

# Understanding How People Are Save – Regeneration Part 1

**Jon Benzinger**

**Titus 3:5-6**

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Good evening, good morning, wherever you are, however you're watching. Thank you for joining me for Redeemer Live. Hey, this passage today I hope is going to be clarifying. I hope it's going to be interesting. I hope it's going to be incredibly helpful. The truth that we're going to look at today is so important for you to know. I'm just so glad that you're with me right now. So grab your Bibles, open to Titus chapter three. That's Titus chapter three. If you have a Bible that we give out here at the church, that's page 1100. Titus chapter three.

While we're turning there, I told you last week about a surprise that you don't want to miss today. So if you're thinking about that, I'm glad you are. If you're following our Instagram, you already know what it is because I told you about it Wednesday night when I wasn't really able to sleep. Well, I kind of told you about it. The surprise is we've hired a new pastor. Isn't that so great? Want to know who he is? I interviewed him last week and you will see that interview after the message and after the last song. I am pumped about this. I cannot wait for you to meet him, but you're going to have to wait.

Titus chapter three, drop down to verse four. And as you do, if you're able, even though you're watching, please stand wherever you are for the reading of God's word. Kids, that's you too. Grab your Bible. Stand next to mom and dad. Look at them, stand with them, and look at God's word. Titus chapter three, drop down to verse four, "We stand because this is the word of God." Titus chapter three, verse four. Like I said, is one sentence from verse four all the way to the end of verse seven. So we're going to read the whole sentence even though our focus today is going to be verse five.

Titus 3:4, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that being justified by His Grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Now, before we get into the text, join me in prayer. Father, the truth in this text is so rich and it is so packed tightly that we're going to spend probably seven weeks just in verses four to seven, but the truth that's here is so helpful and it is so important that I don't want to miss anything. I don't want anybody watching to miss anything. So help us to understand every nook and cranny. Help us to understand every truth, that not only shows us who you are and what you've done, but also helps us understand who we are and what we need. Father, please speak powerfully through this message.

And I also lift up Pastor Lane to you at Family of Faith Fellowship in Queen Creek. I pray that you would bless him. I pray that you would use his teaching online this weekend to bless the

people of Family of Faith Fellowship. Use it to sanctify them, use it to fill their hearts with joy and with love for Christ so that they go out into their world, into their neighborhoods, whatever they're able to do during this quarantine, and show the people they interact with just how wonderful our Savior is. Do that for them. Please do that for us now. Please, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So our text today is Titus chapter three, verses five and six, which says, "The washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Smart guys for centuries have talked about the truth in this text using one of the words in this text, the word regeneration. So that's what I'm going to do today. Now, that might be confusing though as we go on, so I want you to know that up front, even though I'm going to talk about regeneration as a theological category, even though that word is used in our text to describe one aspect of how a person is saved.

Now, I'm convinced regeneration is one of the most important truths that you could ever understand, period. And there is a massive amount of confusion about regeneration. What a surprise. Who would be so in confusion about this most important truth that you and I need to know. I need to help you then with this, and as I put this message together, it came to feel more like a classroom than a sermon, but I know if you listen, this incredibly important text will be a great benefit to your soul.

So we're going to be all over the Bible. There are dozens of passages to consider. You can see that on the outline that I've provided for you online. There's all kinds of stuff in the Bible on this subject that we need to look at so that we understand clearly what the Bible says about regeneration. And we're going to be all over the Bible, because I really want you to understand this. This will help you make sense of so much false teaching out there, and it'll make sense of so much just off teaching that's out there with people with open Bibles, that there's so much that's false, there's so much that's off. You need to know these truths.

Now, let me start by asking you, "How do most people answer the question, 'How is a person saved?'" How? In what way? What is the means of salvation? What is the means that salvation is delivered to a person? Most will say it's by their good works. We dealt with that last week. Others will look to a prayer, others will look to some ritual, usually baptism. That prayer or baptism, that's how a person is saved. The real Sunday school Bible nerd will say, "How they're saved? Well, they're saved by faith. They're saved by trusting in Jesus. They trust him. They give him their lives."

