

Extreme Makeover – Heart Edition (Titus 3:3-7)

The title of this message “Extreme Makeover – *Heart Edition*” is not original to me, but I think the concept fits well with the original message of Titus 3:3-7, which is our text today in our study through Titus, if you want to be finding your way there.

“Extreme Makeover – *Home Edition*” is one of the top-rated shows and series over the last four years in the US, and it is also shown overseas in Portugal, Spain, Latin America, Germany, The United Kingdom, and Australia. Many of you are familiar with the format:

- They pick people in great need of hope and a home more safe and suitable to their needs, which are often great needs
- particularly if their case is desperate, their living conditions deplorable, or if there has been some tragedy, or if there is a rare illness in the family, or something that moves the compassion of powers-that-be to help a particular family
- the crew will suddenly appear in the morning with loud speakers announcing to the chosen house and family who they are and what they are there to do, which is either radically renovate or replace entirely their home
- they will meet with each family member to find out their interests and desires and with the help of many sponsors, volunteers, and often the family’s friends and neighbors, their whole new home will be done in a week while the family is away on a vacation fully paid for by someone else
- the dramatic moment comes when they see the new and improved house as they exit the bus and they say in unison with Mr. Pennington: “Driver ... move that _____” – it is often an emotional moment to see that transformation

Titus 3:3 gives us a picture of such a spiritual radical makeover:

³ 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. ⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, ⁵ 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, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

Verse 3 gives the “before picture,” our desperate tragic deplorable condition that shows our great need, our incurable illness of sin.

But v. 4 has God’s kindness and love appearing just as suddenly and unexpectedly as the loud speaker wake-up call received by the people on the show. Sinners who have been sovereignly chosen by the Producer of our salvation are similarly unaware until awakened by grace, which then comes into every room and compartment of our life. It’s not just a makeover, it’s a total heart *takeover*.

This is not mere renovation or dressing up the outside, the old house must be demolished and rebuilt completely new, which is how 2 Corinthians 5:17 summarizes regeneration: *he is a new creation, old things have passed away, all things have become new*

The beautiful new creation and transformation (inside and out) is even more astounding than any physical home, and it should impact us emotionally, and should impact our watching neighbors

There are some similarities but there are also some differences:

- Before this spiritual makeover, there is no interview to find out our desires of what we want the “new us” to look like in each room – in fact our transformed spiritual home is the exact opposite of what our flesh naturally desired before
- Also this is no team effort – this work of salvation in Titus 3 is done by God and God alone from start to finish, as v. 5 emphatically says it is not at all by anything man does
- This is not a process that takes seven days, the change takes place immediately at salvation in God’s eyes, but it also has continual implications and grows *more beautiful* in time
- The riches poured out in v. 6 are not material but spiritual
- On TV, you can understand why they would pick particular people to help as they play the video of their plight, but when verse 3 plays the video on our condition, I can’t understand why God would choose to save me or you; there is nothing in this picture that deserves grace and nothing in our fallen nature that even desires grace left to ourselves

If you want to take notes – Point #1: Our Past Degenerated State

³ 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.

This is our past degenerated state, and it's not a pretty picture.

CONTEXT: Paul begins this chapter telling Titus to remind the believers of their duty to the unbelieving world around them.

Titus 3:1-3 (NASB95) ¹ Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ² to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. ³ For we also once were ...

Paul reminds us not only of our need to submit to government and to stand out in our behavior and to seek to be salt and light in our world, he also reminds us in our text today of our nature before Christ. If we find it hard to live godly with ungodly people, Paul says don't forget what you once were as well (just as lost as anyone else). You not only "once were" just as ungodly and lost in God's eyes, you still *would be* but for the grace of God (v. 4-7).

Don't be so upset when sinners act like sinners, and don't think that changes your duty as a saved sinner before them. Don't be surprised when pagans live like pagans, but you should live in a way *to surprise them* that you don't live like them all the time anymore. Why? God's amazing grace saves wretches like us!

Last week we saw the way Christianity impacts a pagan society:

- By Lifting Up Scripture Courageously (2:15)
- By Living As Submissive Citizens (3:1-2)
- **By Loving Other Sinners to Christ (3:3-7)**

There is very much a gospel motive in the way we live before our authorities and government and those we work with and for, as chapter 2:9-10 says leading into the gospel. Our home life and our family life is also very much a gospel witness as chapter 2 says, and that section in chapter 2 flows right into the gospel as well.

