

Ambushed by Goodness

Remarkable Christianity, Part 3

Titus 3:4-7

An unforgettable event occurred in the lives of 3 graduating seniors at Azusa Pacific University, a Christian University in Southern California. A pastor and his wife had been invited to join a special gathering of alumni, new faculty, board members and the president of the University and he would later write about this event.

John Wallace, the university president, had invited 3 graduating students to attend a well. These particular students had decided to spend the following two years serving overseas in India, among the untouchables. These students assumed that they were invited to simply be commissioned and encouraged. And they would be.

But then something happened that they did not know was coming. Dr. Wallace turned to the three students and said, "I have news for you. There's somebody you don't know, but they've appreciated what you're planning to do over the next 2 year and have given a gift to the university in your name and on your behalf." Then he turned to the first student and said, "On behalf of the donor, you are forgiven your \$105,000 dollar debt to this institution." The student immediately began to weep. He turned to the second student and said, "And you are forgiven your debt of \$70,000 dollars" and to the third student he said, "You are forgiven your debt of \$130,000 dollars to this University."

Everyone in the room by now was weeping . . . especially these three students who had no idea this was coming. The author writes, "They were ambushed by grace – blown away that someone they didn't even know would pay off their debt."¹

In many ways this is what it means to be ambushed by the grace and love and kindness of God.

We have been ambushed by the goodness of God.

The only difference is that we didn't sign up for two years in India to become the benefactors of His goodness. In fact, we didn't deserve it at all.

But the truth remains, the more we learn about our redemption in Christ, the more we are blown away by His grace – the more dumfounded we are by the goodness of God.

Now in our last few sessions, we've been expounding on those remarkable Christians living on the Island of Crete – those descendants of pirates in the 1st century.

And we've also been exploring what it means to be a remarkable Christian in the 21st century.

Let me invite you again to *Titus and chapter 3* where Paul reveals that we – pirates and rebels at heart – are actually nothing more than the benefactors of a remarkable salvation – we have been ambushed by a remarkable Savior.

Chapter 3 and verse 4 begins, But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

That's one sentence – it's one long sentence. I am convinced the Apostle Paul was always running out of ink.

This is one uninterrupted sentence. And I want to deal with the entire sentence in our study today.

Let me remind you that it begins with that little contrastive conjunction which I mentioned in our former study is one of my favorite words in the English Bible – But!

That changes everything.

Back up to the last part of *verse 2 (remember this?) 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 – but –*

In other words, in spite of the fact that that is what we were – something's about to happen – and that little word, “but”, means everything is about to change.

In fact, you're really tuned in to what follows “but” . . .

- How many applicants heard the company representative say, “We really liked your resume and your past experience, but . . .”
- “The buyer agreed your house was worth it and he really wants it, but . . .”
- How many guys have heard a girl say, “I like you and I think you're a really nice and all, but”; certainly none of us.

Forget what came in front of that conjunction and really pay attention to what follows it, right?

Charles Hughes served as Secretary of State in 1921 under President Harding and later as a justice with the Supreme Court. As Secretary of State, he attended a Pan-American conference where he would have to depend on a translator to translate the Spanish and Portuguese speakers. He told his translator, “Listen, while a running translation is important to me – what I really want is for you to give me every word after the speaker says, “but” – because that may change everything.”ⁱⁱ

Paul is saying – Look, we have nothing to offer God but our sinful lives, but there's something that changes everything.

Verse 4 opens with the truth that:

1. We have a Remarkable Redeemer

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us...

Paul makes special note of God's kindness and love. That word, *kindness* is a word only used by Paul in the New Testament. It refers to the goodness of God. It can actually be thought of in terms of generosity.ⁱⁱⁱ

And it's not a surprise that the next noun would follow here in the text – not only is the goodness of God remarkable, but his love is remarkable. Paul writes, “*the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared . . .*”

Paul uses a compound word here for love, combining *philia* – for love, and *anthropos* – for man; to love mankind.

Philanthropia (φιλανθρωπια) is the word, which gives us our transliterated word, “philanthropy”.^{iv}

Mankind has always been highly impressed by philanthropy – acts of kindness toward mankind. In fact, to give away something you could keep for yourself is something even the ancient Greeks highly valued – it was considered one of the highest virtues you could ever demonstrate toward another.^v

Perhaps you've read in the news about the recent pact made by several billionaires to give away half of their fortune to different causes.

