MOTIVATION FOR GOOD DEEDS

Titus 3:4-8

By

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Titus Lesson 11

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Every pastor can tell you about the 80/20 rule in the local church. Eighty percent of the work gets done by 20 percent of the people. This means that 80 percent of the people attend church without getting involved in any form of service. I haven’t validated those numbers here, but I do know that there are many who attend here who never get involved in ministry. We don’t have a waiting list for Sunday School teachers, nursery workers, and small group Bible study leaders!

Why is that? There could be multiple causes. For one thing, life is busy and other things just crowd out serving the Lord. But, we all have the same number of hours in a week, so it really boils down to priorities. Serving the Lord is just not a priority for many that attend church. And so we come back to the question, why is that? Why aren’t God’s people motivated to serve Him?

I cannot judge the motives of your heart. We each need to examine our own hearts. But, I know that there are many that are just cultural Christians. For them, going to church once in a while is a nice thing to do. It makes them feel good. They would claim to believe in Christ as Savior, but He is not really their Lord. They do not let Christ control their use of time and money. They keep Him compartmentalized in a drawer of their lives and pull Him out whenever they feel the need. But other things dominate their daily lives. Serving Him is just not a priority.

If I have just described you, in love I must tell you that you need to examine whether you are truly saved. Jesus does not save you so that you can relegate Him to a drawer of your life, to pull out and use whenever it’s convenient. He is Lord and He demands total allegiance in every area of your life. He will not take a back seat to your career, your family, or your hobbies. So you must ask yourself honestly, “Is Jesus Christ my Lord?” If He is not, you also need to ask, “Is He truly my Savior?” Have I trusted in His blood to deliver me from the wrath of God? Have I repented of my sins? Is Jesus my only hope of heaven?
It may be that you have trusted Christ as Savior, but you’ve drifted into complacency or carelessness in your relationship with Him. You have forgotten your “purification from [your] former sins” (2 Pet. 1:9). You need to remember and think about what God has done for your soul so that you will be both useful and fruitful in your walk with Christ (2 Pet. 1:8). In other words, remembering God’s abundant grace in saving us is the key for motivation to serve Him. That’s what Paul is saying in Titus 3:4-8:

God’s great love and mercy in saving us will motivate us to excel in good works.

Paul’s overall concern in these verses is the church’s witness to a pagan world. How can we gain a platform to tell this world about God’s great love as seen at the cross of Jesus Christ? Paul’s answer is that we must engage in good deeds in our society. To do that, we must remember that we used to be just as unbelievers around us are (3:3). Then he gives us an extended sentence (3:4-7) extolling God’s great love and mercy in saving us. He then comes back (3:8) to exhort Titus to speak confidently about these things (the truths of the gospel of God’s grace), “so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds.” These good deeds are good and profitable for men, in that they may be the avenue to lead them to experience God’s saving grace. The words, “good and profitable,” contrast with the “unprofitable and worthless” doctrines of the false teachers (3:9).

God’s saving grace was the central theme of Paul’s theology. It is the foundation for everything that he says. It was his personal motivation to serve the Lord in spite of repeated trials, persecutions, and setbacks. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, he says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them [the other apostles]; yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” So we should ask God for deeper understanding of His grace, so that we may serve Him joyfully out of hearts filled with love and gratitude.

To understand His saving grace, we must begin by going down, not up. We must see our wretched condition without Christ so that we appreciate what He did in saving us.
1. To be saved, God must open our eyes to see that we are hopelessly lost and cannot save ourselves (3:4a).

The word “but” that begins verse 4 takes us back to verse 3, which we studied last week: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” That verse described Paul before his conversion (“we”) and it describes every person before conversion.

Maybe you’re thinking, “But I wasn’t like that! I grew up in the church. I was a pretty good person!” If that is true, it is only because of outward circumstances that restrained your sin. But if God has saved you, He opened your eyes to see that the sins of verse 3 are lurking just below the surface in your heart. As Romans 3:10-12 describes the human race, “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.” You were not the first exception to those verses!