Look at Titus 3:1-2 with this context in mind:

- We can put up with fellow sinners because God put up with us, as v. 3ff says. We can show mercy and kindness and love and grace, because we have received all that and more from God despite far worse offenses on our part toward God, far worse than the lesser ways people offend us.
- We must not curse our fellow men as verse 2 says, because they are made in the image of the God we love, whose Son became a curse for us on the cross, maligned by men for us, so that our lips need not malign, but can magnify God!

- We can be peacable with others because the Prince of Peace made peace with us and God, and gives us His peace
- We can be gentle, and humble or considerate with all men because our Lord *exemplifies* those traits and *enables* them

If Titus found himself frustrated with the Cretans (and if you find yourself frustrated with people around you), Titus needed to remember and we need to remember that we too were once like them, and in some ways we still are like this picture, and but for the grace of God we would still be there with the worst of them.

There seems to be intentional contrast with the seven duties in a sinful society, while remembering seven marks of our own sinfulness apart from God's grace toward us:

v. 1 "Be subject"	v. 3 "foolish" (Rom. 1 says when they didn't submit to God, their foolish hearts darkened)
v. 1 "Be ... obedient"	v. 3 "disobedient"
v. 1 "Ready for every good deed" [others-focus]	v. 3 "enslaved to" [sin and pleasure-seeking, self-focus]
v. 2 "malign no one"	v. 3 "malice" (root of slander)
v. 2 "be peacable"	v. 3 "envy" (which can lead to disrupting of peace)
v. 2 "gentle"	v. 3 "hateful"
v. 2 "showing every consideration" / humility	v. 3 "hating one another"

William Hendriksen writes: 'what a sorry spectacle it is. Here "we" come: the glutton and the toper, the miser and the spend-thrift, the mad-cap and the dotard, the sports-worshiper and the sluggard, the fraud and the fop, the sadist and the rapist, the "tiger" and the "wolf" (Cf. Rom. 1:18-32; Gal. 5:19-21). Some serve one master, some another, but by nature all are slaves to those terrible "drives" which they have never learned to control, and which, according to some modern psychologists they should not even try too strenuously to hold down!'¹

God's Word says (v.3) our problem is deeper than sinful choices at times, it says sinners are "enslaved to various lusts and pleasures."

The Greek word for "pleasures" is the root of our word *hedonism*, the pleasure-seeking that so marks our culture.

The word “enslaved” is the verb form of the word *doulos* we saw in Titus 2:9 for literal bondslaves or in Titus 1:1 for spiritual slaves. We are in bondage to sin and as Luther wrote in what he felt his most important book and only one worthy of publication, our sin causes *Bondage of the Will*. We are not as free as we think.

- Our very desires are enslaved, according to Titus 3:3.
- In the words of Jeremiah 17:9, the very heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked, incurably sick
- In the words of God Himself in Genesis 6:5, every inclination of fallen man’s heart is only evil continually
- In the words of 1 Corinthians 2:14 “a natural man **does not** accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; **and he cannot** understand them”
- In the words of Ephesians 2:1, we are all dead in our sins, lifeless, motionless, hopeless, helpless, godless

Sinners may be dead to the things of God, not moving towards God, but they are certainly not inactive in the things of this world:
v. 3 “... spending our life in malice and envy”

I read this week of the long history of these two sins from early Genesis on, beginning with Eve envying the forbidden fruit: ‘It was envy [then malice] which caused the murder of Abel, threw Joseph into a pit, caused Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to rebel against Moses and Aaron, made Saul pursue David, gave rise to the bitter words which “the elder brother” (in the Parable of the Prodigal Son) addressed to his father, and the Crucified Christ. *Love* never envies (1 Cor. 13:4).’²

“... hateful, hating one another”

These last two are the result of the two before, malice and envy.

This twofold two-way hatred that marks fallen man is in contrast to the love of God in v. 4 that comes unexplainably unilaterally unconditionally from God, and regenerates hearts that naturally hated God and others, enabling them to love God and others. We can only love, as 1 John 4:19 says, because God first loved us.