I read that Bill Gates has promised to give away half of his personal fortune; which means he'll give away some 30 billion and with the 30 billion remaining try to eke out an existence . . . I can't imagine how hard that would be.

But truthfully, I admire that – whether he knows it or not, he's reflecting the law of God written on his heart.

For God is the ultimate philanthropist.

In fact, He doesn't just give away some of His fortune . . . money is nothing to Him – to God, gold is nothing more than asphalt . . . it's sidewalks.

You see, the ultimate philanthropy is giving away your life.

It's one thing to give somebody something; it's another thing to love somebody and give your life to them in sacrifice.

His kindness and love appeared.

John Phillips writes about an incident in his commentary through Ephesians where he visited a friend of his. This man's daughter was an alcoholic and, Phillips writes, “I was visiting in his home one day when she was delivered to his door. He had drunk almost an entire bottle of whiskey. Her temper was flaming and abusive. Her face was flushed, her manner belligerent, her actions violent. I looked at the picture of the young unspoiled girl

that still hung on the wall of this man's home. I pitied the poor girl with all my heart for the terrible shipwreck she had made of her life and for her slavery to such a cruel and relentless tyrant. Yet I watched as her father took her gently by the arm, ignoring her abusive [language]. He steered her unsteady footsteps outside to his car. He carefully settles her in, his face drawn and his eyes filled with pain. He patiently strapped her into the seatbelt, then drove her home and put her to bed. John Phillips write, "I pitied her . . . but he loved her."^{vi}

Multiply that young woman's slavery and wretchedness and abusiveness by 10 thousand and the love of that father by infinity and you have the love of our Redeemer who did not just pity us from galaxies away – He loved us.

And His love, Paul writes, made *an appearance* – this is a reference to His incarnation where He came to die and settle forever the matter of atonement for sins past, present and future.

Christ came to our sewer; He moved into our slave quarters – we weren't looking for Him, He came looking for us . . . and He rescued us.

He ambushed us with His goodness and grace.

We happen to have a remarkable Redeemer.

Secondly:

2. We have been given a remarkable redemption

Listen, how will we ever pay our way out of the sewer? How will we ever come up with what we need to buy our way out of the slave market of sin and the dominion of darkness?

Paul clarifies for us the answer in the next phrase – notice *verse 5. He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy.*

In the Greek New Testament, the words, "*not on the basis of deeds,*" appears first in the sentence to show the emphasis of Paul's statement. *Literally, Not from works – He saved us.*

Which means true, biblical salvation is not only freely given, but it has a built-in component of humility.

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, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Lest any of us should boast.

He truth is, if we could sew one stitch of righteousness into our garments of splendor which we will one day wear, we would spend all of eternity admiring that one stitch.

"Beautiful robe, huh – did you see this? I did that. (on sleeve)

Think about what you do with your young children. The day is coming to an end and you tell them, "Okay kids, it's time to clean up the playroom . . . get all your toys and put them into the toy box . . . pick up those cheerios you dropped on the floor and get all those Legos off the stairs and get your tricycle down off the piano bench . . . okay let's go, kids. You know they'll not be able to get it all done perfectly, but you want them to make the effort, right? And then after you tuck them in, you go back through the house and take care of everything they didn't do. A lot of people think that's how God saves us. Hey, do everything you can do and God will appreciate all the help you give Him and when you're finished, He'll take care of everything else you couldn't do."^{vii}

Paul writes, apart from works, He saved us.

Nobody's running around heaven saying, "I did my fair share and God took care of the rest of it."

Remarkable Christianity – which happens to be the genuine item – delivers the truth of a remarkable redemption – paid out in full by Christ Himself – with no help from us.

Salvation is a gift we can only receive – as undeserving sinners – Paul adds at the end of this phrase – in fact, Paul ends this though by making sure we get it – he writes, *according to His mercy.*

He . . . saved . . . us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy.

