

Titus 3:1-8 “Justification and Good Works” September 25, 2016
Ezekiel 36:16-38
Psalm 42

Ezekiel 36 explains why God has driven the house of Israel into exile.

“I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land,
for the idols with which they had defiled it.”

“they profaned my holy name.”

And the LORD goes on to say that it is not because of anything in Israel
that he will save them!

“It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act,
but for the sake of my holy name.”

God does not save you because of how nice and sweet you are!

Indeed, Ezekiel says that when God saves you –
then you will see how bad you really are!

“Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good,
and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations.”

There is such a thing as a *healthy* self-loathing!

When you see what you once were – what you were when you were apart from Christ –
then you look back at that and say “Ugh!”

“We were once foolish, disobedient, led astray,
slaves to various passions and pleasures,
passing our days in malice and envy,
hated by others and hating one another.”

A healthy self-loathing does not dwell there!

When you see clearly what you once were,
you *should* be repulsed by what you once were!

But that’s not you anymore!

So you should not remain in that old way of thinking.

If our identity is in Christ – if *he* is our life –
then we cannot dwell in that loathing,
because our sins have been forgiven and we have been made new!

Our Psalm of Response – Psalm 42 – prays with that same confidence:

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed in me?
Trust God for I will praise him yet; my Savior and my God is he.”

Sing Psalm 42a

Read Titus 3

Introduction: the Submissive Christian and the Pattern of the Cross (v1-2)

I didn't spend much time last week on the theme of submission
because I wanted to start with that today.

Paul uses the word "submission" three times:

In 2:5, where he tells the older women to train the young women to be
"submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled."

In 2:9, where he tells slaves to be "submissive to their own masters in everything."

And here in verse 1 of chapter 3 where he tells all Christians
"to be submissive to rulers and authorities."

There is a tendency in some Christian circles
to emphasize only the first of these three submissions.

Since we have done away with slavery, we don't talk about submitting to masters.
And since we have done away with kings, we don't talk about submitting to rulers.
So it is not entirely surprising that our culture is now trying to do away with husbands,
so that we don't have to submit to them!

But the problem is that if you refuse to submit to anyone, you will end up dead.

If you refuse to obey the speed limit, you could get shot by the police.

Seriously.

If you are going 80 miles an hour down city streets,
and every attempt to slow you down fails,
eventually they will kill you
in order to prevent you from killing others!

Every breach of the law *could result in death* – if you continue to refuse to submit.
Indeed, the only way to avoid death is to submit!

We may not have kings – but we still have rulers.

And you must submit to them.

And we still have masters and slaves.

Someone asked me last week, "What does it mean to
'submit to their own masters in everything'?"

I think that it is clear that Paul is *not* saying that a slave should commit murder –
just because his master told him to!

"In everything" means *in everything pertaining to the relationship*.

If the master says "kill Tom" or "worship Zeus" –
the slave must refuse.

But any lawful command must be obeyed.

We have adjusted the system to allow slaves the freedom to change masters,
but if you are working for someone else,

your time and your labor belongs to them.
Mark's brilliant computer programs do not belong to Mark Hanson –
but to his masters.
And so as long as you work for someone else,
you must submit to them in everything that pertains to that relationship.

And likewise, wives are to submit to their own husbands –
in everything that pertains to that relationship.

What does this look like –
well, Paul provides the clearest description of this
when talking about *Christian character* here in chapter 3!

Submissiveness is supposed to characterize *every Christian*.
Listen to Paul's description of this in verses 1-2:

3 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

It is possible that Paul is simply giving a list of characteristics and qualities –
with submissiveness at the beginning –
but it sure sounds like Paul is *describing* what submission looks like.

What is Christian submission?
What does it mean to submit?
“to be obedient”

If you do not learn to *obey* then you will not be able to live the Christian life.

