

August 25 Lesson 13 (NIV)

## The Washing of Regeneration

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 2:1–10

Background Scripture: Titus 3:3–11

Titus 3:3–11

<sup>3</sup> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

<sup>9</sup> But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. <sup>10</sup> Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. <sup>11</sup> You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

### Key Text

*When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,—Titus 3:4–5*

Hope in the Lord

### Unit III: Eternal Hope

Lessons 10–13

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A. Gospel Focus

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How to Say It

Corinth

*Kor-inth.*

Ephesians

*Ee-fee-zhunz.*

Malta

*Mawl-tuh.*

Pentecost

*Pent-ih-kost.*

## Introduction

### A. Ever-Present Distractions

It seems that at almost every turn, we face new distractions. The latest television show, a spat on social media, or the day's most scandalous entertainment news story all become distractions. These fleeting things take our attention away from those things that are truly important, like our most valued relationships and the work that God has called us to do. A 1985 book by critic Neil Postman asks whether we are *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Could we also be *distracting* ourselves to negative ends?

The same question could also apply to how we approach our faith in God. Rather than focus on the core of our faith, we might become too distracted by nonessential issues. As a result, social media fights among Christians ensue, churches divide, and believers become discouraged.

How can believers avoid distractions and focus on the thing that matters: the gospel that brings salvation? This question is not new; it has faced believers since the beginning of the church.

## B. Lesson Context

The context surrounding the island of Crete and Paul's travels there has been covered in the Lesson Context of the previous lesson—lesson 12.

Paul had written this letter to address certain disturbances that faced the believers on that island. There had been a lack of godliness that had led to meaningless controversies and distractions (Titus 1:10–15). Paul instructed Titus to appoint godly leadership (1:5) to encourage others with gospel truth and refute the teachings of the opposition (1:9–16).

Old or young, male or female, husband or wife, free or enslaved, Paul instructed his readers to demonstrate self-control and pursue lives of godliness (see Titus 2:1–15). Paul also directed Titus to encourage the people to obey authority, be eager for good works, and live with gentleness and meekness (3:1–2). The worst thing that could occur would be for controversies to arise and distract the believers in Crete from focusing on the gospel.

### I. Gospel Reminder

(Titus 3:3–8)

#### A. Our Situation (v. 3)

##### **3a. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.**

In order to highlight the power of the gospel, Paul first had to acknowledge the human situation. Every person has sinned (Romans 3:23), and no one is entirely righteous (3:10). By stating *we too*, Paul included himself as among those who had sinned (compare 7:22–25).

Paul described the condition of human sin by using a “vice list.” Such lists appear often in the writings of Paul (examples: Romans 1:29–31; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21, 26; 2 Timothy 3:2–5). By one count, the New Testament contains 23 of these lists. Paul does not use these lists to imply that every person has committed every sin listed. Instead, the lists paint word pictures, reminding us of the many ways that sin has affected the world and our hearts.

This particular vice list begins by mentioning the *foolish* person who stubbornly refuses to accept God's truth (compare Galatians 3:1–3). Such a person becomes *disobedient* by rebelling against the standards of God (example: Titus 1:16) and others (example: Romans 1:30).

Sin can lead people to deceive themselves regarding right and wrong (see Isaiah 5:20). Therefore, Paul frequently warns against being *deceived* (examples: 1 Corinthians 15:33; Galatians 6:7). Such self-deception causes people to become captive to *all kinds of passions and pleasures* that come from a sinful world (compare Titus 2:12, lesson 12).

##### **3b. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.**

Sin affects not only a person's mindset and actions but also his or her relationships with others. *Malice and envy* are feelings of wickedness directed at another person. These two feelings tend to go hand-in-hand; the underlying Greek words occur together also in Romans 1:29 and 1 Peter 2:1. These feelings result from sinful desires and can lead to anger or other sins. Rather than be filled

with love for others (see 1 Corinthians 13:4), the envious person becomes filled with hate that leads to further sin (James 3:14–16).

This verse is the only occurrence in the New Testament of the underlying Greek word translated as *being hated*. The same word is used twice in a letter from the early church leader Clement of Rome (lived AD 35–99). In one letter, Clement describes how unrighteousness is considered “hateful to God” (see the nonbiblical 1 Clement 35:5–6) and causes people to be considered “abominable” (45:7). God hates wickedness (Proverbs 6:16–19). Instead, God desires that people repent from sin and follow his Son.

Earlier in this letter, Paul remarked on the wickedness of the Cretans (Titus 1:12). In the verse before us, the apostle made it clear to Titus that without God’s grace, all people—including Titus and Paul—were no better than the Cretans. They were *all* sinners.

