



Titus 3:1-11

Home makeover shows have been popular for a long time, but none have been around as long as This Old House. This PBS show is now in its 41st season! That's hard to believe. Thanks to Youtube, there are countless DIYers and talented craftsmen. Just in the last month I have enjoyed watching a few of the restoration projects. Some dude will take a rusty axe or tool and restore it to like new condition. My favorites are probably the intricate ones like this [Tonka truck restoration](#). First of all, there's something relaxing about watching videos like this but more than that, the transformation from rust to radiant is quite impressive. I sped up the video so the whole process happens in [seventeen seconds](#).



Rescue & Restore



The name of the Youtube channel is Rescue & Restore. That's exactly what he does and that's exactly what the Lord does. He rescues and restores us. But he also transforms us. That's what Titus chapter three is all about.

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. ³ For we ourselves 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. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 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. ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Our first reaction tends to be to see a long list of dos and don'ts. Don't do this. Make sure you do that instead. There are so many principles of right behavior in the Bible that it can feel like being a Christian is all about right behavior. For example, here is a bullet point list of all of the things in this chapter that we are supposed to do or not do.

- be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work
- to speak evil of no one
- to avoid quarreling
- to be gentle
- to show perfect courtesy toward all people
- be careful to devote themselves to good works (These things are excellent and profitable for people)
- But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, (for they are unprofitable and worthless)
- As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

That's a lot of do's and don'ts. And this is just one short passage in a Bible filled with more of these. We see standards of right and wrong and either we pat ourselves on the back because we're doing pretty good or else we get discouraged because we missed the mark again. We read verses like this and we see Law instead of Grace. Law is you must meet the standard. Grace is God can raise you to the standard. Law sees God as a taskmaster, but Grace sees him as a merciful Savior. Law is religion but grace is just Jesus. You and I need grace because we were in need of being rescued.

1. Rescue—what we were

Here's a quote from one of my seminary professors. I'm curious how you would put it. He said, "The greatest thing about Christianity is _____." How would you fill in the blank? Jesus? Salvation? Here was his answer. "The greatest thing about Christianity is its doctrine of sin." I think my professor was echoing Jonathan Edward's book titled, "The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended."

Now why would they refer to sin as the greatest Christian doctrine? How can sin be better than Jesus? How can the condemnation of sin be better than mercy and grace? Sin is not really better than Jesus and his great mercy, but without a Biblical understanding of sin, we will never have a Biblical understanding of Jesus and his mercy.

Notice the title of Edward's book—The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin **Defended**. He was defending it against serious attacks from within the church. He was defending the doctrine against the belief that Adam's sin only led to physical death. In Genesis 2, the Lord said this to

Adam. “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Did Adam die physically? Of course, but he also died spiritually and we inherited this sinful nature from Adam. This is crystal clear in such places like Romans 5. So three hundred years ago Edwards had to defend the doctrine of original sin against those who would weaken it. As soon as you mess with the doctrine of original sin, you end up with a different gospel—a different Jesus. Cornelius Plantinga wrote, “To ignore, euphemize, or otherwise mute the lethal reality of sin is to cut the nerve of the gospel”¹ Another writer put it this way. “Without a robust doctrine of sin, we’ve fostered a morality that equates niceness with goodness.”²

Let me make sure we are anchored to our text. Verse three explains why we need to be rescued in the first place. *For we ourselves 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.* Notice the key phrase “we were once.” This is a description of our pre-converted state. We were all of these things and more.

On a few occasions I have made copies available of the document called “33 Things That Happen at the Moment of Salvation.” I have a few copies on the back table. It’s a really helpful booklet because you can take one per day and spend about 5-10 minutes digging into each aspect of our marvelous salvation. I highly recommend it to you. But if you take each of these aspects of our salvation and reversed them, you would really see the true state our of souls apart from Christ.

Here’s the bottom line. If our sin was not all that bad, then our salvation is not all that good. If I offered you three months of chemotherapy right now you would almost certainly turn it down and call me crazy. But if you had a serious cancer diagnosis, you would give it strong consideration. The same is true with our sinful condition apart from Christ. If you reduce the nature and consequences of sin, then that changes the nature and consequences of salvation. If all I need is some self-improvement, then Jesus is merely the best model of human behavior. But if I am God’s enemy and eternally lost without Christ, then I need to be rescued. And that’s exactly what he did...and more. He also restored us to a perfect state.

2. Restore—God’s character and saving work

Verse three shows our need for a rescue and verses 4-7 show the extent of our restoration. Let me break this down for you. First, we are given the “why” of our salvation.

WHY: not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy

I’m not sure this can be said enough, to believers and unbelievers alike. We are so wired to want to do things on our own that we really struggle with this truth. And the beauty of this truth is that it digs deep down into the very character of God. Why are we saved? “According to his own mercy.” God’s character is mercy. And remember, when it comes to attributes of God’s character, he does not merely contain these attributes, he is these things. He does not just contain mercy, he is mercy. Mercy is his very essence, his very being. This means that he can’t become more merciful or less merciful, depending on the circumstances.

That seems foreign to us because that's not how you and I operate. My mercy is very dependent on my circumstances. Did I get enough sleep? Am I hungry? Did I already empty my mercy tank on the last person and I'm fresh out of the precious commodity? There are countless ways in which my mercy tank or your mercy tank can become depleted. But not so with God. He is mercy personified and exemplified. Which is exactly what we needed to have been rescued in the first place. In the absence of mercy we would have received pure justice—and deservedly so.

