

God Our Savior

Sunday, February 28, 2021

Titus 3:5 "...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,..."

Introduction: You don't have to...you get to...

Look at all the good works mentioned in this letter

I remember some friends in Spokane, Washington who always encouraged their friends to do good by considering the opportunity to do something good something to cherish. "You don't 'have to", they would say, "you 'get to". Getting to do something made it sound like it was fun and a privilege to do something good, not a chore or a duty. They had a point. If you look in this third chapter of Titus, one of the pastoral epistles, it is filled with injunctions to do good; obey authority, speak evil of no one, be gentle and humble, be careful to maintain good works. Make it a habit to look always for an opportunity to do something good. And you 'get to' because of the work in the mind of a Christian by the Holy Spirit.

regeneration

⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, There is much to consider in this text but for today, let's look at the phrase "washing of regeneration." It seems a strange turn of phrase to us, but to someone living in the days of the New Testament, especially if they grew up anywhere near the Temple in Jerusalem, the phrase would have been striking. When the priests in Jerusalem went about their duties in and around the Temple they were expected to wash their hands regularly. There was the massive tub filled with water just for this purpose. Frequently washing in this great tub symbolized an appeal to God to be cleansed and have a clear conscience. Here, in an apparent reference to baptism, the Bible describes the work of the Holy Spirit in a person as the reality symbolized by the washing of those priests' hands so long ago. That was symbol. The work of the Holy Spirit is the reality. But it is a washing of "regeneration", not simply a washing of water discussed here. It is the reality symbolized by that great big tub at the temple and also by the Sacrament of Baptism. We simply use water. The Holy Spirit cleanses in a far more profound and deeper manner; a washing of "regeneration."

"genesis again"

This word, "regeneration" could be translated "genesis again", but I suspect that it refers not to some sort of "starting over" but rather making someone fit for heaven. The Apostle Paul uses the same phrase to describe the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Imagine looking at a person, noting all the faults and failings and then envision them not just changed, but re-made and now fit for heaven.

The application is found in verse eight.

⁸ "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."

We return again to the notion that "we don't have to, we get to" do good. Not as an attempt to earn God's grace, but as a response to God's grace in Christ. We are to "maintain" good works. The word means to literally "to stand before" as in rank, and by implication means to preside, practice or rule. It implies being proactive in keeping busy doing that which will please the Lord. Later in the letter the Apostle Paul warns the people to avoid strife and factions and people who seem to relish them. One way to keep away from that is to be busy making the most of your opportunities to do good. Earlier in the epistle, the Apostle wrote (Titus 2:11-15:)

Titus 2:11-15 (NKJV)

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

¹⁵ Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

Please note that verse thirteen is one of the strongest affirmations of the deity of Jesus in the New Testament. He is our Savior and our God. Right next to that is His purpose, that He might redeem for Himself (not just for us, for Himself) His own special people, zealous for good works. So look around you and note your opportunities. Don't over-commit, but view your opportunities to do good as special gifts to Christ that gather into a "portfolio of obedience" and a life that gives glory to God. You don't have to, you get to...

Conclusion

God, in Christ, is our Savior, performing in the Christian by means of the Holy Spirit the cleansing of the soul symbolized by the great bowl of water the ancient priests used to wash their hands in a symbolic appeal for a clean conscience before God. It is called "regeneration" and means, basically, to be prepared for heaven. As followers of Jesus prepared for heaven, we are to be zealous for good works, to maintain them and value them as the opportunities they are to glorify God with the days of our lives.

*Eidersheim "The Temple" Eidersheim-The Temple- "The Laver"