And notice that Paul does not say that we have to understand why first!
Very often, we use this as an excuse for disobedience!
We won't do something until we understand why –
so we persistently disobey,
with the result that we *never* understand why,
because our disobedience has become so engrained in us!

The sixth century abbot, Benedict of Nursia, said it well:
“The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience,
which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all.” (5.1-2)
If your heart is set on Christ –
then you will freely and joyfully obey others.

The second part of Christian submission is “being ready for every good work.”
We are still talking about how the Christian relates to civil authority.
This is closely related to Jeremiah's call for the exiles (Jer 29)

to seek the welfare (the peace) of the city where God had put them.
We should always be ready to seek the welfare of the Michiana region.
We should be ready for every good work –
for every opportunity to do good to our city.

The third part of Christian submission is comprised in the four phrases of verse 2:
“to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling,
to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”

This focuses on how we speak and act in relation to “all people” –
not just our fellow Christians.

Speak evil of no one.

The Greek word here is the word
from which we get our English word “blaspheme.”
Do not *blaspheme* other people.

We usually think of blasphemy in terms of how we speak of God –
but you can also blaspheme people.
You blaspheme other people when speak of them in a way
that is calculated to make other people think less of them than they should.

To put it simply,
you must never use your words to destroy people.

The goal of your speech about others should always be *love*.

So, for instance, how should you speak about Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump.
Well, you should not blaspheme them.
In other words, when you speak about Hilary and Donald
the result of your words should be
that other people *love* Hilary and Donald better.
Notice what I said – and what I did not say!
The result should be *love*.
You can love both Hilary and Donald without voting for either one!
I insist that you love both of them!
You can disagree with someone without blaspheming them!
You can explain why someone should not be president
in a loving way.

So much of what passes for political discourse right now is simply slander.
Most of the memes on social media are taking half-truths
and using them to promote hatred and scorn.
That is what it means to blaspheme – to speak evil of someone.

And Paul shows us a better way:

to be gentle – to show perfect courtesy –
the word translated courtesy
can convey the idea of humility, courtesy, or gentleness.

The idea here should be clear:
Christian submission is characterized by humility, gentleness, and courtesy.

All throughout his epistles Paul grounds this in the humiliation of the Son of God.
The incarnation and the cross sets the standard for the Christian life.

And that is at the heart of how Christians are to relate to rulers –
and indeed to “all people.”

This is why Friedrich Nietzsche spoke of Christianity as a religion for slaves.
Because it is.
Christianity is *not* a religion of and for the powerful.
Christianity is a religion of and for the weak and helpless.

After all – look at what Paul says in verse 3:
What were we?
Who were we?

1. What We Were: Slaves to Sin and Misery (v3)

³ *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures,*

We were foolish.

Remember the theme of chapter 2 – self-controlled, moderate, prudent.

And this is contrasted in chapter 3 with *foolish*.

We were once foolish – we were *not* self-controlled, moderate, or prudent.

We were once disobedient – we did not obey God (or others).

We were once led astray – we wandered from God’s ways
because we were *led astray*.

What is it that led us astray?

Paul says that we were *slaves to various passions and pleasures*,

We were slaves to our desires.

Yes, Nietzsche was right to say

that Christianity is a religion of slaves.

Christianity is a religion for those who were helpless –

who were slaves to our passions and pleasures –

we were led astray into bondage.

We were created to love and enjoy God –

and in that way all of our created desires

are supposed to be oriented toward him.

What Paul calls *passions and pleasures*
are the *disordered* loves that result from our idolatrous quest
to find love and joy apart from God.
Passions and pleasures, in Paul's vocabulary,
are not *good things* pursued in the wrong way.
Rather passions and pleasures are disordered loves and joys.

Let me give you a real easy example:
Sexual lust.
There is no proper outlet for sexual lust.