Remembering our *degenerated past state* should humble us and guard us from hating those who are sinful as we were and in need of salvation as much as we did. Rather than hate, we should love as Jesus loved the rich young ruler who rejected the gospel. We should be patient and longsuffering as God, not desiring any perish

We should not look down pridefully on sinners, but should look on them as Jesus looked on Jerusalem, with compassion and tears for their lostness, and a desire that they repent and be saved as well

*This moves us from our first point, **Our Past Degenerated State to #2 – GOD’S AMAZING GRACE***

⁴ **But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,** ⁵ **He saved us**

I. Howard Marshall sums up Paul’s argument: ‘since we once were what they still are, but were delivered through the kindness of God, so we ought to show kindness to those whom we once resembled ... The main point is accordingly that the readers are now able to live differently from previously and therefore ought to do so .. The dominant thought is that God has saved the readers who were once enslaved by sin; he has transformed them by the power of the Holy Spirit so that they are now in effect delivered from slavery to sin and empowered to live a new life.’³

This verse describes God as “our Savior” - God is by nature a Savior. And just as there were seven duties for Christians in a sinful society (v. 1-2), and seven sins that mark unbelievers (v. 3), there are seven aspects of God’s amazing saving grace here (v.4-7)

KINDNESS – It is God’s very nature to be kind to the lost, and one way we show we have His nature and are truly children of His is when we show kindness to those who don’t deserve it, or hate us

In Luke 6:35 Jesus said “But love your enemies, and do good ... and you will be **sons of the Most High**; for He Himself is **kind** to ungrateful and evil *men*.”

Romans 2:4 tells us not to “think lightly of **the riches of His kindness** and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the **kindness of God leads you to repentance**”

The sovereign kindness of God had to lead me to repentance or I would still be in verse 3. As we saw last week, even repentance is a gift granted by God. When you understand how truly lost we were, grace is truly amazing. God found us, while blind He made us see!

Everything in this passage is initiated by God – in fact is any text clearer than these verses that salvation is all of God and by God?

⁴ But when the **kindness of God** our Savior and **His love** for mankind appeared, ⁵ **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**, ⁶ whom **He poured out upon us** richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified **by His grace** we would be **made heirs ...**

As you read verses 4-7, someone might ask “with all Paul’s emphasis on God’s part, where is man’s part in salvation?”

The answer: our part is in verse 3 - sin. That’s what we brought to the table, that’s our “great contribution.” As the young boy who I told you about before articulated his testimony “I did my part, God did His part. I did the sinning, He did the saving.”

As you read verses 4-7 it’s all God’s initiative, God’s work, God – God – God. And that’s Paul’s point, just like it is many other passages. Romans 8:30 says it this way “these whom **He** predestined, **He** also called; and these whom **He** called, **He** also justified; and these whom **He** justified, **He** also glorified.”

God is the subject performing all the saving actions, we are the object. We are recipients, He is the Rescuer. Or as v. 5 sums it up in 3 words: “He saved us.” Jesus did it all, all to Him I owe.

Our regeneration, our salvation is not explained by the pronoun “me” – it was *me*, *I did* such-and-such. Nor is it the pronoun “we” – God did this and I helped Him out and together *we* pulled it off. The biblical pronoun is *He* – He saved me, and whatever I did along the way is traced back to what *He* did and does in my life.

LOVE FOR MANKIND APPEARED – the most visible appearing of this was of course the Son of God coming to earth. “For God so **loved the world** that He gave His only Son ...” (John 3:16)

This is one word in the Greek in v. 4 for love toward man (*philanthropia* – English philanthropy = great acts of benevolence or kindness or charity). The way the Bible uses the term of God of course goes deeper than this, far more than niceness or generosity or thinking of others or doing charity, this word includes deep affectionate love, fondness, compassion, often toward a friend, and especially an eagerness to deliver someone from pain, trouble, or danger. It’s been pointed out often that biblical love goes beyond emotions and finds ways to express itself in actions.

This word appears only one other time in the Greek NT in Acts 28:2 where it says “the natives showed us **extraordinary kindness** [*philanthropia*]; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.” (practical love)

MERCY – the next attribute of God we see

⁵ **He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy**

The original language word order actually has “according to His mercy He saved us” at the end – the entire phrase that comes before for emphasis is “not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us”

This is saying as strongly and clearly as possible that our salvation was not based on anything we had done or would do or could do.

I was talking with a friend recently about a conversation with a man in the cultic segment of the Worldwide Church of God (Armstrongism). When my friend Tim explained to him how the scriptures say we are not saved by works of the law, the cultist said “that’s just works of the Mosaic law” – that’s why Titus 3:5 is an important verse to have in your arsenal. This verse says clearly salvation is not based on *any righteous* deeds or works we do.

