



God

# The First Philanthropist

A Study in Titus 3:4-8

Why Jesus Matters

Patrick J. Griffiths



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## An Introduction

God loves us, so He saved us. The “fruit” of this action created heirs and imitators. His people carry His DNA. This is the powerful and radical nature of God’s *Good News*.

Our preceding paragraph (Titus 3:1-3) shows how the JESUS SEED bears the fruit of respect and civility toward those who govern us. Verse three shows the radical nature of the gospel. It takes us from what we were in Adam (v. 3) and completely and thoroughly changes us to what we now are in Christ (vv. 7, 8). Titus 3:4-8 shows the power behind this deep-seated transformation.

It is our desire to tap the deep recesses of this text as we explore the very character and motive of God in His self-sacrificing saving work. Often, when we go about describing God, we will refer to His divine attributes or characteristics. We will smugly seek to reduce God to single qualities such as love or holiness, as if such an exercise were

possible. Yet, God is always more than the sum total of His attributes. We speak of God saving humanity for His glory, which is true. But it wasn't His glory that drove Him to do what He did. Not only is His glory innate, thus reflected in all He does, but also the end of all He does. It was His love for those He created.

Verse four speaks of God's love for humanity. The word used to capture that idea is transliterated into our English language as *philanthropist*. A *philanthropist* is one who is generous with their resources in enabling others to better their lives and circumstances. As a culture, we note those *philanthropists* who have large quantities of resources and they dispense excess or lavish financial gifts to various foundations or charities to benefit the less fortunate. Yet, generosity is not based on the size of the gift, but on the heart of the giver. With God, the imagery escalates to unfathomable depths and immeasurable heights. From the excessive riches of His being and resources

He saves His people from sin and death and for joy and glory. Moreover, from this lavish dispensing He causes the recipients to become *philanthropists*. His people become what He is, generous givers. This text tells us so. This thought of God being the first *philanthropist* is the idea that shapes our short read.

If we were to ratchet this entire *Story* back to the beginning, we would read of a God who created this entire world so that He might meet with His people, in order that they might know and experience the joy He has within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, when speaking of such things the impact of what is said gets lost in the “white noise” of theological discourse and debate. Yet, in our churches we have come to accept it as ordinary rather than what it is, extraordinary.

This passage seeks to shake us from our complacency when speaking of God’s love

for us and see what it does to His people from the inside out.

So with this thought in mind, let us explore God's love for His people and the radical impact it has to them and through them to those around them. We will consider this paragraph along three notable features. The first feature we will confront in our text is the person of God.



## The Person of God

In our short study we will note how the incarnation forms the platform for all three notable features. The first notable feature revealed by the incarnation is *the Person of God* (v. 4)

- <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,

When God became flesh, at least two qualities were displayed. First, we see God's kindness. Second, we see God's love for humanity. God's kindness and love are in parallel. They are working together in our text. His kindness and love moved Him to act mercifully to undeserving sinners.

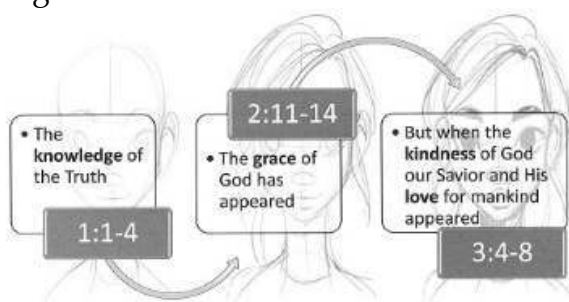
Titus 3:4-8 tells us what drove God to save us. It was His love for us. This love is so powerful as to save us from our past sin and then consequently, for good works. He moves us from the disobedient to the obedient, from existing as orphans to actual heirs, from those who *deny Him **by** their*

*works*, to those who *confess Him through their works*.

This is how powerful God's love is. His love secures His end. Neither you nor I can stop the hand of God from acting. Our wills are not powerful enough to stop God's intent. He did not make our wills His equal or superior. Nothing stands above God and all bow before Him.

Titus 3:4-8 graphically and powerfully explains this idea. There is a progression of revelation inside of Titus as we move from 1:1-4 through 2:11-14 and conclude in 3:4-8.

Notice the structure of our text inside the larger context of the entire letter.



Paul begins by vaguely laying out his premise in 1:1-4. He does not go into detail as to what the knowledge of the truth entails. By chapter 2:11-14, he adds more detail, that this truth is bedded in the grace of God appearing. Finally, in 3:4 we read of God's kindness and love for mankind. It is as if in chapter 1 we see a fuzzy rudimentary sketch of a face only to see it come into focus in chapter 2, with sharper and crisper lines and details in chapter 3.

In the verse preceding our present paragraph, Titus 3:3 shows the innate estate of humanity. God describes us as foolish, disobedient, slaves to our passions, full of malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. The larger significance of this paragraph will be the outcome of God's redemptive activity as the first philanthropist. His love to us, works in us and through us to those around us. As a result, we move from being hated by others and hating others, to those who are loved by others and love others. However, before we

reach that conclusion, let us allow the darkness and decay of our condition in Adam to settle in our minds. Our condition required, yea demanded, intercession apart from which no one would or could be saved.