## **B. God’s Response (vv. 4–7)**

### **4. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,**

The phrase *but when* points to a change of status for humanity. The previous verse’s description of human sin does not have to be the final status for humanity. Instead, God has provided a way to free us from sin and evil. This divine initiative for salvation arises from God’s character, particularly his *kindness and love*. This truth is the core of our faith.

God has revealed his kindness through his gracious benevolence to help sinful humanity. Throughout history, God’s kindness has been on display (examples: Ruth 2:20; Jeremiah 9:24). The ultimate example of his kindness has come through God’s sending of his Son, Christ Jesus, to pay sin’s price through the sacrifice of himself on the cross (Romans 3:21–26; Ephesians 2:7). This display of kindness would lead humanity to repentance (Romans 2:4).

The underlying Greek word translated *love* in this verse is unique. It is not one of the more frequently used Greek words for *love* found in the New Testament. A form of this particular Greek word is used in Acts 27:3 regarding the behavior of Julius. The term is also used in 28:2 regarding the “kindness” of the people of Malta toward Paul. We can experience salvation and a new life because of God’s love and kindness for us.

This verse is the second and final occurrence in this letter of the underlying Greek translated *appeared*. The word is first used regarding the appearance of “the grace of God ... that offers salvation” (Titus 2:11; see lesson 12). Humanity no longer had to live in the darkness of sin. Instead, the grace, kindness, and love of *God our Savior* have been displayed through Jesus Christ for our salvation (see 2 Timothy 1:9–10).

### **5a. he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.**

The good things we do—our *righteous things*—do not earn us salvation. Our righteous acts are like “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) that do not benefit us for salvation (57:12).

Despite human sin, God delights in showing *mercy* (Micah 7:18; example: Daniel 9:9). This is because God is “rich in mercy” for our salvation (Ephesians 2:4–5). Our merciful God has provided

a way for salvation that does not require our righteousness (Romans 9:15–16). Instead, he has initiated our salvation through his gift of grace (11:6; Ephesians 2:8–9; 2 Timothy 1:9). By his mercy and grace, we are justified by faith. Therefore, we are *saved*.

### **5b. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,**

Students of the text have long discussed what Paul meant by the phrase *the washing of rebirth*. One possibility is that Paul was referring to the practice of baptism. Through baptism we are “buried with [Christ]” (Colossians 2:12), and those who have been baptized are also “clothed ... with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). The other possibility is that Paul is referring generally to the spiritual cleansing from sin that results from our salvation. When we accept God’s gift of grace, his Spirit fills us and transforms us (2 Corinthians 3:18). This transformation comes as the Spirit empowers us to remove the sinful self and receive new life (Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:10–11).

This new life is one where we are dead to the ways of sin (Romans 6:11). Our old selves were held captive to foolishness and disobedience. But because of God’s gift of grace, salvation is available to us. When we accept that gift, *the Holy Spirit* transforms us into new people devoted to following God and obeying his commands.

### **6. whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,**

This verse reminds readers of the events of Pentecost when God poured out his Spirit (Acts 2:1–41). The underlying Greek word translated *poured out* is also used in Acts 2 to describe how God promised to “pour out” his Spirit (2:17–18; compare Joel 2:28). By using the phrase *on us*, Paul includes both himself and Titus as among those who had experienced the presence of God’s Spirit.

The pouring out of God’s Spirit on his people is not like the trickle of water from a drying creek. Instead, God has *generously* poured his Spirit out as a rich resource of his grace and love (Romans 5:5). The Spirit’s presence brings renewal and sanctification to the lives of believers. All people who have accepted God’s grace are invited to receive and “drink” of God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Paul’s explanation of our salvation in verses 5–6 reveals the work of the Triune God. All three persons of the Trinity are either mentioned or implied in these verses. The personal pronoun *he* refers to God the Father who has sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17). The Holy Spirit proceeds from both God the Father and his only Son, *Jesus Christ our Savior* (14:26; 15:26; 16:7). In this verse, Paul has affirmed the role of all three persons of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for our justification and sanctification.

### **7. so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**

Only through God’s *grace* and our faith in Christ’s sacrifice are we *justified* (Romans 3:24; 5:9; 10:9–10; 11:6; Galatians 3:11; etc.). Although we are guilty of sin, we are counted righteous when we accept God’s gift of grace (2:16). Our justification results in a new status and our hope for the future. Because of this justification, we become the children of God. As such, we *become heirs* of God and benefactors of God’s promises regarding glory (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7).

As heirs, we have a unique hope as we await our future (Romans 8:23–25). To have *hope* does not mean wishful thinking. For Paul, *hope* is a certainty; it is a confidence that the promises made by

God to his heirs will come true (15:4; see also commentary on Titus 1:2 and 2:13 in lesson 12). In this case, the hoped-for promise is that God's children will someday experience glorious *eternal life* with him (2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:3–4; 2 Peter 1:10–11; etc.).