Another good verse to memorize is Isaiah 64:6 which says all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags in God’s sight, we are all unclean people among a people of unclean lips, our sins sweep us away.

Romans 4 and Galatians 2-3 and Ephesians 2 are other good passages to turn to when explaining the gospel. Another excellent concise statement is just a few pages earlier – turn back to 2 Tim. 1

2 Timothy 1:9-10 (NASB95) ⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works**, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, ¹⁰ but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel

Back in Titus 3:5 it ascribes salvation to God’s **mercy**

Mercy has been defined as “the self-moved, spontaneous loving kindness of God which causes Him to deal in compassion and tender affection with the miserable and distressed.”

Mercy is the outward manifestation of pity which assumes need on the part of him who receives it and resources adequate to meet need on part of him who shows the mercy. It is kindness or concern shown for someone in serious need, here God's loving and benevolent pity for the misery brought about by our sin.⁴

We are saved by God's mercy, not by our merit—
by Christ's dying, not by our doing.

In verse 7, it says we are “justified by His **grace**” – yet another amazing attribute of our Savior and God. Mercy is sometimes explained as the withholding of what we deserve (which is God's punishment) whereas grace is the giving of what we do not deserve (eternal life). Sometimes the terms seem virtually synonymous.

In other passages, the “being justified” in v. 7 is said to be *by faith*, or in Ephesians 2:8, “by grace through faith.”

“By” literally means “because of grace” or “on the basis / grounds of grace.” Grace is the reason, the instrument that really saves us, on the grounds of the work of Christ in His life, death, resurrection

Faith is technically the MEANS, not the cause of our salvation. It's the channel, what salvation is “through” (Paul doesn't even mention faith here because His emphasis is so fully on God saving)

A technical note that is important: The Bible never uses the Greek construction for faith as the cause or basis of salvation.⁵

A theologian named B. B. Warfield has helped clarified it's not even so much *your* faith in Christ that saves, it's Christ that saves those who have faith. The object of faith is what's critical – Christ ALONE (not Christ plus anything else).

JUSTIFIED in v. 7 is from the same Greek root as the word for “righteous deeds” in verse 5, making a powerful play on words. We cannot be righteous by our works; we must be declared righteous by God's work. This is the word for a legal or forensic declaration in a court – not merely “not guilty” as our courts might say, this is a declaration that someone is righteous. This is possible because a real perfect righteousness from Christ has actually been reckoned or imputed to us, and our real guilt and sin was imputed to Christ in this great exchange, substitution, and divine transfer.

The great result at the end of v. 7 is that we would be **“heirs according to the hope of eternal life”**

In the Greco-Roman world, “heirs” was a legal term and was found on ancient inscriptions of Asia Minor to refer to a son after he was succeeded to the inheritance as representative of his father. An heir is one who receives or is entitled legally to receive in the future some endowment or quality from a parent or predecessor.

Moulton and Milligan’s work on Greek papyri: "In the inscriptions the one thing most often emphasized is the obligation of the [heir] to fulfill certain conditions devolving upon him as an heir. When Paul insists that only those who fulfill the conditions of heirship are truly heirs, he is making use of a well-known principle." If you’re a true son and heir, you shall live accordingly.

Galatians 4 gives us insight into the Roman custom and biblical metaphor if you want to turn there. Heirs were typically natural children, but a Master could also make others joint-heirs outside his natural family, even at times redeeming-adopting slaves as sons

⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so **that He might redeem** those who were under the Law, that we might receive the **adoption as sons.** ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ Therefore you are **no longer a slave, but a son;** and if a son, **then an heir** through God.

Now look back at Titus 3:6 - The Spirit’s vital role in this process is also highlighted as it says He’s “poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” – abundant spiritual blessing.

This is language reminiscent of Acts 2 that quotes Joel’s prophecy about the Holy Spirit being poured out, using very similar original language to this text. Through the work of Jesus Christ in saving us, the Holy Spirit is richly poured out in our life. There are spiritual blessings in this life, and the end of verse 7 has our ultimate inheritance – not earthly possessions but eternal life. Eph. 1 says the Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

Titus 3 has all three members of the Trinity involved in this grand work of salvation – God the Father (v. 4), HS (end of 5), Jesus (6)

And the critical aspect and center of this passage, **regeneration**, is where we’ll spend the rest of our time.

