

## “He Saved Us”

*“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,”* Titus 3:5.

The verse just cited is taken from Paul’s inspired epistle to Titus, whom he earlier described as *“a true son in our common faith,”* Titus 1:4. Titus had formerly been a co-laborer with Paul on a portion of his “missionary journeys,” and on one occasion Paul had left him *“in Crete”* so that he (Titus) might *“set in order”* the things that were *“lacking, and appoint elders in every city,”* Titus 1:5. In this three-chapter epistle, Paul gave numerous instructions to Titus regarding his evangelistic obligations. Included in these instructions was that of reminding his hearers to *“be subject to rulers and authorities,”* to *“speak evil of no one,”* but to *“be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men,”* Titus 3:1-2. And one reason for *“showing all humility to all men”* is that fact that Paul said *“we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another,”* Titus 3:3. In other words, one strong motivation for *“showing all humility to all men”* is an ever-abiding awareness of what *“we”* once were — *“foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”*

Ouch! That is not a pretty picture! But it is one that describes the former lives of so many Christians. In view of what we *“once”* were (prior to conversion), we must therefore *“be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men,”* v. 2. But what brought about the change in what we *“once”* were, and what we (if we are faithful Christians) **now** are? Note verse four: *“the kindness and love of God our Savior toward men appeared.”*

Did you get that message? *“The kindness and love of God our Savior...appeared?”* But to whom? Included in the recipients of His *“kindness and love”* are those who were *“foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy...,”* v. 3. Whether or not we are willing to admit it, this verse describes the former lives — not only of Paul and Titus, but that of many Christians today. Let’s face it! In view of what we *“once”* were, not one of us is deserving of *“the kindness and love of God,”* especially to the degree that God sent Jesus Who made the supreme sacrifice so that *“we”* might be saved! And this is one reason why *“we”* ought to show *“all humility to all men,”* v. 2.

Now we are getting to verse five. Finally! Yes, if we are Christians, we can say as did Paul, **“He Saved us!”** And in view of what we *“once”* were, that, within itself, is an amazing thought. But **how** did *“He”* save us?

**Viewed negatively**, it was *“**not** by works of righteousness which we have done,”* v. 5. Considering what we *“once”* were, as already described in verse 3, there is no way that we could do enough *“works of righteousness”* to make God so indebted to us that

“*He*” would save us on the basis of our own merit. Hence, Paul prefaced his further remarks by saying “*according to His mercy.*” Eliminate the “*mercy*” of God, there is no way that any of us could be saved! And in view of the magnitude of our own sins, we should be thankful that God, “*because of His great love*” for us, is “*rich in mercy,*” Eph. 2:4. Mercy, from *eleos* (Greek), is defined as “the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it,” **Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, by W.E. Vine. Indeed, it behooves us to humbly thank God for His “*great love*” and His “*rich mercy!*”

**Viewed positively**, the apostle said “*He saved us!*” Obviously, other than sincerely complying with God’s terms of pardon (cf. Acts 2:36-40), there is no way that we could save ourselves! Fortunately, the apostle let us know **how** “*He saved us.*” Please note, the apostle further said “*He saved us through*” (or “*by,*” KJV). The word “*through*” (NKJV) or “*by*” (KJV) is translated from *dia* (Greek), and is defined as “the Ground or Reason on account of which anything is or is not done; by reason of, because of” (**Thayer’s Lexicon**). Hence, “*He saved us,*” and it was “*through*” or “*by*” (denoting the “ground or reason”) whereby our salvation is accomplished. Yes, “*He saved us:*”

“**Through**” or “**by**” “*the washing of regeneration,*” Tit. 3:5. “*Regeneration*” is translated from *palingenesis* (Greek), which is a compound word taken from *palin* (which means “again” and *genesis*, meaning “birth.” Hence “*regeneration*” means the same as the words “*born again,*” as used in John 3:5. However, the apostle mentioned “*the washing of regeneration.*” Being “*born again*” involves a “*washing.*” This reminds us of Eph. 5:26 wherein the church Jesus built was mentioned as having been cleansed and sanctified “*by the washing of water by the word.*” And this harmonizes with John 3:5 wherein Jesus taught that entrance into the kingdom is predicated upon one being “*born of water and the Spirit.*” It also harmonizes with Acts 22:16 in which we read of Ananias commanding the believing, penitent Saul of Tarsus to “*arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*”

“**And renewing of the Holy Spirit,**” Tit. 3:5. “*Renewing*” (Gk) is translated from *anakainoo*, which means “to make new,” (**Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, by W.E. Vine). Hence, the “*us*” whom “*He saved*” have been made “*new,*” a renewing involving the work of the Holy Spirit. This harmonizes with Acts 2:38 in which we read of Peter commanding the pricked in the heart Jews to whom he had just preached the gospel to “*repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” It also harmonizes with John 3:5 which records Jesus telling Nicodemus, “*unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*” And it further harmonizes with Romans 6:4 in which the apostle taught the saints at Rome that as a result of their having been “*buried with*” Christ “*through baptism*” they should now “*walk in newness of life.*” Succinctly stated, those whom “*He saved*” were saved “*through*” or “*by*” (a) “*the washing of regeneration*” and (b) the “**renewing of the Holy Spirit,**” Tit. 3:5.

And these are the ones who were then described as “*having justified by His grace,*” Titus 3:5. Those whom God “*saved*” are the ones who have been “*justified by His grace,*” that

they “*should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*,” Tit. 3:7. “*Justified*” is from *diakaioo* (Gk), which is defined as (a) “to show to be right or righteous” and (b) “to declare to be righteous, to pronounce “righteous” (**Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, by W.E. Vine). They are now justified, or righteous, because their sins have been remitted. Cf. Acts 2:38. As a result they have “*become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*.” Imagine that! Those whom “*He saved*” have been “*justified*,” they have “*become heirs*,” and they live in “*hope of eternal life*,” Tit. 3:7; cf. 1:2. Moreover, being “*heirs*,” they are “*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*,” Rom. 8:17! Clearly, in view of what we “*once*” were, and in view of the magnitude of the blessings the “*justified*” ones possess, our salvation did not come about by reason of “*works of righteousness which we have done*.” But on the other hand, apart from our having submitted to that plan involving “*the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*,” “*He*” (God) would not have “*saved us*,” and we would neither be “*justified*” or “*made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*!”

And thereby having thus been “*saved*,” it behooves us to “*live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age*,” Tit. 2:12 and “*be careful to maintain good works*,” Tit. 3:14, always seeking “*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*,” Matt. 6:33. Consider ye well!

\* \*\*\* —B. Witherington

**So True:** “The ignorance of ignorance is the death of knowledge.”