Here's the difficulty. When we answer this question, When we ask the question, we're tempted to look back at some man-made, observable, controllable, simple, straightforward activity. Pray a prayer, get baptized, be a good person, make a decision. John one is instructive for this. John chapter one. So keep your finger on Titus 3 and turn to John chapter one. That's page 981 in the blue Bibles, John chapter one.

John is the cousin of Jesus. John was His closest follower, maybe even His closest friend. He is the disciple that Jesus loved. There was a special friendship between Jesus and John, and as John

writes this gospel, as he tells people, proclaims the truth about Jesus, he wants us to understand from the outset how it is that a person is saved. Look at chapter one of John and drop down to verse 12. John one, 12, says, "And to all who did receive him," and then he explains what that means. What does it mean to receive him? Who believed in His name. So to receive Jesus is to believe in him, is to trust in him, is to give your life to him. "To all who did receive him, who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

I had you turn to this text because it's very important that you see something. Here, regeneration is referred to using a synonym, and that synonym is that of birth, being born. He has said that those who receive Christ, those who believe in him, become children of God. But notice the text. How does that happen? Well, John answers how it does not happen. First, it does not happen by blood. Meaning no one is a child of God because of their ancestry or their race. His second, he says, no one is a child of God because of the will of the flesh, by some purely natural process, by some purely natural activity of the flesh, things that we can do. That is not how it happens. And third, no one is a child of God because, "Because of the will of man." Ultimately, no one is a child of God because they chose to be, they are a child of God because they were, notice the text, because they were born of God. Notice verse 12, he gives people the status of a child of God.

Now think about it. Did you give yourself the status of being a child of your parents? Did you go through some ritual to be their child? Were you being their son or daughter, did that depend on your choice? How many of you, if you could, you would've chosen maybe a different group of parents to be connected to? Your status as a child of your parents depended completely on your parents. And it was supernatural, there was nothing manmade, observable, controllable, simple or straightforward about it. It was highly mysterious. How did this happen? How did we show? How did that all start? Where did that come from, that supernatural life, that spiritual life, where did that spring from?

Well, this is what I want us to think about today because this miraculous physical life is being compared to this miraculous spiritual life. So I want you to know the how of salvation. How do we experience salvation? How does God save a person? How is it that God saves people now that Jesus has been raised from the dead? Back to Titus chapter three. You can see in verse five that the subject is salvation with those words that open the verse, "He that is God the Father. He saved us." Why did he save people? Verse four. He saved people because of the goodness and loving kindness of God. That's why. He saves people because he is kind. He's not harsh, he's not cruel. He's pleasant, He's friendly. He's sympathetic to our need for salvation.

That's seen in the next reason that God saves. He saves people because he's compassionate. He's not only willing to help, he actually helps those in danger. That's really what salvation means, right? Rescue from danger. That danger we saw last week is not only sin and it's not only the punishment people rightly deserve for their sins, the danger people are facing every second of every day is God, a God who knows everything we've done, a God who more than knows it, saw everything we've ever done, and not only what we've done, but also what we've thought about

doing. He knows that too. God is dangerous because he's all powerful. No scrawny human can overpower him. He's all knowing. You can't outthink him. You can't trick him.

God is also dangerous for people because he is good. He must punish sin like good judges, like good police, punish those who break the law or who aren't good. And finally, God is dangerous for people because there's nothing we can do to fix the problem God has with us. That was last week, verse five. He saved us, notice, not because of works done by us in righteousness. It doesn't mean people aren't going to try and try and try and try, even though this could not be any more clear that not even their best works, not even the very best they could do, could give them any hope that God would accept them.

So why are people saved then? People are saved because God, the kind, compassionate, merciful Savior, he saves people from himself. The all good, all-knowing, all powerful judge. He sees people in the hopeless and helpless condition before him and he takes the initiative to fix the problem that we have. He actually fixes the problem in our lives individually when he shows us mercy, when he appears to us. What God does to save is Paul's entire focus in verses four to seven. It's so much his focus, notice that not even faith is mentioned in this passage, there's no response whatsoever, this is all that God does to save. There's no human condition, there's no human response.

Paul's point is here, "Christians, we are to obey our government. We're to love our neighbors," verses one and two, "because," verse three, "the only difference between Christians and those who reject God is that a kind compassionate merciful God saved them by His Grace, not because of their works." In other words, there is nothing at all superior about Christians when comparing us to non-Christians. Nothing at all. The only difference between them and us is Grace. God's mercy towards us, His kindness against what we deserve. We don't deserve that he be kind to us, we don't deserve that he be compassionate to us, but he does it anyway. Why? Because we are so good? No, we're not. But because he's so good and he's so merciful.