By God's Amazing Grace we were delivered from our Past Degenerated State to ...

#3 – OUR PRESENT REGENERATED STATE

Right in the middle of this passage, the heart of the gospel, Titus 3:5 says “He saved us ... [2nd half of verse] by the washing of **regeneration** and renewing by the Holy Spirit”

Both words “regeneration and renewing” are said to how we are actually saved. This is the real cause of our salvation, what the Holy Spirit does, not what man does in response. Both of these words only appear one other time in the NT.

RENEWING – In Romans 12:2, it says we are to “be transformed by the **renewing** of your minds” – in that context it is a continual transforming renewal. Here in Titus 3:5, it is tied with the saving work of the Holy Spirit, so this renewing begins at regeneration but also continues through life, similar to ongoing sanctification.

REGENERATION – This is not a word for an ongoing or repeatable activity, but refers to an entirely new reality. Other use:

Matthew 19:28 (NASB95) ²⁸ And Jesus said to [His disciples], “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, **in the regeneration** when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones ...

The context is the future kingdom, the future age, when everything is made new, when the curse and fallen nature of the present creation is undone, and it speaks of this as “the regeneration.” The ESV has “in the new world” (a whole new world, which has some continuity with the present world but is radically new and better). Like a re-birth of creation. It’s like saying “in the new heavens and the new earth” that Isaiah spoke about in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22.

Turn to Romans 8, where some of this idea is developed further
You can study 8:14-19 further on the ideas of heirs and sonship. John Piper helped connect these passages, explaining regeneration as ‘something that will happen to all creation, not just human beings ... when human beings sinned ... God made all creation a visible display of the horrors of sin. Disease, degeneration, natural disasters—these are all part of the visual, audible, touchable images of the moral outrage that sin entered the world and pervades the world.

The most important passage in the Bible about this is Romans 8:20-23 ... because it confirms and clarifies what Jesus said about the creation undergoing a “new birth”—the “regeneration.”

8:20 The creation [*All of it! Not just the people.*] was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, [*namely, God, since only God can subject the creation to futility in hope*] in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [*There will be a great renewal someday and it will happen so that creation joins the children of God in their glorious renewal.*] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [*There's the imagery of new birth, just like Jesus said.*] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly **for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.** [there's a sense in which our adoption and redemption already occurred, but its full reality is future - PL]

So if we put it all together, the picture seems to be something like this: God's purpose is that the entire creation be born again. That is, the whole universe will replace its futility and corruption and disease and degeneration and disasters with a whole new order—a new heaven and a new earth. This will be the great, universal regeneration. The great, universal new birth.

When Paul uses this word in Titus 3:5, he wants us to see that our new birth is a part of that. The newness we have by virtue of our regeneration now is the firstfruits of the greater newness we will have when our bodies are made new as a part of the universe being made new. Paul said in Romans 8:23, “We . . . who have the firstfruits of the Spirit [because we have been born again by the Spirit] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

So when you think of your new birth, think of it as the first installment of what is coming. Your body and the whole world will one day take part in this regeneration. God's final purpose is not spiritually renewed souls inhabiting decrepit bodies in a disease and disaster ravaged world. His purpose is a renewed world with renewed bodies and renewed souls that take all our renewed senses and make them a means of enjoying and praising God.

When you hear the word regeneration in Titus 3:5, hear it that big. “[God] 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.” When he says in verse 7 that the aim of the new birth is “that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life,” he means heirs of everything included in that eternal life—new heavens, new earth, new body, new perfected relationships, new sinless sight of all that is good and glorious, and new capacities for a kind of pleasure in God that will exceed all your dreams.

That’s the unusual signal of what the new birth is: It’s the first installment of the final, universal regeneration of the universe.⁶

Many miss the point and they use the word “washing” in Titus 3:5 to argue that water itself or baptism is how we are saved. But the text doesn’t use the word “baptism” and notice what it says at the end: “by the Holy Spirit” – this is God’s spiritual work. The first half of the verse is one of the clearest in all of God’s Word that no righteous deed we do saves us. This is not baptismal regeneration.

Regeneration is not even something we do at all, it is something God does for us and to us and in us. Sanctification is something we are actively involved with, our spiritual growth requires our human action and effort. Synergism is the word for that cooperative effort.

