

New Birth For A New Life

Titus 3:1-8

Introduction:

- 1) Nicodemus was a respected religious leader in the 1st century. He was both a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel of the nation of Israel. He was devoutly religious, theologically well-educated, and held in the highest esteem by those who knew him. He was, by any standard of measurement, a good man.
- 2) However, visiting the young itinerant rabbi from Galilee one evening after dark, he was shocked to hear he was not ready to enter the kingdom of God. What reason did Jesus give him? He had never been born from above, he had never been born again, he had never experienced the miracle of new birth, the work of the Spirit of God the Bible calls regeneration.
- 3) Millard Erickson defines regeneration as “the divine side of conversion. It is completely God’s doing. It is God’s transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ . . . it involves something new, a whole reversal of the person’s natural tendencies” (pgs. 955-957). In other words it is new birth for a new life.
- 4) The word itself only occurs twice in the New Testament. One is Matthew 19:28 which refers to the cosmic regeneration in the eschaton. The other is here in the text before us in Titus 3:5. Paul is vitally interested in both the nature of the new birth and the results of the new birth. He is unalterably convinced that the new birth will be evident in a new life, a new life exploding in good works. Good works form a sandwich or inclusio for our text as they begin the discussion in verse 1 and conclude it in verse 8. Regeneration is the apex of the text appearing squarely in the middle of the passage in verses 5-6. Thus the two are essentially related to each other as we consider the full dimension of our salvation.

Transition: Paul divides his analysis into 3 parts.

- I. We must be ready for good works. 3:1-3
 God saved us in order that we would do good works. Ephesians 2:10 reminds us we were created in Christ Jesus for good works. Living in a culture that was hostile to the gospel and corrupted by moral sin at every turn, Paul admonished those in Crete to live distinctively different lives. He does so by giving them and us principles to live by in vs. 1-2, principles that stand in stark contrast to how we used to live as described in v. 3.
 1. In the present we can help others. 3:1-2
 “Remind them” (pre. imp., probably iterative), call to remembrance those things that they were previously taught. Paul provides 7 commands that fall roughly into 4 categories.
 - a) We submit obediently. 3:1
 “We are to be 1) subject and 2) obey rulers and authorities.”

- Jesus said in Matthew 22:21, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”
- Paul adds in Romans 13:1, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”
- Peter also says in 1 Peter 2:13, “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of those who do good.”
- Christians are not anarchist or rebels. We do not subvert the government or disobey the government unless it brings us into direct conflict with the commands of God (Acts 5:29). And, even then, our disobedience is passive not active, and we willingly accept the consequences of our actions.

b) We serve eagerly. 3:1

“Be ready (prepared) for every good work.” The word “every” indicates the command is comprehensive. Complementing this command is Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, esp. to those who are of the household of faith.” We look to aid others, assist others, help others in any and every opportunity.

c) We speak gently. 3:2

- Speak evil (lit. “*blasphemein*”), slander, treat with contempt no one. Again the scope is comprehensive. We malign or curse no one with our words, stirring up strife, ill will and trouble. No, we are peaceable and gentle, uncontentious and forbearing, friendly and considerate.
- We exercise out of a life of wisdom “sweet reasonableness” that refuses to hold a grudge, and that also gives others the benefit of the doubt (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8). The regenerate person refuses to cultivate “the fine art” of verbal and physical abuse.

d) We show humility. 3:2

Showing (demonstrating, putting on display for all to see) all humility (meekness) to all men [note all is repeated]. “Humility” sums up well the prior 6 commands. It is a conscious placing of others ahead of yourself. It is in attitude and action esteeming others better than yourself (Phil 2:3). It is the essence of the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).

Transition: Now, Paul knew one way to appreciate who we are now is to remember who we used to be, to draw a contrast between how we can not act with how we had to act b.c., before I met Jesus Christ.

2. In the past we harmed others. 3:3

Thru the new birth, regeneration, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). What a difference Jesus has made. Paul knew this was true for us. He knew it was true for him. He begins verse 3 with an emphatic “we.” Exactly what has Jesus saved us

from besides the fires of hell and eternal separation from God? In one word it is sin. But sin like the mythological hydra is a many-headed creature that attacked and subdued us from every conceivable direction. Paul notes 6 ways in particular that sin enslaved and held us captive.

a) Sin deceives.