I've heard some people say that you should only lust after your wife.
But think about what lust is:
lust is not a proper desire.
When you lust after a woman,
you are not seeking to love her as Christ loved the church.
When you lust after a woman,
you desire to have her for yourself –
to control her for your own pleasure –
lust certainly has a sexual component,
but there is nothing *pure* about lust.
If you simply transfer your lust for "women" in general
to lust for a woman in particular (even if she is your wife!),
you are transferring an inordinate desire –
and it is no wonder that the result invariably falls short of love.

Lust must be put to death.
You cannot just transfer it to a "proper" object
because there *is no proper object* for lust!
There is a proper object for sexual desire –
but *lust* is not simply "proper sexual desire"!

Paul says that our problem is that we were *enslaved* to our various passions and pleasures.
And so long as passions and pleasures are your master –
so long as you are *controlled* by them –
there simply is no way to "transfer" your desires to something good.

passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

So what happens when you are enslaved to your passions and pleasures?
When you are enslaved to your passions and pleasures,
they control you.
But the passions – your desires – are a cruel master!
Pleasure sounds like fun (that is the lure, after all!) –
but passions and pleasures cannot satisfy.
And when we are enslaved to passions and pleasures,

the result is that we pass our days in malice and envy –
hated by others and hating one another.

The result of disordered loves is disordered relationships.
Think about the disordered relationships in your life.
All of the disordered relationships in my life
stem from disordered loves.
And, quite frankly, I'm not talking about *their* disordered loves.
I'm talking about *my own* disordered loves!
I can see how my desire for my own comfort – my own power –
my own happiness – has resulted in a disordered relationship.

Paul's point, after all, is that we were *slaves*.
We were *helpless*.
We were in the condition of Israel enslaved in Egypt.
How was Israel supposed to get out of slavery in Egypt?

And that is where Paul's *central* point comes in:
We were slaves – there was nothing we could do to save ourselves –
but *God* has done what we were helpless to do!

2. What God Has Done (v4-7)

a. The Incarnation: the Appearing of God's Goodness and Loving Kindness (v4)

⁴ *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,*

We saw this in chapter 2, verse 11 –
“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people...”
Paul is not talking about some abstract principle.
He is talking about the appearing of Jesus Christ –
the Son of God who joined himself to our flesh and blood.
The incarnation of the Word is here described as the appearing
of the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior.

Was God good before?
Why yes! He has always been good!

But his *goodness* appeared in a way that it had never appeared before!
Because in Jesus God's goodness and loving kindness appeared in the flesh.

And when God's goodness and loving kindness appeared in the flesh,

b. He Saved Us According to His Own Mercy – Not By Our Works (v5a)

⁵ *he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,*

Salvation belongs to the LORD.
Only God can save.
He saved us.
We were slaves.
There was nothing that we could do to save ourselves.

So he saved us – not because of works done by us in righteousness.
Paul has already made it clear – we were once foolish, disobedient, led astray...

We were wandering in the wrong direction!
With our loves disordered – our relationships were disordered as well!

But God has saved us *according to his own mercy*.
Who deserves mercy?
No one *deserves* mercy.
The whole point of *mercy* is that it is *not* deserved.

Paul will go on to talk about the importance of doing good works –
but Paul is *very clear* that God did not save you because of your works.
He saved us...according to his own mercy.

But *how* has God saved us?

He saved us:

c. By the Washing of Regeneration and Renewal of the Holy Spirit (v5b-6)

by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

You can see here the Trinitarian character of our salvation.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each play a distinctive role in our salvation.
The Father has saved us,
pouring out the Holy Spirit upon us
through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Given the Trinitarian focus here –
and given the language of washing and pouring –
we should definitely hear the image of baptism.

Baptism *is* the “washing of regeneration.”

That doesn't mean that everyone who gets baptized is automatically regenerated.

In any sacrament there is both an outward sign and an inward reality.

In baptism the outward sign is washing with water.

The inward reality is regeneration – the new birth.

Just getting wet does not give you a new heart.