Unlike sanctification, regeneration is pure monergism – meaning it is a work of One: God alone, not God plus man. It results in our conversion and justification, which takes place at a moment in time, and is not an ongoing process like sanctification. Our faith is in response to God’s prior work in regeneration, it’s not our faith that ultimately causes our regenerated state. It’s God’s prior grace that quickens us and we respond in faith and begin to live by faith.

That’s true theologically, but chronologically these events of conversion are essentially simultaneously from a human perspective (regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, conversion, etc.). We don’t believe in a time lag between those events, like some Lutherans or others do where baptized infants are regenerated in some way, but do not repent or receive Christ in saving faith until many years later. The priority of God’s prior grace just shows that the initiative is God’s and all glory is God’s, and His love and choice causes ours, not the other way around.

There is some mystery as to how exactly regeneration and how God's calling works in relation to man's heart, but one attempt to explain it is the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith (10.1), which speaks of God 'enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, (Acts 26:18, 1 Cor. 2:10,12, Eph. 1:17–18) taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; (Ezek. 36:26) renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, (Ezek. 11:19, Phil. 2:13, Deut. 30:6, Ezek. 36:27) and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: (Eph. 1:19, John 6:44–45) **yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.** (Cant. 1:4, Ps. 110:3, John 6:37, Rom. 6:16–18)'

The Synod of Dort (*The Articles of the Dort* 3.16) clarified further that God's regenerating grace does not 'abolish the will and properties of the will, or violently constrain it, but doth spiritually revive it, heal it, rectify it, and powerfully yet gently bend it: so that where formerly the rebellion of the flesh, and stubbornness did domineer without control, now a willing and sincere obedience to the Spirit begins to reign; in which change the true and spiritual rescue and freedom of our will doth consist ...'

How exactly some great theological truths intersect is something my little brain struggles with, but I still believe what the Bible says

During the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers emphasis on the priority of God's regenerating grace before man's genuine faith in conversion and sanctification was opposed by Roman Catholic theologians who believed what man does (in synergism with God) is what effects our calling, regeneration, justification, and so on. Eventually some Protestants such as the Arminian Christians departed from this Reformation distinctive and took a modified form of the Catholic view, making our regeneration dependent on man's initiative or effort, just without all of Rome's sacraments.

But consider for a moment how the Scriptures describe fallen man:
 Romans 3:10-12 (NASB95) ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, ... THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

Turn to Ezekiel 36. As you turn, consider these other statements:

- Isaiah 53 says we all like sheep have gone astray to our own way (that's what our will and choices get all of us, the wrong way) – we are in need of a Shepherd to rescue us as we would never go the right way ourselves without Him carrying and leading us to green pastures for His name sake
- We are described as lost in need of someone else to find us, we don't find the Savior, the Savior finds us who are lost
- We are described as captives who have no way to pay our own ransom, and not even naturally aware of our bondage
- We are described as slaves to sin with no hope of freeing ourselves by our own willpower or works, our only hope is for a Master to choose us and redeem us from the market
- We are described as spiritually blind and unable to see and in need of a mighty miracle if we will ever see the Lord
- We are spiritually dead, insensitive, immovable by spiritual things (Eph 2:1), motionless, lifeless, hopeless (v. 12)
- We are told our natural heart is evil, corrupt, deceitful, desperately wicked, depraved, incurably sick – our heart is even described in the OT as a heart of stone (stone cold)

When Paul speaks of “the washing of regeneration by the Holy Spirit” the language is reminiscent of the spiritual ministry of the Holy Spirit prophesied by Ezekiel 36. I believe this is also what Nicodemus should have thought of when Jesus said “You must be born of water and the spirit or you cannot enter the kingdom”

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NASB95) ²⁵ “Then **I will** sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; **I will** cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ “Moreover, **I will give you a new heart** and **put a new spirit within you**; and **I will remove the heart of stone** from your flesh and **give you a heart of flesh**. ²⁷ “**I will** put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, **and you will** be careful to observe My ordinances.

This text is *the washing of regeneration*, and notice the removal of our old stony heart, and the implanting of a new heart and new spirit from God, which causes us to walk in Him and obey Him. This isn't heart renovation, it's heart replacement, heart transplant!

Notice also the repeated “I will” by God and at the end of verse 27 as a result it says “*you will* be careful to observe My ordinances.” Lest we still think we had something to do with this, see v. 32

³² “**I am not doing this for your sake,**” declares the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. **Be ashamed and confounded for your ways,** O house of Israel!”