Some people don’t like an emphasis on our sin. They want to be positive. They know that God has forgiven their sins, but they just want to focus on His love and not think about the depths of sin from which He rescued them. But, if you do that, you will not appreciate God’s love and grace. God’s grace in saving you was not a matter of His taking a basically good person and giving you a little moral guidance or advice. Salvation is a radical intervention that required the infinite, holy God to send His own Son to be the substitute for sinners. You will never understand or appreciate God’s amazing grace until you see that you were a wretched, lost sinner before He intervened in your life.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones brings this out in his exposition of Ephesians 2:14-16, which states that Christ is our peace, who reconciled us to God through His death. He says (God’s Way of Reconciliation [Baker], p. 201), “In order to measure the love of God you have first to go down before you can go up. You do not start on the level and go up. We have to be brought up from a dungeon, from a horrible pit; and unless you know something of the measure of that depth you will only be measuring half the love of God.”
So Paul begins to tell us of God’s abundant love and mercy with the word, “but,” which takes us back to see the depths of sin from which He rescued us. Then he gives us these glorious verses about God’s grace:

2. When God saves us, it is totally due to His grace and provision, and not at all due to our works (3:4-7).

In verse 3, man is active in sin without God. In verses 4-7, God is active in salvation, changing what man could not. Paul does not mention faith in 3:4-7, because his emphasis is on what God graciously did for us. Our salvation was not due to anything good in us. Salvation is not a joint effort, where God does His part and we add our part. It is all from God, and not at all from us. God did not love us because we were worth loving, but rather because He is love. He did not save us because He foresaw that we would believe in Him. That would make us, not God, the cause of our salvation. Apart from His sovereign intervention, none of us would have believed, because we were dead in our sins. He had to take the initiative. Salvation is totally of the Lord.

These verses give the basis (or cause) of our salvation (first, negatively, not by our works; then, positively, by God’s kindness, love, and mercy); the means of our salvation (regeneration; renewal, justification); and, the result of our salvation (the hope of eternal life). Note the work of all three persons of the Trinity. The Father took the loving initiative in our salvation. The Son provided His gracious merit to secure our salvation. The Spirit effected and abundantly applied God’s salvation to us.

A. Salvation is not on the basis of deeds that we have done in righteousness.

Every non-Christian religion, every cult, and two of the major branches of Christianity (the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church) teach that somehow our good works play a part in our salvation. But, go through the epistles of Paul and note how often he is at pains to deny that our works have any part in saving us. Here are just a few (see, also, 1 Cor. 1:26-31; Gal. 2:21-3:14):

Romans 4:4-5: “Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not
work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Romans 9:11-12, “for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’”

2 Timothy 1:9: God, “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”

Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Clearly, we are saved so that as a result we will walk in the good works that God prepared beforehand for us to do. But, just as clearly, we are saved apart from any good works, so that we will not boast. So, Paul says here (Titus 3:5a) that God “saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness.”

B. Salvation is on the basis of God’s kindness, love, and mercy.

Note that Paul calls God our Savior (3:4) and then (3:6) calls Jesus Christ our Savior, making Him equal with God. The kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared when Jesus Christ, the eternal God, took on human flesh and entered this world to die as the substitute for our sins. We personally experienced His mercy—His compassion on our pitiable condition—when He saved us. When Jesus commands us to love our enemies and do good (Luke 6:35), He adds as the reason that the Most High “Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.” In the next verse, He commands, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” So the foundation for our showing love, kindness, and mercy to others is that we know the love, kindness, and mercy of the Father.

God’s “love for mankind” (Titus 3:4) is the Greek word, philanthropia, from which we get our word, philanthropy. This is the
only time this word is used of God in the New Testament. The more usual word is, 
*agape*, which occurs in the familiar John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” The reason that God loved this evil world and sent His Son was not that the world was so loveable! Rather, it was that God is so loving! The fact that He loved sinful rebels such as we were shows the magnitude of His great love. Thus, salvation is not based on our good deeds, but rather on God’s kindness, love, and mercy.

C. Salvation is accomplished through the washing of regeneration, renewing by the Holy Spirit, and being justified by God’s grace.

There is at least one sermon in each of these phrases, so I can only skim the surface here!

(1) Salvation is accomplished through the washing of regeneration.

Regeneration refers to the new birth, or being born again. When God saves us, He raises us from spiritual death to life (Eph. 2:5). We were as active in being born again as we were in being born the first time. In other words, God is active and we are passive. We do not exercise our free will to be born again any more than Lazarus exercised his free will to come from death to life when Jesus cried out, “Lazarus, come forth!” James 1:18 plainly states, “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth….” The new birth is God’s doing, according to His will.

Many commentators interpret the washing of regeneration to refer to baptism, but that is mistaken. In the New Testament, baptism happens after the new birth, as a picture and testimony of what God did in saving us: He washed us from all our sins. The only other time this word is used in the New Testament is in Ephesians 5:26, where Paul says that God cleansed the church “by the washing of water with the word.” In the context, it refers to what happened at the cross.

In Titus 3:5, Paul may have been thinking of Ezekiel 16:4, where God speaks metaphorically of Israel’s birth as a nation: “As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not
rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths." He goes on to say that no one took pity on her, but she was thrown in a field and left to die. Then (Ezek. 16:6), God passed by and saw her squirming in her blood and said to her, “Live!” Later (16:9) He tells how he bathed her with water and washed off her blood. It is a picture of how when we were born spiritually, God washed off the filth of our sins.

