

Titus Chapter Three (vv.1-7)

- Titus 3 is a chapter of seven individual **commands** to Titus. He was to: *remind* the believers to be subject to governing authorities (v.1), *reinforce* the faithful saying (v.8), *refuse* foolish speculations (v.9), *reject* those who were divisive (v.10), *rendezvous* with Paul at Nicopolis (v.12), *replenish* Zenas and Apollos with every necessary resource for their journey (v.13), and *relay* Paul's heartfelt greetings to the saints (v.15). There is another (plural) imperative in v.14.
- The main theme of the chapter (and indeed the epistle) is **good works** (v.1, v.8, v.14). There are six mentions of 'good works' in Titus including: the *poverty* of good works (1.16), the *pattern* of good works (2.7), a *passion* for good works (2.14), *preparation* for good works (3.1), the *priority* of good works (3.8) and the *purpose* of good works (3.14).
- The heart of the chapter is one great doctrinal **sentence** about salvation (vv.4-7). As to the *past*, salvation originated in the kindness, love and mercy of God our Saviour (v.4). As to the *present*, we enjoy regeneration (new position) and renewal (new person) by the Spirit (v.5). As to the *future*, we are heirs according to the hope of eternal life (v.7).
- The sentence of vv.4-7 is typical of the structure and teaching of the epistle. Good works spring from good doctrine. A believer's zeal for good works does not come from a sense of duty, but an intelligent grasp of what God has done.

The Practice of Good Works – In Society [vv.1-2]

These two verses present seven duties of a believer in connection with *society* (rather than the *family*, 2.1-10). The first *three* of these duties refer to the believer as a good citizen in relation to the government (v.1). The second *four* refer to the Christian as a good neighbour in society (v.2). Both will help to advance the testimony of the gospel.

Seven Duties [vv.1-2]

v.1. The present imperative **put them in mind** demands that Titus is to *repeatedly* remind all the believers of their responsibilities before God to the state. The verb is a compound verb using two words 'under' and 'remember' to suggest the idea of putting 'under the weight' (as to conscience) of this reminder. The implication is that these matters were not new to them, but they were required to be taught afresh. One responsibility of teaching brethren is that of repetition. The saints enjoy novel thoughts, but it is vital to remind them of what they already know – the ministry of remembrance.

The saints must be reminded to **be subject** [*hypotassō*] to **principalities** [*archē*] and **powers** [*exousia*]. The RV translates "rulers" and "authorities" – the two terms comprehending various forms of human government and every sort of civil official, in other words, "the government and its officers" [NLT]. The verb *hypotassō* is primarily a military term and describes ranks of soldiers arranging themselves under the leadership of their commander. The form is likely in the middle voice which calls for a willing, voluntary submission to such authority. This is in direct contrast to the rebellious nature of Cretan society (cf. 1.6, 10). That this submission involves obedience is obvious from the following clause, **to obey magistrates** – a call to recognise authority and live a lifestyle of obedience to it. But Paul takes the exhortation one step further and calls on believers to be **ready to every good work**. This implies not only submission but *support*. Believers should be ready to support those in authority by their general attitude of respect and compliance – seeking to contribute beneficially to state and society. It should be noted that there are two different words used for 'good work'. The word here is *agathos* meaning beneficial or advantageous (also 1.16). Believers should seek to bring benefit to people wherever they can. The other, and most frequent word, is *kalos* (2.7, 14; 3.8, 14) meaning beautiful or admirable. When you see such works, you say 'that's the way it should be done!' These are works that are winsomely attractive.

The Bible teaches that all governments are "ordained" (appointed), but not necessarily approved, of God. MacDonald says, "A regime might be very un-Christian or even anti-Christian, but *any* government is better than no government at all. The absence of government is anarchy, and people cannot survive for long under anarchy. Even if a ruler does not know God personally, he is still 'the anointed of the Lord' in his official position and should be respected as such." That this is an important issue is obvious from the space afforded to it in the teaching of both Paul (Romans 13.1-7) and Peter (1 Peter 2.13-17). West says, "Never was such an exhortation more needed than in the present day as the lawlessness of the age rapidly increases, openly manifest in demonstrations, protests, hooliganism and riots; the way is only being paved for the ultimate revelation of the Lawless One." We note, however, that occasionally governments may decree and seek to impose upon Christians what they cannot with clear conscience obey. In such an event, we must obey God rather than men but be willing to submit to the judicial consequences that will inevitably follow (Daniel 3.18-20; Acts 5.29).