- We ourselves (all of us, no exceptions) were once foolish (senseless, ignorant, without spiritual understanding) . . . deceived (led astray, misled, guided by another in the wrong direction).
- Sin makes you stupid!

b) Sin disobeys.

Disobedient. Our natural bend was to disobey and seek our way: disobedient to God (cf. 1:16), authorities, parents, everyone and everything. I was a self-centered, self-deceived/Satan deceived rebel.

c) Sin dictates.

Serving (*douleuontes*, in a continuous state of slavery) lust (*epithumiais*) and pleasures (*hedonais*) various (*poikilais*). Professing to be liberated and free, I was in actuality in bondage and slavery to a cruel and never satisfied taskmaster: myself. Lust and pleasure controlled me. I flirted with both beauties only to discover no matter how much I gave them, they were never satisfied, it was never, never enough. What a fool I truly was to give myself to 2 mistresses who promised so much but gave so little of any real value.

d) Sin detests.

Living in malice (*kakia*), “an evil attitude of mind which manifest itself in ill-will and desire to injure” (Hiebert, 88). It is one who with a vicious character “desires to bring good to no one.”

e) Sin desires.

Envy, an unquenchable desire to have what you do not have. MacArthur with great insight notes, “Envy is a sin that carries its own reward: it guarantees its own frustration and disappointment. By definition, the envious person cannot be satisfied with what he has and will always crave for more” (p. 149). Sexual sin illustrates this perfectly, wanting more until it goes “all the way” only to find even this is not enough.

f) Sin destroys.

Hateful and hating one another “Hateful” was your nature and attitude (a natural outgrowth of envy). “Hating” was your character and action. In contrast to living a life of love that characterizes the disciples of Jesus (John 13:35), we lived a life of hate that gave evidence we were disciples of the Devil.

Transition:

This is a picture of who we were but not who we are. There is a new me and this new me is ever ready for good works. But how? How is this possible?

II. We have been regenerated for good works. 3:4-7

- At one time in our lives we were dead, doomed and depraved, “But God” so says Eph. 2:4.
- At one time in our lives we were a spiritual corpse, controlled by our sin nature, Satan, and the world, condemned with no hope, no future, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior” so says Titus 2:4. Praise God for these 2:4’s in the Bible. What does this one in Titus teach us? 4 precious truths.

1) God cares for us. 3:4

Paul begins with the basic and beautiful truth that God loves us. In fact both His kindness (goodness, generosity) and His love has made an appearance. This is the 3rd appearing in Titus!

- 1) The grace of God 2:11
- 2) The glory of God 2:13
- 3) The goodness of God 3:4

This goodness, this love and kindness, has its source in God our Savior (5th of its 6 times in Titus). It has as its object mankind, sinners in need of a Savior.

2) God changes us. 3:5

- Here is the greatest verse in the Bible on the doctrine of regeneration, the new birth experienced by those who repent of their sin and put their trust completely and exclusively in Jesus Christ.
- Paul begins first by telling us how regeneration did not happen, countering the false thinking that has plagued humanity for all of our existence. His words could not be more plain: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” Salvation is not earned. Regeneration is not something you can work up. You were dead, spiritually without a heartbeat, no pulse, nothing. Any good you had done was “like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). On your best day you had nothing to give God, and if you have never realized that you have never been saved. No, we cannot work our way into heaven
- But (!) . . . according to mercy (now added to His kindness and love) He saved us (delivered us from sin and its slavery, rescued us from death, hell and the grave).
 - Why? Kindness, love, mercy.
 - What? Saved us.
 - How? 1)Washing of regeneration and 2) Renewing of the Holy Spirit.
- Regeneration consist negatively of a cleansing and positively of a renewing, both brought about by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration washes us, makes us clean through the new birth. The imagery of washing has nothing to do with baptism for it is the Holy Spirit who is washing us, not externally but internally. The picture looks back to Ezekiel 36:25-27 where the prophet writes “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a

new heart and put a new Spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (NKJ). It looks to Eph. 5:26 when speaks our being cleansed by the washing of water by the Word. Thus the Spirit and the Word work in tandem to make us brand new in Jesus Christ. Indeed that is exactly where Paul looks next as he affirms:

3) God has come for us. 3:6

- God is generous when He gives us His Spirit. He has poured Him out on us abundantly (generously, richly) through Jesus Christ our Savior (cf. 3:4!).
- Paul is probably looking back to Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2. However, what God did then for the believers gathered in the Upper room He does for every believer in regeneration. His Spirit comes to be with them and in them in abundance.

