

The Kindness of God

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Introduction.

- A. The world around us is filled with transformative forces. We all recognize the immense power of natural disasters. I will never forget the swath of devastation left behind by Hurricane Rita last year. Trees were uprooted everywhere, roofs ripped off, debris carried for miles, and sometimes, entire buildings destroyed. Rita turned Beaumont from a town to a war zone. Many of us can tell similar stories.
- B. The work of man can have a similar impact. 20 years ago, I had never heard of cell phones. Now, I can't imagine life without one. In the political realm, the election of the right President—or the wrong one—can alter this nation's course for decades. Even the 9-11 terrorists transformed the world.
- C. However, impressive though these things are, a transforming event doesn't have to make the evening news. Indeed, the most powerful transforming force known to mankind hardly ever does. It can change men utterly, but it completely escapes the general notice, because it does its work within the human heart. It has touched each one of us, and it continues to change us toward a goal beyond our imagining. It is the kindness of God.
- D. This kindness is examined in many passages. Psalm 103:12-13, which we looked at a few weeks ago, defines it as a thing of infinite extent. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that it was the power that led Christ to the cross. One of the most interesting passages along these lines, though, is Titus 3:1-8, which describes the effects that it should have on us. Let's consider this context this evening, to unearth the connection between our daily lives and the transforming kindness of God.

I. Our Need.

- A. Before we can truly understand the scope of God's kindness, though, we need to understand our need for it. We need to see ourselves as we truly are. Paul points this need out in Titus 3:3. This verse paints a very unflattering picture of mankind. It describes our situation without Jesus. Without Christ, man is foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, malicious, envious, hateful, and hate-filled.
- B. Now, this is a characterization of ourselves that we don't like. We naturally want to say, "I'm not like that." However, that's because we're using the wrong measuring stick. Because we manage to stay away from the evil part of the time, we think we're doing pretty OK. The problem is, though, the times when we DO engage in the things on the list. That's enough to condemn us in the eyes of the heavenly Judge, and the times when we aren't doing them don't help. No murderer is going to stand before an earthly judge and say, "Yes, I killed a man, but look at all the times when I didn't kill anybody!" because he knows that one murder is enough to condemn him as a murderer. In the same way, our sin is enough to condemn us all as sinners. Because we are sinners, because we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we need help.

II. God's Response.

- A. Thankfully, God responded to our need, and we see His response described in Titus 3:4-7. Titus 3:4 is interesting because it defines the ministry of Jesus, indeed the entire Christian age, as one thing: the appearance of God's kindness and His love for mankind. Isn't that neat? Everything we see in the New Testament can be described as a manifestation of the love of God. We need to consider the word in this light. Every single tiny commandment in the Bible is God telling us to do something because He loves us, and God's right in everything He tells us to do, because He is infinitely wise. We are governed by kindness and love.
- B. Titus 3:5-6 tells us about what this kindness did: it saved us, and this passage defines our salvation.
 1. The first thing it says about our salvation is that it is not on the basis of deeds which we have done. This is a favorite topic in Paul's writings, and it should come as a great relief to all of us. On the basis of deeds that we have done, none of us deserve to be saved. None of us can demand by our own merit to live eternally with God. This is exactly why we needed help in the first place.
 2. We are not saved because of our own righteous deeds, but according to God's mercy, for which, brethren, I am thankful beyond words. I know that in my own life, I have sinned. I have done more than enough evil to keep me out of heaven. I know I'm not perfect, but this passage tells me that I don't have to be to follow God. I don't have to depend on my own righteousness. Instead, I can depend upon His infinite mercy. God both desires to help me despite the evil that I have done, and He has the capacity to do so.
 3. In the last part of this two-verse chunk, we see the way in which God's mercy operates: by the washing of regeneration and by the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom God poured out through Jesus. Both of these things are extremely important to our faith, so let's spend some time dwelling on each.
 - a. The first of these two items is "the washing of regeneration." I'm not normally a big Greek word study guy, but we need to look at "washing," which is a translation of the Greek *loutron*. There are lots of different words for "washing" in Scripture, but this one is special. The only other place it is

