of the good news (cf. John 3:5), and not the outward rite of water immersion. Water immersion as an outward act would have been important in terms of testifying of one’s salvation, but that is not what is principally in view here.⁷

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.

² *Ibid.*, 780.

³ Wise, Abegg, and Cook, 160.

⁴ LS, 478.

⁵ So the CJB/CJSB rendering, “He did it by means of the *mikveh* of rebirth and the renewal brought about by the *Ruach HaKodesh*.”

⁶ The frequently misunderstood “baptism now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21), most probably pertains to the declaration of faith in the Lord Yeshua made at one’s immersion, *not* that the actual ritual provides salvation.

⁷ Cf. Marshall & Towner, pp 318, 321-322.

What God has brought to the redeemed is *palingenesia* (παλιγγενεσία), which may be defined as “a being born again, new birth” (LS).⁸ A.M. Stibbs suggests that this might actually be like the term “naturalization,” and “though it suggests a new birth or nature, [it] may rather signify a change of status.”⁹ *Palingenesia* notably appears in Matthew 19:28, where Yeshua speaks of how “in the regeneration [*palingenesia*] when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne...” In the estimation of D. Edmond Hiebert, there it refers “to the external material rebirth of creation at Christ’s return. Here [Titus 3:5] it denotes the inner spiritual regeneration of the individual believer.”¹⁰ So, while much is to come in the future regeneration via the return of the Messiah and the complete establishment of His Kingdom of Earth, individuals get to partake of the regeneration in their own lives via the washing of their souls by the Holy Spirit. Philip H. Towner properly adds, “the Spirit-enabled ‘doing of the law’—cannot be far from mind [here]. Just as the [OT] tradition promised, God’s gift of the Spirit would change the way people live.”¹¹

3:6 While God the Father purposed to show His philanthropy for humankind (Titus 3:4), with the Holy Spirit washing people from their sins (Titus 3:5), it is in Yeshua the Son as Savior that things have become truly realized. Paul states, “He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:6, NLT). Romans 5:5 similarly says, “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” The expectation of the Spirit being poured out itself is prophesied in Joel 2:28: “it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh [*al-kol-basar*, אֶל-כָּל-בָּשָׂר]; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (RSV; cf. Acts 2:17).

What need not elude us is that in Titus 3:4-6 taken together, a Bible reader really does witness the work of God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Yeshua the Son together.¹² While some in today’s Messianic movement are critical of what they perceive to be errors in traditional Christian Trinitarianism (which itself is variant depending on denominational tradition or affiliation),¹³ the tri-unity of God is not just some formula employed via religious dogma, but is actually something revealed via the actions of the Creator. Gordon D. Fee comments, “One should also note the inherent Trinitarianism in this clause (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-6; Eph. 1:3-14), which sees the Father, Son, and Spirit working conjointly for our salvation.”¹⁴ Yeshua’s Divinity is especially seen in how He, just like the Father (Titus 3:4), is granted the title Savior. Mounce rightly concludes,

“It is once again significant that v 4 begins by applying the title of σωτήρως [*sōtēros*], ‘savior,’ to God the Father and v 6 concludes by applying the same title to Jesus Christ. There is no question that here, as well as elsewhere in the PE, Paul holds to the full divinity of Christ.”¹⁵

3:7 As important as salvation and eternal life are for every born again Believer, Paul is likely combining the current and futuristic aspects of redemption (cf. Romans 8:17) in Titus 3:7 by saying, “so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.” Make no mistake about it: regenerated Believers in Messiah Yeshua **have** eternal life (Romans 3:24). Yet, eternal life is something which is consummated at the Second Coming and resurrection, specifically when “this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53; cf. Colossians 1:5). Looking back at Titus 3:5-7, one can see a few parallels with 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of

⁸ LS, 587.

⁹ Stibbs, in *NBCR*, 1186.

¹⁰ D. Edmond Hiebert, “Titus,” in *EXP*, 11:445.

¹¹ Towner, 784.

¹² Cf. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 206; Hiebert, in *EXP*, 11:446; Knight, 350; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 447.

¹³ Consult the author’s article “What Does the Shema Really Mean?” (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

¹⁴ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 206.

¹⁵ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 450.

you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and in the Spirit of our God.”

3:8 Everything that has been said in Titus 3:4-7 is to be regarded as *Pistos ho logos* (Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος) or a “faithful word.” Some have thought that this may have composed some kind of early liturgical material or creedal statement used by the early Believers, adopted into the scope of the letter, but the primary point is that God’s salvation has been provided to sinful mortals. Titus as Paul’s representative on Crete is “to insist on these things [stated], so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men” (Titus 3:8, RSV).

Rather than being found practitioners of sinful activities (Titus 3:3), the Cretans are to instead be focused on good deeds. The clause employed, *hina prontizōsin kalōn ergōn* (ἵνα φροντίζωσιν καλῶν ἔργων) is actually rendered by the Moffat New Testament with, “that those who have faith in God must profess honest occupations.”¹⁶ *Kalōn ergōn* (καλῶν ἔργων) is actually “good works” (NRSV/ESV/HCSB), but it cannot be overlooked that the verb *proistēmi* (προϊστημι) can mean in some ancient secular contexts “*profess honest occupations*” (Thayer).¹⁷ There is nothing particularly wrong with viewing “good works” as being associated with practicing an honest job (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:11), as long as such a job includes being an upstanding citizen concerned with demonstrating God’s mercy and grace to others in the workplace, marketplace, or anywhere else in the community.

Salvation, by God’s grace in Yeshua the Messiah, leads to His people practicing good works. Such good works are to be manifested “for everyone” (NIV/NRSV), not just those inside or outside of the assembly of faith. Believers practice good works toward fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, people with whom they have a close bond in the congregation, *and* toward those in greater society who need a distinct touch of the Creator’s love. Sadly throughout much of the history of our faith, it seems that demonstrating good works toward fellow Believers tends to be easier than doing so toward non-Believers. Still, if one fails to practice good works toward fellow Believers, then how will any of us learn to practice them toward outsiders to the faith? Only by us understanding the missional imperatives of “good works”—in particular the righteous imperatives of God’s Torah in action—will any of us be able to have a proper handle on the kinds of deeds we should see present in our individual lives.

¹⁶ Also the NEB, “engage in honourable occupations.”

¹⁷ Thayer, pp 539-540.