v.2. The remaining four duties of these two verses refer to the believer's attitude towards individuals in the broader non-believing society. To be "ready for every good deed" (v.1) likely includes both the state and individuals within society more generally (v.2). First, believers are to **speak evil** [*blasphēmeō*] **of no man**, literally, 'of not even one person'. The word *blasphēmeō* means to charge falsely or with malicious intent; or to attack the good name and reputation of someone. A

believer should be free of any kind of slander or insult towards unbelievers and believers alike. Second, believers are not **brawlers** – they abstain from fighting and are not contentious, but rather are **gentle**, yielding and holding back when provoked. The word “gentle” [*epieikēs*] describes a person who is considerate, willing to yield (conciliatory) where no moral principle is at stake. They will not therefore stubbornly insist on their rights but act in courtesy and forbearance (Hiebert). The LXX uses *epieikēs* of God in Psalm 86.5 translated as ‘ready to forgive’. Believers also show **all** (continual and full display of) **meekness** [*prautēs*]. Meek describes a person who is not aggressive or resentful, but has a mild attitude of spirit and complete control of temper. Such a person can submit to difficult circumstances, accepting it as being allowed by the overruling hand of God. Meekness is being at home in the will of God. Trench says, “It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing and resisting.” Both gentleness and meekness are words used by Paul to describe Christ in 2 Corinthians 10.1.

The Power of the Gospel – The Triumph of Grace [vv.3-8]

Verse 3 describes people who are marked by depravity, leading to the disintegration of society. People are foolish, selfish and jealous of each other. But then, once again, the grace of God began to work and was manifested in the person of Jesus Christ our Saviour (cp. 2.11). This is a *transforming* grace that triumphs over sin and binds believers together into a community marked by kindness and love – the same kindness and love shown towards them in Christ (v.4).

Sevenfold Depravity [v.3]

v.3. This list of vices is part of 21 such lists in the NT which comprise *either* vices or virtues. The vices are those sins that derive from the flesh. The virtues are spiritual qualities produced by the Spirit in a regenerated soul. The most frequent vice across these lists is *fornication* [x8]. The list of vices in Titus 1.12 is *national* and characteristic of the Cretans. The list here is *natural*, and true of all mankind worldwide. JA Kitchen summarises the verse as follows, “We do well to recall that, in our non-believing state, when it came to our relationship to God we were deficient (unenlightened), disobedient, and deceived. In regard to ourselves we were dominated (enslaved) by our desires. And thus, in relation to others, we destroyed our relationships through ill-will, envy and hatefulness.”

The opening clause provides a reason as to *why* believers should behave as described in v.2 – **for we ourselves also were sometimes**, or “for we too were once...” [NET]. Some of the people in Cretan society were no doubt very difficult to live with, and even more difficult to show gentleness and meekness towards. Yet, says Paul, ‘Don’t forget that you were just the same. Before you were saved, you were like them! But God treated us with kindness, love and mercy. Shouldn’t we do the same?’ It is the remembrance of what we once were, but for the grace of God, that is a powerful motive for kindness and consideration towards the unsaved. The seven (grammatically distinct) vices follow:

- **foolish** [*anoētos*] – the opposite of ‘wise’, lacking in spiritual intelligence and understanding. The Lord used the word of the two on the road to Emmaus described their unenlightened view of God’s purpose for Christ (Luke 24.25).
- **disobedient** [*apeithēs*] – uncompliant, unwilling to be brought under the authority of another – whether God, or governing authorities as an expression of divine authority.
- **deceived** [*planaō*] – to be led astray by another, wandering from the pathway of divine truth by following the false guides of mythology and religion, or their own evil affections and appetites.
- **serving divers lusts and pleasures** – being enslaved to various strong desires (lusts) produced by the flesh, thinking that gratifying the natural desires will produce pleasure and satisfaction.
- **living in malice** [*kakia*] **and envy** [*phthonos*] – living life in the atmosphere of malice and antagonism, being inwardly vicious, desiring the ill-will and injury of others. Envy describes resentment toward the success or possessions of another and harbours a strong desire to deprive them of what they have.
- **hateful** [*stygētos*] – detestable or loathsome to others (passive).
- **hating one another** – to have a strong aversion and dislike of others, resulting in malicious and hostile behaviour. Active ill-will and a persecuting spirit.

