

SIX STEPS TO SALVATION

Titus 3:3-7

By Jon Quinn

Brethren have often suggested that there are five steps to salvation. I'm told that this was a memory aid used last century to teach children what must be done to be saved. The teacher would count off the steps finger by finger of one hand (hence, five steps); hear, believe, repent, confess Christ and be baptized. If God had given us six fingers on a hand we could easily find another step in the scripture (we could, for instance, put "be taught the gospel" before "hear" the way as Paul suggests in Romans 10:14; "How will they hear without a preacher," he asked).

Our text suggests six steps which had to be taken in order for us to be saved; "For we also were once foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 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, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:3-7).

RECOGNITION OF OUR NEED FOR SALVATION

"For we also were once foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hating one another..." (Titus 3:3). Certainly one must come to realize the bankruptness of a life without God. It is the foolish man who counts as unimportant the great spiritual counsel found within the pages of God's word. It is the blind man who holds that life without God is better in spite of the tragic social, ethical and moral consequences of ungodliness which we see all around us.

One must see himself for what he is before God will grant him repentance. As long as we believe ourselves wise in our disobedience, we will not seek the answer (Romans 1:18-23). But when we are finally fed up with our sin, then repentance becomes possible.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S MERCY

"But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared..." (Titus 3:4). Our faith rests in the Redeemer who came to "seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God's kindness and love is made known through Jesus Christ. As we witness Jesus' unselfish devotion to our well being, we are confident that His gift is more than adequate to lift us from our otherwise hopeless estate.

To benefit from God's kindness, we must be willing to receive it. We must exercise faith in what He has done; God's grace does not automatically cover everyone. But thanks be to God that no one is automatically excluded either. The central fact of the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. When I come to believe this gospel enough to comply with its conditions, then I will receive of God's mercy.

REGENERATED BY WASHING

"...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..." (Titus 3:5). God does not save us because we have done something to deserve it. The Scriptures say, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" and "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6,8).

But please notice that this does not mean that there is no response that must be made to the gospel of grace. The old sinner must be replaced by a new self. This is called "regeneration." It is a new beginning.

Our text refers to it as a "washing of regeneration." Jesus used the term "born again" when He talked of regeneration. His words help us to understand why Paul uses the term "washing" because Jesus says that being "born again" involves being "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:1-5). The Scriptures plainly show that it is at the point of our immersion, or baptism into Christ that we are made new. It is then that we begin our "walk in newness of life" and that "our old body of sin" is done away with and that we are "free from sin" (Romans 6:3-7; 17-18). Those in the body, or church of Christ have been cleansed "by the washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26). The concept of baptism as an act of faith by which God grants us forgiveness is not in any way opposed to salvation by grace or mercy. Rather, it establishes it (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16).

RENEWING BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

"...and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior..." (Titus 3:5b-6). Those first converts on Pentecost were told that if they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus that they would receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). "Regeneration" and "renewing" are very similar concepts. One difference would be that the "regeneration" happens once when we are baptized while the "renewing" is an ongoing process which begins when we obey the gospel.

There are parts of every big city that are badly in need of "urban renewal." This means that things need to be cleaned up, repaired and painted. The "renewing by the Holy Spirit" is a similar process. It involves obeying the Holy Spirit's revelation, the Scriptures, to clean up and remove those things which are not becoming to the life and attitudes of a Christian and replacing them with those attributes which are (Galatians 5:18-25).

JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE

"...that being justified by His grace..." (Titus 3:7a). "Justification" is a legal term. We are not "just" before God because we have been sinless, but rather because God, by His grace, has pardoned us. But this grace did not come cheaply. Jesus bled and died on the cross so that we might be counted as "just" by a righteous God. We simply could not and can not accomplish this for ourselves. We could never deserve forgiveness. It is by grace, but not only by grace (as some are too quick to say!). It is by "grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8-10). Grace is God's part in providing the gospel for us; faith is our part in receiving it.

HOPE AS HEIRS OF ETERNAL LIFE

"...we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:7b). It is interesting that the Bible says that "For in hope we have been saved" (Romans 8:24). Hope saves us by giving us the needed motivation to come to Christ and then to remain faithful to Him. Those that possess a strong and living hope will refuse to be dissuaded from following Jesus. Satan may "make us an offer we can't refuse" and then be surprised when we refuse it. How did we become so strong? Through our hope of inheriting eternal life. Nothing this world offers or threatens can compare to what God has promised and warned.

So there it is: salvation in six steps; Recognition of our need; Acceptance of God's mercy; Regeneration by washing; Renewal by the Holy Spirit; Justification by grace and Hope as heirs of eternal life. The kindness of God has already appeared. It is certainly grace which continues to afford us opportunity to receive and grow in respect to salvation.

Contact the writer:
JWQuinn@AOL.com

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