Here we read of God's radical power. Only God can move us from chaos to cosmos, from disorder to order. This is what the Gospel intrinsically does. Neither you nor I can stop this. God takes us from where we are as sinners, and, through His redemptive activity, turns us into heirs. He is the one who makes all things new. We often ask ourselves as to God's motive. **Why did God do this?** Our text tells us. Although it seems redundant, we must not tire or stop from saying the obvious: He loves us.

It is still impossible for us to fully understand the depth of God's love when the text tells us that God loves us to the degree that His Son would take on human flesh and become for us what we could never become for ourselves, the sin-bearer.

Throughout the New Testament, including this Letter to Titus, we read of Jesus being the voluntary and vicarious sacrifice for sinners. It is only in Him that the wrath of God against us and the sentence of God could be satisfied. Romans 5 gives us a straightforward word concerning this love.

- <sup>6</sup>“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:6-10).

This is the magnitude of God’s love for His people. He loved us even when we were weak (v.6), wicked (v. 8), and at war with Him (v. 10). It is His love that changes us

from those who were hated by others and hating one another to those who are lovers of God and, as a consequence, lovers of one another. Friends, only the JESUS SEED can so powerful change us into this.

As one writer notes, “We of ourselves should never have become changed [people], had not the kindness of God and His divine love for [humanity] shown itself. We, indeed, have no ground for self-exaltation, no excuse for haughty treatment of others, either in thought or action; for if we now live other and purer lives than they live, our change to better and higher things was owing to no desert or merit of ours, but solely to the mercy and the love of God. The changed life is here solely attributed to the manifestation to man of the kindness and love of God our Savior.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a point in time when God’s kindness, love for His people, and mercy manifested itself. When did this happen? Our passage speaks of an *epiphany*. I believe

the primary idea behind this appearance is His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement. God, in manifesting Himself, saves His people from sin and death and for joy and glory. This appearance of our Lord has two aspects or phases. First, there is the appearance tied to His incarnation (Titus 2:11; 3:4). Second, there is the appearance tied to His Second Coming (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). The first coming is gracious and the second is glorious. In the first coming, He judges sin. In the second coming, He judges sinners. The first one is tied to salvation and the second is tied to sentencing.

Verse 4 speaks to His first coming, thus walking us into verse 5. Here we read of our second notable feature: the provision of God.

## The Provision of God

The second notable feature revealed by the incarnation is *the Provision of God* (vv. 5, 6). Verse 5a states the provision negatively:

- <sup>5</sup> “He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness,**”

Whereas Verse 5b-6 states the provision positively:

- <sup>5b</sup> “**but according to His mercy,** by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,”

The means of appropriating God’s kindness and love is not by works but by believing.

When God acts, the entire created order will be recreated.



Notice the contrast between the descriptive in verse 3 and deeds of righteousness in verse 5. Those in verse 3 are incapable of righteous deeds, thus, if they are to be saved, it must be because of mercy.

There is an intentional contrast between our works and God's works.

Titus calls us to good works. The word for "good" stands in contrast to "righteousness." There is nothing we can do to affect our justification before God. **Our justification never works up in the vertical, it only works out on the horizontal. The horizontal display of God's righteous work is through our good works.**

Listen to the following statement by one of the church's older commentators:

"If men could have been saved by their own good works, there would have been no need of salvation by the Redeemer; if our own deeds were now the basis of our title to

eternal life, the work of Christ would be equally unnecessary. It is a great and fundamental principle of the gospel that the good works of men come in for no share in the justification of the soul. They are in no sense a consideration on account of which God pardons a man, and receives him to favor. The only basis of justification is the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ; and in the matter of justification before God, all the race is on a level.”<sup>2</sup>

When I read and hear this my heart sings. I am bowed before God in humility and gratitude. I cannot read this without my heart weeping. If the redeeming of my eternal soul was by any other means than His kindness, love, and mercy, I would be lost forever in a lake of fire. But God who is rich in mercy saved me. Why? Because He loves me. What moved Him to act in this manner? His love for me!

“Whatever we have done or can do, when we come to receive salvation from the hand

of God, there is no other element which enters into it but mercy. It is not because our deeds deserve it; it is not because we have by repentance and faith wrought ourselves into such a state of mind that we can claim it; but, after all our tears, and sighs, and prayers, and good deeds, it is a mere favour. Even then God might justly withhold it if he chose, and no blame would be attached to him if he should suffer us to sink down to ruin.”<sup>3</sup>

The washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit are parallel statements. They could be progressive parallelism where the one explains and expands on the other. Thus, the washing can be water baptism [i.e. shadow] and the renewing could be Spirit baptism [i.e. the substance]. Either way, they speak to the same thing. God rebirths / recreates His people through His powerful in-working of the Holy Spirit.