(2) Salvation is accomplished through renewing by the Holy Spirit.

Commentators debate whether this refers to the same act as the washing of regeneration, or to something separate. I understand it to refer to the ongoing process of inner renewal that occurs after regeneration. In Romans 12:2, this renewal of the mind is the ongoing process that takes place after we present our bodies to God as living sacrifices. In Ephesians 4:23 and Colossians 3:10, Paul refers to putting on the new man, who is being renewed according to the image of the One who created him. While God creates the new nature by the power of His Spirit, we must walk in the Spirit and be transformed through God’s Word in order to experience this ongoing renewal.

Note also that Paul adds (3:6) that God poured out the Holy Spirit upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Those who teach that you may be a Christian without having the Holy Spirit are mistaken. Every Christian has received the Holy Spirit: Paul says (Rom. 8:9), “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” Our text says that we not only have the Spirit in a small portion, but that God has poured out the Spirit on us richly through Jesus Christ.

But, having said that, we all need to ask ourselves, “Do I experience this?” Do I know in my daily walk the fullness of God’s Spirit? If not, why not? Is there some sin in my heart that blocks His fullness? Is my focus too much on the things of this world? Is my faith too small, so that I operate more in dependence on my own abilities, rather than relying on God’s Spirit? The main evidence of the Spirit’s fullness in our lives will not be that we babble in tongues or keel over backwards. The main evidence will be the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) manifested in our daily lives.
(3) Salvation is accomplished through being justified by God’s grace.

To be justified is for God to declare the sinner righteous because He imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to us at the instant we believe (see Romans 3 & 4). God does not justify the sinner by crediting faith to us as our righteousness. Rather, the merit of Christ (His perfect righteousness) is credited to us through faith in Christ. As Paul says here, justification comes to us by God’s grace, and thus it is in no way merited by our faith.

Thus salvation is not on the basis of deeds that we have done, but rather, is on the basis of God’s kindness, love, and mercy. It is accomplished through the washing of regeneration, renewing by the Holy Spirit, and being justified by God’s grace. Finally,

D. Salvation results in our being made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

All that is Christ’s is ours! We do not experience it all in this life, but it is laid up for us in heaven, as secure as the promise of God. “Hope” does not convey any uncertainty, but rather the fact that our inheritance is still in the future, and thus not fully realized. We are heirs, written in the will of God’s Son. Throughout eternity, we will not get to the end of experiencing our riches in Christ!

What is the bottom line? Why does Paul go into this great discourse on our salvation?

3. These doctrines of God’s grace in our salvation will motivate us to excel in good deeds (3:8).

“This is a trustworthy statement” occurs four other times in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11). Here it refers back to the long sentence that runs from verses 4-7. “These things” refers to the same sentence, these great doctrinal truths about our salvation. Paul wants Titus to continue speaking these truths with confidence, so that believers “will be careful to engage in good deeds.”

“Be careful” is literally, “take thought.” It implies that we must give mental effort to the question of how God wants us to serve Him. It also takes a swipe at the false teachers, who loved to speculate on worthless things that did not lead to good deeds (3:9).
It also shows us that sound doctrine is not for useless speculation, but for practical application. If you understand the doctrine of salvation by God’s sovereign grace, it will motivate you to take thought about how you may engage in good deeds.

“Engage in” is a Greek word that means, “to take the lead.” It is used of elders leading the church (1 Tim. 5:17). The idea is that believers give careful thought so that they may excel or take the lead in doing good works. The reason is that these things (the truths of the gospel and the good deeds of believers) are good and profitable for men, believers and unbelievers alike. Our good deeds encourage and build up the saints. And, they are often the platform that open the door so that we can tell lost people about the kindness and love of God, who sent His Son to be the Savior of all that believe in Him.

**Conclusion**

So, are you motivated, like Paul was, to outdo everyone else in serving God? If not, first make sure that you’re trusting in Christ as Savior and Lord. Then, meditate on His great kindness, love, and mercy that sent His Son to die for your sins. The Lord’s Supper is a time to be reminded again and again of what He did for you totally by His grace. Let His grace motivate you to excel in good deeds. Tell the world of what He has done for your soul!

**Application Questions**

1. Why do so few Christians excel in good deeds? How can they remedy this problem?

2. Some Christians would argue that to be reminded of our sinfulness is negative and unhealthy for our self-esteem. How would you respond?

3. Why must sound doctrine (3:4-7) be the foundation for good deeds (3:8)? Why are the “good deeds” of those in the cults worthless?

4. Why must we insist that to mingle good works with faith for salvation is to pollute the pure gospel of God’s grace?

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