Sevenfold Deliverance [vv.4-7]

Verses 4-7 are one single sentence in Greek which presents salvation as deliverance from the depravity of sin by the mighty power of God. The **sevenfold deliverance** begins with a new *period* (‘after that’, v.4), and a merciful *provision* (he saved us, v.5). This salvation provides a new *position* (regeneration, v.5), makes a new *person* (renewal, v.5) by the *power* of the Holy Spirit (v.6). A new *pronouncement* (justified, v.7) provides a new and eternal *prospect* (heirs, v.7).

v.4. But after that introduces the contrast between what we *once were* and what we *now are* because of what God, in Christ, has done for us. Man’s extremity was God’s opportunity, and thus the **kindness** [*chrēstotēs*] and **love** [*philanthrōpia*] **of God our Saviour** toward man appeared. *chrēstotēs* is translated as ‘goodness’ in Romans 2.4 and describes the quality of being warm-hearted, kind and considerate. This is compassion in action. The Greeks used the

word to describe a well-fitting and comfortable shoe that does not hurt the foot in any part. It is the kindness of God that has brought the comfort of salvation to every believer. The word for love, *philanthrōpia*, is defined as ‘affectionate concern for and interest in humanity’ [BDAG] or ‘the quality of being marked or motivated by concern for the alleviation of suffering’ [Lexham]. It is active pity for those in any kind of distress. The Greeks considered this to be the highest of virtues. These two unusual NT words are deliberately used by Paul to contrast the former state of mankind in their malice and hatred to the kindness and love of God. In addition, Paul is encouraging the believers to show the same kind of kindness and philanthropy to their fellow men that God has shown to them.

God the Father is described as **God our Saviour**, a title equally applied in Titus to both the Father (1.3; 2.10; 3.4) and the Son (1.4; 2.13; 3.6). Here, the emphasis is on the Father as the source of salvation. The sentence will go on to affirm the role of the trinity in salvation, both the Son (v.6) and the Spirit (v.5). Divine kindness and love have **appeared** [*epiphainō*], having a glorious and personal unveiling (outshining) in the Person of Jesus Christ (cp. 2.11).

v.5. He saved us is the main subject and verb of the whole sentence (vv.4-7). The rest of the sentence describes the *basis* of salvation (divine mercy), the *nature* of salvation (regeneration and justification), the *means* of salvation (the Holy Spirit) and the *hope* of salvation (eternal life). God has dealt with the *darkness* of our sin (Christ appeared), the *danger* of our sin (He saved us), the *defilement* of our sin (washing of regeneration), and the *deadness* of our sin (a renewal). Also, for the *destitution* of our sin, God has made us heirs (v.7)!

Salvation is **not by works of righteousness which we have done**. The statement contains a very strong negative, ‘absolutely not’ or ‘without exception’. It was not ‘out of’ [*ek*] our works that salvation is received. Good works is a major theme in Titus, but these are necessary evidence of divine life, they do not effect salvation. The works are those which ‘we have done in righteousness’. These are not evil works, but acts done ‘in righteousness’, that is, done with the motive of attaining righteousness. But “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64.6) for “when works are done as a means to achieving righteousness before God, they become unworthy” (JA Kitchen). The true means of salvation was **according to His mercy** [*eleos*]. The clause ‘according to’ suggests that God’s mercy (active compassion) is the measure by which we determine the vastness of God’s saving grace. He has not only cancelled our debt (mercy) but also made us spiritually rich (grace). Thus, God’s mercy is so immense – He cancelled an infinite debt of sin against His holiness – that it becomes the measuring rod to show us how incredibly vast and rich His saving grace is.