But the character of God is revealed even further in this passage. *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared...”* The word translated as loving kindness is *philanthropia*. This one's easy to define, isn't it? Our English word philanthropy comes from this word. It simply means “love of man” or love of humanity. Andrew Carnegie was the original and probably still to this day, greatest philanthropist the world has ever seen. The last time I checked, Bill Gates was giving away about a billion dollars per year, but Carnegie gave away about 100 billion dollars in his lifetime. But all of his dollars are as nothing compared to God's philanthropy. When your essential nature is mercy then the outflow of that mercy will be a love for humanity, even when humanity is your enemy.

This is the *why* of salvation, God's motivation. Next is the *How* of our salvation: “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Regeneration is a great Bible word that doesn't get much attention. As the text clearly states, regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit. The best known passage describing regeneration is probably John 3. If you recall, Nicodemus came to Jesus under cover of night to ask him questions. Jesus told Nicodemus these famous words. “You must be born again.” Being born again is the same thing as regeneration. And like all of God's saving work, from our perspective, we are passive recipients of it. It is something that happens to us.

The other place the word regeneration is used is in Matthew 19. Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The ESV translates this as the phrase “new world.” The NASB/KJV translate it as “in the regeneration.” The NIV translates it as “at the renewal of all things.” This is referring to the new heavens and the new earth. You are aware that the current heavens and earth will be destroyed and then recreated, right? So what will eventually happen to all of creation has already happened to us. We have been regenerated. We have been washed and renewed. We have been restored. And unlike with the old Tonka truck, it didn't take days or hours or even seconds. Regeneration is an instantaneous work of the Holy Spirit that cannot be reversed. If you have trusted in Christ alone as your Savior, you have experienced *the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*. You have been washed and renewed and regenerated. Just the like the entire heavens and earth will one day be recreated, so all believers have already been recreated.

Why is it important that this cannot be reversed? Remember I mentioned Jonathan Edwards defending the doctrine of original sin? He had to defend the doctrine because it was under attack. Charles Finney came along a couple generations later essentially doing the same thing.

The doctrine of a literal imputation of Adam's sin to all his posterity, of the literal imputation of all the sins of the elect to Christ, and of His suffering for them the exact

amount due to the transgressors, of the literal imputation of Christ's righteousness or obedience to the elect, and the consequent perpetual justification of all that are converted from the first exercise of faith, whatever their subsequent life may be I say I regard these dogmas as fabulous, and better befitting a romance than a system of theology.³

Let me break this down for you. Finney denied the doctrine of original sin and as a result, also denied the atonement which saves us. He wrote, "It is true, that the atonement, of itself, does not secure the salvation of any one."⁴ Do you see? If you don't believe that you need to be rescued you can't be rescued and restored. And this has even worse implications.

Whenever he sins, he must, for the time being, cease to be holy. The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys... In these respects, then, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground.⁵

This is one of the most depressing things you will ever read. You remember that long list of commands we are supposed to obey and sins we are supposed to avoid? If we fail to do that, we are exactly like an unconverted sinner. In other words, each time we sin we need to be rescued and restored again. Do you see how horrible that would be? Can you feel the weighty burden that would be to us? Our security in Christ would be like a revolving door. You're in, you're out. You're in, you're out.

But that's not the way it works. We "were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures." But because God is mercy and kindness we have been rescued and restored. We have been washed and regenerated. We have become something entirely different. "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy." Obedience cannot earn our salvation nor can sin cause us to lose our salvation. But neither are we supposed to stay the way that we are. There is a process of applied grace called transformation.

3. Transform—process of applied grace

Look at this list one more time and see what they all have in common.

- be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work
- to speak evil of no one
- to avoid quarreling
- to be gentle
- to show perfect courtesy toward all people
- be careful to devote themselves to good works (These things are excellent and profitable for people)
- But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, (for they are unprofitable and worthless)
- As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Almost every one of them has to do with getting along with one another. The list and the passage itself culminates in the severe warning about divisive people. It's one thing to lack gentleness and courtesy but being divisive is so much worse. One could make a case that the others things on the list, if not handled well, are precursors to division. If the body of Christ is not kind and gentle with one another, it begins to chip away at unity. If you quarrel over worthless issues, it will chip away at unity. So even though these commands apply to individual believers, that is, each of us is responsible for doing our part, these are really communal commands and principles. It's not as much about you and me as it is about us and we.

Being rescued and restored—or to just call it the gospel—is the power and motivation for getting along with one another. Infinite mercy has been extended to us, therefore mercy should flow from us to others. Divisiveness receive such a strong warning because it can be a death blow to a local church.

This past week I met a man who pastored at least four churches in over forty years and now he is doing interim pastor placements which are about a year long. So in total, he has pastored about eight churches in forty five years. Would you be surprised to know that they weren't all healthy churches? But he said he went to one church in Minnesota that was the most peaceful and happy place he had ever been. As he described it I immediately thought of our church. This is the healthiest church I have ever been in. Tim Farrell came to his last elder meeting this past Monday. As we reflected on his six years of service, I was reminded that in those six years we faced some of our greatest challenges. The enemy wanted to do harm to our body but God has been very kind to us. He has rescued us and restored us and will continue to transform us.

Rich Maurer
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¹Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, p. 199.

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/sin-not-way-supposed-cornelius-plantinga/>

³ Finney, *Systematic Theology*, Lecture 36, 508,509.

⁴ Charles G. Finney, *Systematic Theology* (Bethany, 1976), p. 217.

⁵ Charles G. Finney, *Systematic Theology* (Bethany, 1976), p. 46.