Paul writes with this same progression to the Ephesians, "*Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God (there it is again – But God) being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). (Ephesians 2:3-5)*

That's how He saved us! You can't get any clearer than that! And can I tell you the joy it was this past week to clarify that with a dear couple attending our GreenHouse class – they've been coming since this past Christmas sweet – in their late

60's. He said to me as we met in my office, "You know, I wasn't raised in a church that talked about being saved . . . but I hear that a lot around here and I've actually begun reading my Bible and I'm seeing that word – saved – all over the place.

I explained to him what it meant to be saved by Christ alone and why only Christ could redeem us, apart from the works of religion or good deeds and he bowed his head and prayed in his own words, "Lord Jesus, I'm asking you right now to save me."

Dear Flock, Christianity doesn't give us room to gloat – but it does give us all of eternity to be grateful.

We have been ambushed by goodness and grace.

What a remarkable Redeemer; we've been given a remarkable redemption.

3. Thirdly, we are under remarkable reconstruction

Notice the middle part of verse 5. By the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out richly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that being justified by His grace.

Now let's unpack this verse for a moment.

By the washing of regeneration . . .

There are those who would say this is the ordinance of baptism – and they spill all kinds of ink over the fact that you can't become a Christian until you've been baptized.

Well, all you have to do is read the phrase and notice the agent doing the baptizing. Notice again, ***"By the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Senior Pastor . . ."***

Not even close.

The agent doing the action is the Holy Spirit.

This is an internal, spiritual cleansing of the heart – pictured externally, certainly, by water baptism.

In fact, and I'll take for a moment the argument of those who believe in baptismal regeneration – the fact that in the mind of the Apostles and the early church, there was no such thing as a non-baptized believer.

One followed the other.

I mean, they couldn't conceive of such a thing. Why would anybody follow Jesus Christ and not want to identify through the ordinance He instituted whereby the disciple is publically identified with his death, burial and resurrection?

Somebody says, "But I get nervous in front of a crowd; I don't like public speaking; I really don't want to be seen with my hair plastered to my head; what if water gets up my nose; **what if they forget to bring me back up?** That's never happened.

We've been tempted.

Listen, the physical demonstration of washing which illustrates the internal spiritual act of cleansing is a wonderful act – but let's not take it back into the definition of regeneration.

Because if we do, we've added something we do for God in order to be saved – which according to the Bible is something Christ has done for us.

In fact, if you have to be baptized in order to be saved, you're actually going to have to depend on someone else to baptize you . . . what happens if he doesn't make it to church?

The word Paul uses here for "washing" is not baptize (βαπτίζω), but loutron (λουτρον). It's a reference to a bath – the kind you take on Saturday night, whether you need it or not. It's a complete bath.

That's how vile we are . . . we don't need a little washing – we need a full bath.

I remember when our twins were around 4 years old we used to live in a house with a wood burning stone fireplace. Out back, behind the house, right next to our deck, about 2 feet from the ground, was a little iron door you could open up; you could shovel out the ashes from the back of the chimney fairly easily. It was now summertime and I hadn't cleaned it out from the winter.

Well, our twin sons found that little gate. And what do you think they did? You don't think they kept it closed do you?

They considered it an open door from God. They threw the ashes into the air; they shoveled ashes all over each other . . . how much fun can you have?

My wife asked me to go call the kids for supper . . . I stepped out on the deck and saw aliens from outer space . . . with large eyes peering up at me underneath layers of ash; they were covered from head to toe.

I went back inside and called my wife. I wanted her to see the kids doing something I hadn't put them up to.

She walked out and said, "What are we going to do?" I was thinking of adoption. She said, "They can't come in the house like that . . ." I said, "Let me take care of it . . . and I went and turned on the garden hose and hosed them down; had them take

off their clothes, all the way down to their superman underwear and I hosed them down from head to two – they thought it was a blast. Was this a great day or what?

I soaked them down before they ever stepped foot in the house – they were clean.

The only other time this word “washing” appears in the New Testament is when Paul uses it to refer to the bath of the water of the word (*Ephesians 5:26*).^{viii}

This is the spiritual truth of a deep cleansing – and the Holy Spirit effectively uses the truth of the Word of God to hose us completely down.

Now there are three key doctrinal words in this verse that I want you to circle.

The word, regeneration, renewing, or renewal and justified, or justification.

a. First, regeneration

It literally means to have another birth. From this we get the idea of what Jesus Christ referred to in John chapter 3 for being *born again*.