This text tells us why the JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT. When

God saves us, He makes us new. What we once were (v. 3), we no longer are, but still have. The gospel changes us into something entirely different. What Christ secures for us in His person and work, the Holy Spirit powerful and effectually works in us and through us. It is an inside out working.

- <sup>6</sup> “whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,”

Jesus spoke of this in John’s upper room discourse (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). He notes how He must go in order that the Holy Spirit might come. His statement is theological, not spatial. The Holy Spirit was already there doing His work, but a next or new thing would be added.

When Jesus became for us the sin-bearer, He took upon Himself our sin. When we by grace through faith believe who He is and what He did, the Father takes this work and imputes it to us. This “work” is embodied in the Holy Spirit. It is His righteousness that is

now ours. And the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, works in us and through us this very righteousness so that we become righteous and thus live righteous lives.

This work is copious. There is more there than you need. However deep the sin and dark the stain, God wins. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Look at your life. What is it that brings you shame? What sin have you committed or took pleasure in that haunts you even after you have been saved? Well, I am here to tell you that God's work is copious. There is an excessive and lavish expression of God's working because of who He is as an infinite and immeasurable God that swallows up all of your past deeds and renders them powerless.

Perhaps today, even as an heir of God, you are committing acts of debauchery. I tell you in the name of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit and the provision of Jesus – stop! You are no longer a child of sin and enslaved

to your appetites. I also tell you in your fight against sin, that it has no authority over you. Regardless of the assault, you can never be anything other than what you are, a child of God. Take heart and keep fighting against sin by bathing yourself in the gospel each and every day.

The next verse gives us our third notable feature: the result of God's powerful workings.

## The Promise of God

The final notable feature revealed by the incarnation is *the Promise of God* (vv. 7, 8).

God's design in saving sinners is to restore them as heirs and to have them live out His design for them through good works. In so doing, we are not only heirs of eternal hope, but imitators of God's philanthropic activity.

The result is twofold:

- <sup>7</sup> **so that** being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
- <sup>8</sup> This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, **so that** those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds.

“When 67-year-old carpenter Russell Herman died in 1994, his will included a staggering set of bequests. Included in his plan for distribution was more than two

billion dollars for the City of East St. Louis, another billion and a half for the State of Illinois, two and a half billion for the national forest system, and to top off the list, Herman left six trillion dollars to the government to help pay off the national debt. That sounds amazingly generous, but there was a small problem—Herman's only asset when he died was a 1983 Oldsmobile. He made grand pronouncements, but there was no real generosity involved. His promises were meaningless because there was nothing to back them up."<sup>4</sup>

Thankfully, God has the resources to back up His promises. God is always first and foremost the great philanthropist.

The fact that we are saved is a testament to God's mercy and grace. God has withheld from us what we deserve and has given what we could not earn.

The eternal life referenced does not exist in the abstract. We are heirs of God's intent,



His design. That for which we have been created will be fulfilled. We will walk in good works (Eph. 2:10).

- <sup>10</sup> “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Paul wants the people of God to be overwhelmed by His language. There is a shock and awe in all of this. This is why he ends in the following verse (v. 8).

- <sup>8</sup> “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” (Titus 3:8).

Here Paul summarizes his primary point: JESUS WORKS. The JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT. “This shows that Paul supposed that the doctrines of the gospel were fitted to lead men to holy living.”<sup>5</sup>

## A Final Word

The stunning aspect to all of this is that God is the first philanthropist, but what He does in regenerating and renewing us turns us into philanthropists! God the first giver makes us givers to one another. We become what He is! Christians are not stingy and selfish people. We are generous and giving people. This is what the Jesus Seed does in the people of God.

This idea is celebrated even more in the final verse of this Letter (3:15).

**The obedient Christian life is one lived resting on the finished work of Jesus. The obedient Christian life is one where you recognize your own innate selfishness and irresponsibility and begin to realize that the Christian life is one that lives with others in mind.** That might be other family members, it might be other employees, it might be other neighbors, it might be other citizens of this nation, it might be other

fellow congregants, but the focus is no longer just on you and your immediate gratification. The JESUS SEED always drives us to love God and to love one another in that order and with that outcome.

Our very existence stands in stark and dramatic contrast to the unbelieving world around us. We are in this world, but not of this world. I am, we are, the embodiment of this text. If you believe yourself to be failing, put it off and press forward. How often must this cycle repeat itself? Every moment of every day. That is life on the horizontal.

This text and the message of Titus assures us that God has secured for Himself His victory both in us and through us to those around us. Let us always live in light of the gospel.

May the observing world continue to note through our loving activity our philanthropic God (Matt. 5:16).

In Jesus name, Amen.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers on Titus 3:4.
- <sup>2</sup> *Albert Barnes' NT Commentary* on Titus 3:5.
- <sup>3</sup> *Albert Barnes' NT Commentary* on Titus 3:5.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/giving-away-what-wasn-t-his>
- <sup>5</sup> *Albert Barnes' NT Commentary* on Titus 3:8.









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