4) God comforts us. 3:7

- To be justified means to be declared righteous. By virtue of the imputed righteousness of Christ we stand before God just as if we had never sinned and just as if we had always obeyed God perfectly. We are not made justified. We are declared justified. And how did we receive this legal acquittal, this forensic standing of righteousness before God? Paul now adds a 4th motive as to why our great God saved us.
 - It was His kindness that moved Him to save us (v.4).
 - It was His love that moved Him to save us (v. 4).
 - It was His mercy that moved Him to save us (v.5)
 - It was His grace that moved Him to save us (v. 7).
- Having saved us, regenerated us, renewed us, and justified us, He now comforts us with a word about our future. We are heirs (right now!) in hope (but it is not yet our full possession) of eternal life. There is no question that this inheritance will be received. As a work of our Triune God, the Father (v. 4-5), the Son (v.6), and the Holy Spirit (v. 5), it is a signed, sealed and settled issue.

III. We will be rewarded for good works. 3:8

5 times in the pastoral epistles we find the phrase, “This is a faithful saying” (1Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). It serves to emphasize the importance of the words Paul is about to write. Here it looks back to vs. 4-7 or vs. 5-7.

Further, the faithful saying may be something of a creedal statement, a hymn, catechetical or liturgical material. Because of the importance of the words, they should be repeated, memorized or even sung. They should also have daily and personal application in our lives and that is exactly what we see in the closing verse of this section, vs. 8.

1) We should affirm good works.

This faithful (“trustworthy” NIV) saying and the words that make it up should be affirmed and affirmed constantly (over and over again). These are words of truth,

of divine origin, and we do a good work to teach them repeatedly (cf. Deut. 6:7-9). A blessing for all is certain to occur.

2) We should be active in good works.

Those who have been regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit are now described simply as those who have believed (perf. tense) in God. And, because they have believed and do believe they should be careful to maintain (to busy themselves) good works (1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). You see the new birth will result in a new life. Death is replaced by life. The flesh is captive to the Spirit. Evil works are overcome by good works. Such works are more assuredly good (excellent *NIV*) and profitable to men, saved and unsaved, the latter seeing the beauty of your new life and are drawn to the Christ who changed you, the Christ who can change them too!

Conclusion:

In an article entitled “Scholars, Interfaith Families Grapple Over What Passport Needed For Heaven,” (May 8, 2005, *RNS*), Amy Green discusses the perennial question, “Who goes to heaven?” Discussing the problem John 14:6 presents and the liberalizing view of Roman Catholicism since Vatican II, she also speaks of a Presbyterian pastor in Memphis, Tennessee who in a sermon says John 14:6 as “a club with which we beat others over the head.” The pastor goes on to say, “What I encourage people to do is look at the broader themes of the Bible, and what we see is a God who loved the world, a God whose intention is that all creation be made whole and healed,” he says. “A lot of people kind of had a gut feeling that their God was a more loving God and a bigger God than they had imagined . . . and were yearning to have their large and loving view of God validated. And I think that’s what happened.” The sermon affirmed what Heather Pearson Chauhan had believed all along, Chauhan, 31, an obstetrician/gynecologist, grew up a Christian and then married a Hindu man she met in medical school. Her husband converted to Christianity after they wed, and now the couple plans to raise their 4-month-old son a Christian. “To define religion or Christianity as this narrow path I think is not a global perspective,” she says. “Everyone gets to God a different way.”

Not so says the Word of God. No, only those who have been regenerated by the power of God, renewed by the Spirit, justified by grace and believed in Jesus and Jesus alone will go to heaven. Yes, we all need a new birth for a new life now and forever.