The word is compounded from *palin* (παλιν) for *again* and *genesis* (γενεσις) or *genesis*, for *beginnings*.^{ix}

The Book of Genesis simply means, the Book of Beginnings.

Paul is referring here to a brand new beginning . . . a new birth.

You see, you’ve had one birth already – and that was physical; but now, Paul says, by means of the Holy Spirit, you have experienced a second birth – which is spiritual.

Salvation is the moment of your new birth.

So to get into heaven, you have to be born, as it were, twice.

No wonder Satan has counterfeited this concept going all the way back into the Old Testament days.

He counterfeited the idea of animal sacrifice and atonement and good works and spiritual death and resurrection long before Paul ever delivered the genuine gospel of a new birth.

The heart of man, energized by the deceiver of mankind, Satan, has created a variety of analogies to the gospel.

For instance, one mystery religion required their followers to go through a ceremony where they dug a pit – a symbolic grave – and over the pit they placed wooden beams in a lattice type formation. They then killed a bull and dripped the bull through

the lattice down upon the person who had ceremonially died. The blood allowed him to be reborn, and he came up out of the grave and was given a glass of milk to drink as a newborn babe.

The Stoics used this word “regeneration” to refer to the planet, which they believed was thoroughly burned by God every 3,000 years and then it experienced a new birth.^x

The Mayans aren’t the only ones who’ve predicted the end of the world as we know it.

All of these mystery religions and cults illustrate the Apostle Paul’s comment that they are *constantly learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7)*.

God alone created the heavens and the earth and God alone is the one who creates spiritual life.

- *For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).*
- *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

Listen, regeneration is not the turning over a new leaf; it is the birth of a new life, by means of the Holy Spirit – to all who’ve come by faith to Christ alone.

b. Renewal

Now Paul refers to another key distinctive – not only are we regenerated – born again – by the Holy Spirit, we are also *renewed by the Holy Spirit*, Paul writes in *verse 5*.

Not only is there regeneration, there is renewal. And here’s the difference:

- Regeneration or rebirth is a moment in time.
- Renewal is a lifetime.

- Regeneration is like a once in a lifetime spiritual bath.
- Renewal is like a daily shower.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, *the inward man is renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16)*.

Paul uses this same word again in *Romans 12:2* where he writes, “*Do not be conformed to this world* – in other words, don’t be squeezed into the mold of this world – *but instead be transformed by* – here it is – *the renewing of your minds*.”

This is the ongoing activity of surrender to the Holy Spirit, who uses the word to daily cleanse your mind and heart.

c. Justification

Now Paul **uses another key word** – notice again the end of *verse 5*. ***By the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, (v. 6) Whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (v. 7) so that being justified by His grace . . . stop there.***

We are regenerated, renewed and justified.

By the way, in this one sentence from the Apostle Paul, you clearly see the distinctive presence of the **Trinity**. If anyone asks you for a text revealing the Trinity – here’s a great one.

You have ***God our Savior (verse 4)***; then the ***Holy Spirit (verse 5)*** and now in *verse 6 you have Jesus Christ*.

And you also happen to have a wonderful verse on the equality of Jesus Christ with God the Father; Paul refers to God as our Savior – a reference to God the Father – in *verse 4* – and then he refers to Jesus Christ as our Savior – in *verse 6*.

Which is it? Is God the Father our Savior, or is Jesus Christ our Savior . . . and while you’re at it, we’re told that the agent involved in the act of regeneration is the Holy Spirit, so He must be our Savior too.

The answer is yes to all three. Salvation is the perfect work of cooperation between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Now back to this idea of justification.

It’s that part of the transaction of our new birth where God the judge declares us righteous.

Because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account, and the atonement of Christ fully sufficient to pay for the record of sins we’ve committed against Him; it’s as if God the Father, sitting at the bench with all the evidence before Him, can no longer find any record of sin against us.

And He strikes his gavel and says to us – you are justified.

It’s more than being freed . . . it’s having your penalty erased from your biography. Your record is spotless in Christ.