Only the work of the Holy Spirit gives you a new heart –
after all, Paul calls it the “washing of regeneration

and renewal *of the Holy Spirit.*”

The most famous example of this in the NT was Simon Magus in Acts 8 –
he was baptized – but he did not receive a new heart –
as Peter says to him in Acts 8:21,

“You have neither part nor lot in this matter,
for your heart is not right before God.”

If your heart is not right before God –
then you do not have a new heart!

The idea of regeneration is important.

The word “regeneration” has to do with “new beginnings,”
“beginning again.”

The idea is closely related to the themes of “new birth” or “new creation.”

What God has done in Jesus is nothing less than a new creation.

The “washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”
is talking about the fulfillment of what Ezekiel had said in Ez 36:25-27

“I will sprinkle clean water on you,
and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses,
and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.

And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh
and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit within you,
and cause you to walk in my statutes
and be careful to obey my rules.”

The new covenant – the new creation – the new birth –
all go together in the resurrection of Jesus.

Our problem was not that our desires needed to be tweaked.

We were “slaves to various passions and pleasures...”

We were filthy with our sins and idolatries.

We had hearts of stone.

We needed *new hearts* – a new birth.

John Chrysostom says this well:

“we were so drowned in wickedness that we could not be purified.

We needed a new birth!

For this is implied by ‘regeneration.’

For as when a house is in a ruinous state no one places props under it
nor makes any addition to the old building,

but pulls it down to the foundations and rebuilds it anew.

So in our case, God has not repaired us but made us anew.” (304)

And God’s purpose in this is:

d. So that Being Justified by His Grace We Might Become Heirs (v7)

⁷ *so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

We are justified by the grace of God.

“Justification is an act of God’s free grace
wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight,
only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us,
and received by faith alone” (SC 33)

As Paul has already made it clear –

our works contribute *nothing* to this!

Justification is entirely an act of God’s free grace.

And in our justification, God declares us righteous in his sight.

The judge pronounces us *not guilty* –

not because of anything we did – but because of what *Jesus* did!

So that we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is why justification and adoption are so closely connected.

When God declares us righteous in his sight –

he also declares that we are his children –

that he has adopted us in his beloved Son,

so that we might become fellow-heirs with Jesus.

3. What Duty God Requires of Us: Be Devoted to Good Works (v8)

⁸ *The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.*

Notice the connection in verse 8 between faith and good works.

Paul wants Titus to insist that those who have believed in God
may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

You can even hear an echo of the Great Commission –

when Jesus said, “teach them to observe all that I have commanded”

So, think about what Paul is saying here.

We were once foolish, disobedient, led astray –

we once were held captive – enslaved to our passions and pleasures.

And those disordered loves resulted in disordered relationships.

But Jesus came to save us – where we couldn’t possibly save ourselves.

And God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

God saved us, so that being justified by grace we might become heirs.

God saved us so that we might become like his beloved Son.

This is why Paul says to insist on these things –
so that those who have believed in God may be *careful*
to devote themselves to good works.
There is nothing *automatic* about good works in the Christian life.
You must be *careful* to be devoted to good works.

How are good works related to justification?
Look at our text!
Not as the means by which we are justified!

Rather, good works are what we call “necessary, subsequent, conditions.”
Good works are necessary – they are not optional.
You cannot call yourself a child of God,
if you are refusing to do what he says!
But good works are also *subsequent* to our justification.
Verse 5 makes this clear –
“not because of works done by us in righteousness.”
Our good works are *subsequent* to our justification.
We do not do good works *in order to* be justified –
but because we are justified.
But we also properly call good works a *condition* of justification.
Not a *pre-condition*!
They are a subsequent condition –
in other words, they *must* follow justification.
If someone claims to follow Jesus,
but they refuse to do what Jesus said,
then they are *not* following Jesus.

And that’s why we need one another!

It is all too easy to fall back into those old patterns – those old disordered loves.
If you haven’t connected with a shepherding group –
or one of the men’s or women’s groups –
I would urge you to seek out a connection there.