Ezekiel 37:1 (NASB95) The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ²He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. ³He said to me, “Son of man, **can these bones live?**” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.” ⁴Again He said to me, “Prophecy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’” ⁵“Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, ‘Behold, **I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.**

... ¹¹Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.’” ¹²“Therefore prophecy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, **I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves**, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³“Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. ¹⁴“**I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life**, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD.’”

I would agree with C. H. Spurgeon that this text is primarily about future regeneration of the actual Jewish nation, and there is both physical and spiritual aspects here. They will be restored to the land, and most importantly, to their Lord. There are some unique promises given to Israel in this book, and the fullness of Israel’s spiritual regeneration will not be literally fulfilled until the end-times conversion of Israel in Romans 11:26, which Iain Murray described as part of the great Puritan hope. They called for prayer for the final day conversion of the Jews in the Larger Westminster Catechism and Westminster Directory for Public Worship.⁷

But until that day, the New Testament is also clear that the *spiritual* benefits of the New Covenant and promised ministry of the Holy Spirit is experienced on a personal individual level by all regenerated believers of this age, Jew or Gentile.

Let’s close with Ephesians 2, which puts together everything we’ve discussed as well as any Scripture in God’s Word.

Notice the key concepts and words and even the key words we’ve seen in Titus 3 – rich and mercy and love and kindness and grace to those who were spiritually dead and needed to be regenerated:

Ephesians 2:4-9 (NASB95)

⁴But God, being **rich in mercy, because of His great love** with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive** together with Christ (**by grace you have been saved**), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that **in the ages to come**

He might show **the surpassing riches** of His grace **in kindness toward us** in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that **not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;** ⁹**not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

This is what makes grace so amazing! While we were dead, He made us alive. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! We are not resurrected because of our response, impetus or initiative; we respond because we were resurrected by God, by His initiative, intervention, and the One we once resisted becomes irresistible and we're made willing to believe. Yes, we did genuinely exercise faith, but even that was not of ourselves, it says the whole thing is the gift of God. There is no way we can boast or take any credit or glory for any part of our salvation because it is all of God!

He rescued us, He regenerated us, He resurrected us, He raised us up, He ransomed us, He redeemed us, He replaced our sinful stony heart, He re-created us!

This is re-generation, not from anything in our original generation or flesh. Nothing in our old nature can account for this, God must impart in us a new nature. Nothing in *natural* man could cause regeneration, this is a *supernatural God thing* in a sinner's heart.

Nothing from our first birth could account for this, that's why Jesus told Nicodemus, you need a new birth and unless you are born again you will never see the kingdom of God (John 3).

This is what's going on in Titus 3:5, when it says "God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit"

- This is how degenerate sinners become regenerate
- This is how slaves of sin are saved
- This is when the blind are given sight
- This is when the spiritual dead are given spiritual life

This is what inspired the most famous hymn by John Newton:
*Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
 I once was lost but now **am found**, was blind but now I see
 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears
 relieved ...*

It was all of grace all the way, amazing wretch-saving, lost-finding, sight-giving, heart-teaching, fear-instilling, soul-relieving, safe-keeping, danger-protecting, home-leading, praise-inspiring for ten thousand years and beyond we will sing in amazed praise

¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 388

² *Ibid.*

³ I. Howard Marshall, *International Critical Commentary*, T&T Clark, p. 305)

⁴ http://www.preceptaustin.org/titus_34-8.htm#3:5

⁵ Greek *dia* + accusative *pistin* – “because of / on account of faith”, cf. Salmond, *Expositor’s Greek Testament* on Ephesians 2:8.

⁶ John Piper, “Through the Washing of Regeneration”

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/48/2590_Through_the_Washing_of_Regeneration/

⁷ The **Larger Westminster Catechism** Question 191 sums up the Puritan view. What do we pray for in the second petition of the Lord's prayer?

Answer: We pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in.

In the **Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God** we are directed to pray for:

The propagation of the gospel and the kingdom of Christ to all nations; for the conversion of the Jews, the fullness of the Gentiles, the fall of antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord

... There will be a major conversion of the Jews as 'godlessness is turned away from Jacob' (Rom 11). This is part of a programme as we will see.

For more quotes from the Puritan tradition on the future salvation of Israel, see:

http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org/home/1477/1477/docs/ISRAEL%20-%20THEOLOGIAN%20QUOTES.pdf?sec_id=1477