The final clauses of the verse show *how* God has accomplished such salvation. First, salvation brings a believer into a new position through [*diā*] the **washing** [*loutron*] **of regeneration** [*palingenesia*]. The washing (to bathe, a complete washing of the body) is a spiritual cleansing of the dirt and defilement of sin that brings a believer into a new state, that of regeneration. The noun “regeneration” is a compound word composed of ‘again/anew’ and ‘beginning’. It was used broadly to describe the restoration of a thing to its original, pristine state. The word is only found elsewhere in Matthew 19.28 which refers to the regenerated earth of the millennial kingdom. When the Lord Jesus comes back to reign this world will be brought into a new state. So, salvation has brought us into a new state before God which should be reflected in the lives of believers. Note. Regeneration is slightly different to new birth, though both occur at the same time. New *birth* is the imparting of divine, spiritual life – for I was dead. This introduces a believer into a new *family* (the family of God) and into a new *state* where every taint of sin’s defilement has been removed – this is regeneration. This complete washing (bathing) is seen in *type* when the priests were washed with water by Moses (Leviticus 8.6). The washing of this verse has nothing to do with baptism – it was all accomplished at conversion.

Second, salvation makes a believer a new person by the **renewing of the Holy Ghost**. The word “renewal” means ‘to make completely new’. This is not a mere refresh, nor putting new clothes on the old man, but refers to the believer as a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17). He is a new man in new clothes. The believer will therefore be new in behaviour, ways and habits (Romans 12.2). It is likely that the Holy Spirit is the divine agent of both the washing *and* renewing, probably through the instrument of the word of God (1 Peter 1.22). This verse therefore describes the radical transformation of salvation. Salvation involves something done *for* us (2.14) as well as something done *in* us (3.5). We need both. Our *position* has been changed, and *we* have been changed by the indwelling Spirit.

v.6. Salvation gives a believer a new power – the Holy Spirit dwells within. **Which** is a masculine pronoun referring back to the Holy Spirit in v.5. Thus, the Holy Spirit is a person whom **he** (God our Saviour) **shed on us abundantly**. The language is full of profusion, the word “shed” (aorist) meaning ‘to pour out’ or ‘give generously’ (cf. Romans 5.5) and the word “abundantly” [*plousiōs*] meaning richly and lavishly (cf. John 3.34) – having the implication of value as well as abundance. The Holy Spirit did not merely make us new then leave us! Whilst at Pentecost, the Spirit of God was sent with profusion from heaven, this verse likely refers to conversion when believers once and for all received the profusion of the Holy Spirit. There is therefore no excuse for failure in the Christian life – believers are indwelt by a divine person. This

outpouring of the Spirit was accomplished **through** the 'channel' of **Jesus Christ our Saviour**, referring not just to the work of Calvary, but also His agency in sending the Spirit of God (John 7.38-39; 15.26; Acts 2.33).

v.7. The word **that** completes the sentence begun in v.4 by speaking to the purpose of God's saving work. Believers are **justified** by his grace. This familiar legal term means to clear of every charge and declare righteous in the sight of a holy God. Perhaps Paul is assuring the believers in Crete that there is no possibility of any legal objection from their previous state being raised to jeopardise their position before God. It is worth noting that justification does not mean to *make* a man righteous as if there is an ongoing process of getting more righteous every day until the final verdict. No. Justification *declares* a man righteous – it is the permanent standing of the believer before God; they already *have* the final verdict. That righteous standing should be reproduced in a practical way in the life of a believer. Righteousness is reckoned to the believer at conversion, but this is not the *personal* righteousness of Christ (or God) – such intrinsic righteousness (character) cannot be transferred. In the NT, justification is said to be by blood (the *ground*), by faith (the *grasp*) and, here, **by his grace** – the *gift*.

Our new standing in the sight of God, and membership of the family of God (v.6) makes believers **heirs**. Romans 8.17 says, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." As members of God's family, believers are *already* heirs – the content of that inheritance being the fulness of the glory of God (Romans 8.17). Their standing as heirs is **according to** (in keeping with) **the hope of eternal life**. As heirs of God, we confidently expect eternal life. Eternal life is already possessed by the believer but will be fully realised and enjoyed in a coming day. This will also be the occasion of the full realisation of the inheritance.