Several years ago, I was driving on the speedway – I mean the freeway – in another city. I was going 6 miles an hour faster than I thought I was. I was driving a borrowed vehicle and the wheels were

larger than the original factory wheels which caused the calibration of the speedometer to be off. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it. So instead of going 70 miles an hour, I was going 76 miles an hour; which was really bad because I had entered a township where the speed limit had just dropped from 65 to 55. You’re thinking, well what were you even doing going 70? That’s not a part of my illustration, so, don’t interrupt me.

Obviously I was in trouble – I was pulled over going 21 miles over the speed limit.

So I chose to appear in court. Hopefully pay a fine and keep my insurance from skyrocketing.

As I stood in line that afternoon with all the other race car drivers, the courtroom was actually more like a classroom – in fact, the judge was sitting at a folding table with a stack of papers on top.

My name was called, he asked me what I was driving, and I told him. I believe what he did was give me a prayer for judgment – that is, he kept it off my record and all I did was pay the fine.

Then he looked up at me and said, “Sir, I am doing you quite a favor.” Now I hadn’t even said anything. I didn’t even know what he was doing at the time. He handed me a piece of paper, and again said, “I’m doing you a big favor.” I said, “Thank you, sir” and walked toward the door. As I opened the door, he hollered after me – I’m doing you a big favor!”

Let me say this – doing me a big favor and declaring me righteous are two entirely different things.

Even a prayer for judgment which keeps it off the books isn’t the same thing.

In order for that judge to actually justify me, in the biblical sense of the word, he would have said, “You’ve committed a crime – and listen – I’m going to take this police report, erase your name and write my name in your place; I’ll pay the fine and add the penalty to my record – and you can have my spotless driving record because I’ve never broken the law.

This is how Paul defined justification when he wrote to the Colossian believers ***When you were dead in your transgressions . . . He*** (God the judge) ***made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt, consisting of decrees against us*** – that is, your criminal history – ***and He has taken it out of the way*** – how? – ***having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13, 14).***

In other words, God switched the names on the rap sheet. Christ's name was written at the top of the volume of all your sins; Jesus Christ became the condemned criminal and we became perfect law keepers with His perfect record attributed to our name.

This is justification:

- He took our vileness and gave us His virtue;
- He took our perversion and gave us His purity;
- He took our record of sin and gave us His record of sinlessness.

We have been ambushed by the grace of God.

And that's not all . . . Paul has one more thing to say in this very long sentence.

- Not only do we happen to have a remarkable Redeemer;
- Not only have we been given a remarkable redemption;
- Not only are we under a remarkable reconstruction;

Fourthly:

4. We have been promised a remarkable reward

Paul writes here in Titus 3:7, so that being justified we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We would be made royal heirs of God.

The aorist tense indicates that this is already ours – bestowed at the moment of regeneration, to be experienced fully and literally in the future.

Listen, we're not just citizens of the coming [Kingdom] of God, we are co-owners. How's that for grace?^{xi}

The poet wrote,

I once was lost in darkest night
Yet thought I knew the way.
The sin that promised joy and life
Had led me to the grave.
I had no hope that You would own
A rebel to Your will.
And if You had not loved me first
I would refuse You still.

But as I ran my hell-bound race
Indifferent to the cost,
You looked upon my helpless state
And led me to the cross.
And I beheld God's love displayed
You suffered in my place.
You bore the wrath reserved for me
Now all I know is grace.
Hallelujah! All I have is Christ
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life.^{xii}

Beloved, we have been ambushed by goodness and grace.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/30/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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i PreachingToday.com/Anonymous Donor Pays off Students' Debts (4/19/2010)

ii V. Raymond Edman, But God! (Zondervan, 1962), p. 13

iii John A. Kitchen, The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors (Kress Christian Publications, 2009), p. 551

iv Ibid

v Cleon Rogers Jr. & Cleon Rogers III, The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament (Zondervan, 1998), p. 511

vi John Phillips, Exploring Ephesians (Loizeaux Brothers, 1993), p. 64

vii Adapted from David Campbell, Opening Up Titus (Day One Publications, 2007), p. 102

viii D. Edmond Hiebert, Titus and Philemon (Moody Bible Institute, 1957), p. 70

ix Kitchen, p. 533

x William Barclay, The Letters of Timothy, Titus and Philemon (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 262

xi Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus (Zondervan, 2010), p. 308

xii 2008 Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI), by Jordan Kauflin