### C. Profitable Actions (v. 8)

#### 8a. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things,

The phrase *this is a trustworthy saying* is found in five places in the Pastoral Epistles (here and in 1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11). As a mentor to both Timothy and Titus, Paul sought to remind them of the trustworthy doctrine that they could then proclaim in their churches.

*These things* include what Paul had taught up to this point in the letter. This teaching included the human condition, the kindness and love of God, salvation through grace, purification by the Spirit, and hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3–7). These points of doctrine are the core of the gospel message. Titus could trust Paul's teaching and, therefore, proclaim it to the Cretans. As Titus taught these things, the believers in Crete would hear and obey, thus becoming obedient children of God.

#### 8b. so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

When the gospel is proclaimed, heard, believed, and *trusted*, it will create a people devoted to obeying *God*. Having faith and doing *good* go hand-in-hand (James 2:14–21, 26). Believers doing good works that result from their salvation is a prominent theme in this letter (see also Titus 2:14; 3:1, 14).

The good works of a believer come as a result of the presence of God in that person's life (Philippians 2:12–13). Good works are the result of salvation, not the source of it. God has blessed us so that we might do good (2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 2:10). The works that Paul has in mind *are excellent and profitable* for all people. By this, he means that good works are a way to obey God and are a benefit *for everyone* (examples: 1 Timothy 5:10; 6:18). When we are filled with the Holy Spirit and allow the Spirit to shape our habits and mindsets, we become eager to do good works. In the process, we please and obey God (Hebrews 13:16).

## III. Gospel Behavior

### (Titus 3:9–11)

#### A. Avoid Foolishness (v. 9)

#### 9. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

Having established what defines “profitable” behavior in light of salvation (Titus 3:8, above), Paul describes those *unprofitable* behaviors for believers pursuing godliness. This list of behavior related to the “many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, ... [who were] disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach” (1:10–11). In this verse, Paul

addressed false teachers that had infiltrated the Cretan church. Their *foolish controversies* and *arguments* had divided the church. Rather than being a community known for love and good works, the Cretan church risked conflict over *useless* debates by following these teachers.

The mention of *genealogies* and *quarrels about the law* provides clues regarding the identity of the false teachers. Their teachings had been influenced by certain Jewish ideas from the people “of the circumcision” (Titus 1:10; see 1:14). Some of the teachings concerned aspects of the Law of Moses and human ancestry. Such things had no value for human salvation in light of the work of Christ Jesus.

In Paul’s letters to Timothy, the apostle warns the young man regarding the dangers of empty talk (1 Timothy 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:16, 23) and meaningless stories and genealogies (1 Timothy 1:3–4). While we do not know specifics regarding the situations that faced Timothy and Titus, both men confronted false teachers in their communities. Part of Paul’s ministry was to guide these younger leaders to lead their particular churches in the ways of godliness. This guidance meant they would have to call out dangerous teachings and divisive behaviors.

### **B. Admonish Divisiveness (vv. 10–11)**

**10–11. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.**

Rather than build up the body of Christ that is the church, a *divisive person* creates discord and disruption. Therefore, believers should avoid such a person (see Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6).

In response to such a divisive person, Paul describes an early form of church discipline. Paul’s directives reveal a certain level of patience. Divisive people could receive two warnings. After the *second* warning the church should outright reject the person. By allowing two warnings, Titus would give the troublesome party ample opportunity to repent and change. Paul’s warning in these verses recalls Jesus’ teaching regarding dealing with sin in the church (Matthew 18:15–17). This event was not Paul’s first experience handing out warnings and discipline. The church in Corinth had received such warnings from Paul (2 Corinthians 13:2).

By following Paul’s directives in this regard, Titus would no longer give attention to those who brought distraction and division to the church. Because of the false teachers’ stubbornness and refusal to accept correction, they had *selfcondemned* themselves. Their behaviors *warped* the order Titus had been commissioned to create for the church at Crete. As a result, a strong response on the part of Titus was required.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Gospel Focus**

When churches emphasize the gospel, the spiritual health of its members improves. Instead of being focused on distractions that lead to division, believers can become devoted to doing good works that result from godliness.

As if to remind believers of all eras, the apostle Paul retells the gospel message that begins with the kindness and love of God that results in our salvation and culminates with being made new through God's Spirit. This is the gospel message, and it is profitable for all believers.

In response to Paul's directives to Titus, we should reflect on his teachings and the practices of our churches. Ask yourself if your church focuses on the gospel and living out its teachings. Then, ask yourself the same question. Do you focus on the gospel and living out its teachings? Have distractions threatened your spiritual livelihood?

### **B. Prayer**

Kind and loving God, we thank you for your mercy and grace by which you have saved us. Help us be more attentive to the Spirit's leading into renewal and rebirth so that we might do good works in your name. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

The only thing truly profitable is the gospel!<sup>1</sup>

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