- used in the Bible is Ephesians 5:26, which describes Christ's cleansing of His church through the washing of water with the word. *Friberg's Analytical Lexicon* tells us that the literal meaning of *loutron* is "bathtub," but that it is used figuratively in the New Testament as a term to describe the ceremonial washing of baptism. Titus here is describing the baptism of regeneration, that is, the baptism of being born again, which refers back to Jesus' teaching in John 3 that we must be born again of water and the spirit. The point is, "the washing of regeneration" is definitely water baptism.
- b. Here's why this is so important: once we understand that, Titus 3:5 tells us that we are not saved by works, but by God's mercy operating through baptism. Now, this is exactly the opposite of what a lot of denominations want us to believe. They say that we are saved by faith alone, and that baptism can't be a part of God's plan of salvation, because if we were saved by baptism, we would be saved by our own works. That line of reasoning cannot stand up to Titus 3:5, because Titus 3:5 explicitly says that baptism is not a work, and that we are saved through baptism. The next time you're talking about faith alone with somebody, bring up Titus 3:5. If that doesn't convince them, nothing will.
 4. Once we've got the washing of regeneration down, we need to move on to the renewing by the Holy Spirit. The obvious connection to make here is to Romans 12:2, which urges us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Now, a lot of folks want to tell us that this is about the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, but that's not so. Instead, this passage is about the way that the Holy Spirit renews our minds today--through God's word as we study it. This reminds me of a discussion I had with my dad some years ago, when I was in college, very impressed with my own ability to study the Bible, and convinced that the Holy Spirit personally indwelt the Christian. He asked me to sit down with my Bible, go through every verse that talks about the spiritual impact of the Holy Spirit on Christians, and find one thing that the Holy Spirit is supposed to do that isn't done through the word. Needless to say, I couldn't do it. This verse is about us being renewed through the word.
 - C. In Titus 3:7, Paul describes the effect of this washing and renewing. Once we have been justified, we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. As we learn about God, the salvation that He offers us from sin, and the promise of life with Him in heaven, it moves us to become saved and then to live in a way that pleases Him, because we know that if we don't, we have no hope. God response ultimately leads us to service.

III. Our Application.

- A. Paul begins to define the application that we need to make of these things in Titus 3:8. To understand what's going on here, we need to remember that this is a letter from Paul the teacher to Titus the student, and it instructs Titus about what he needs to say as a preacher. Paul says that if Titus speaks confidently about these things, his hearers will be careful to engage in good deeds. Through hearing about where they came from and what God has done for them, the Christians of Crete would be motivated to want to live for God.
- B. What good deeds? That takes us back to Titus 3:1-2. Remember, Titus 3:3 begins with a "for." Paul was saying to Titus that Christians needed to live godly lives because of all the things we've talked about already. This passage defines many of the things that we need to be as Christians. Most of us don't struggle too much with keeping theft and murder out of our lives, but just about all of us need to work on being more peaceful.
- C. Here's the end of the Christian transformation. We start out as all of the evil things listed in Titus 3:3, but because of God's kindness, our entire way of life is altered. We no longer stand condemned by our sin, and, as Titus 3:1-2 makes clear, we have a new list of completely opposed practices to pursue. Let's go through and look at a few of these ways God's kindness should alter our behavior:
 1. First, we need to be subject to rulers. This doesn't say "be subject to rulers in laws you think are important, but ignore the small stuff." As Christians, we are to be absolutely law-abiding, even when those around us aren't. We can't lie to save money on our taxes. We can't burn CD's and DVD's of songs and movies we haven't paid for. We have to be subject to the governing authorities.
 2. Second, we need to be people who are ready for good deeds. We need to take advantage of our opportunities to do what is right. I just saw a perfect example of this a couple weeks ago, when Bob asked for volunteers to help him put together the new member directories. Of course, not everyone could help in that work. Most of us have jobs during the day when Bob was putting those directories together. But there were some people who didn't have jobs, who had the opportunity to help, and who did help. Some of our brethren were in that workroom with Bob every day. They didn't do it to be paid, they didn't do it to be recognized, they did it because they were ready for good deeds. We all should be the same.
 3. The last one of these items I want to look at is showing consideration to all men, which also seems to embrace the previous three virtues on Paul's list. This is an important one. We show consideration when we treat someone else like a human being who is worthy of love and respect, instead of like a faceless robot we just happened to cross paths with. We show consideration when we remain polite with the waiter, even after he has gotten our order wrong twice, when we help someone move into the house next door, even though we've never seen them before in our lives, when we take the time to be kind.

Conclusion. If you want to know the transforming power of God's kindness in your life, it can be yours today.