Well, exactly how does that mercy work? What does that mercy look like when God shows His mercy to save someone? How does he actually do it? What actually happens when he saves people? What does he do that saves people? I'm glad you asked all those questions. Look at verse five. He saved us, dot, dot, dot, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. This phrase, "By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit," this phrase is incredibly difficult to translate. I read one scholar who said there are five views that smart guys take on how to understand this passage. And then he says, "And all five of them make sense." That's not exactly what I want to read when I'm studying passages.

So here in this phrase in verse five, this is what I think is going on. So what I think Paul is saying. I think he's saying regeneration and renewal are not two separate events. They are one event looked at from two angles. And that this event, which we're going to call regeneration, this event, when this happens, we are washed from our sins, we're washed from our old life, we're washed from our old nature, and all of that is done by the Holy Spirit. This is the experience of regeneration or what we saw John call, "Being born again," or, "Being born from God."

Keep all this in mind as you look at Titus three, five, and six, because today I'm going to have seven questions about regeneration, or in the words of John 1:13, seven questions about being born again. I hope the answers you see in God's word to these questions will be instructive. I hope they'll clear up some confusion. I hope that's not going to cause more confusion. But like I said before and I reiterate again, I hope the answers that we look at to these questions will fix some error. And I hope that it's going to barbecue some sacred cows that people who go to church have about how a person is saved.

The first question I want to ask about regeneration and have the Bible answer is this point. Question number one, what is regeneration? What is regeneration? Regeneration is not reincarnation. Regeneration is not changing your life and regeneration is not a feeling. Look at Titus 3:5. 3 terms help explain what regeneration is. Those three terms are washing, regeneration, and renewal. Washing is not physical. Nothing in this text is physical. Washing is used as a metaphor for spiritual cleansing that removes, that purifies people from the defilement, the dirtiness, the guilt of their sin.

Also, while it might symbolize this, this does not refer to water baptism. Regeneration and renewal I think are essentially synonymous. I think it's hard to tell where one idea stops and the other begins. They describe the same event from different angles. Actually, like I said, all three words describe the same event from three angles. Regeneration is not starting over. It's a word that's formed by smashing two other words together. The words beginning and again.

So this is a new beginning. This is a new genesis. It's called being born again or born from above or born of God. And then renewal isn't taking something good and making it better. That's kind of how we use the term. No, this word speaks of being made alive, of receiving new life, of being a new creation, a recreation. This isn't a makeover. I heard one preacher say, "This isn't a makeover, it's a takeover." It's an internal spiritual supernatural transformation on the inside. Regeneration actually makes a person something they weren't beforehand. This is not a renovation. They are a brand-new creation. This is 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. It's gone. Behold the new has come and it's here and it can't stop in a person's life." When that new arrives, what happened in that moment is what we're calling regeneration.

So we put this all together. Regeneration is this, or to answer the question, to take the truths of the scripture, look at those first and then put a definition together from those truths. Regeneration is an internal supernatural act of God's kindness, His compassion, His mercy, where he purifies a person from all of their sins and gives spiritual life to that person, creating them anew. It is the life of God in the soul of a person. And the nanosecond before that life of God showed up, that person did not have any of God's life in them at all. It is an inner recreating of the fallen human nature by the kind and sovereign mercy of God. People are still the same on the outside, but anyone who's experienced this knows that while being the same on the outside, they are a completely different person on the inside. They've been born again.

Now, the second question about regeneration that we want the Bible to answer is this. Why is there regeneration? Why is there regeneration? Why is regeneration necessary? What is the problem that regeneration is addressing? Two things. We saw it first in the word washing. Regeneration cleanses a person from all of their sins. So that's one of the problems, we have sins that we need to be cleansed from, that we need to be rid of, and it's regeneration that washes our sins away. But regeneration is also necessary because of what we are apart from or without regeneration. Colossians 2:13 says, "You were dead in your trespasses." Ephesians 2:1, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked."

Did you notice that? We were dead but we were walking? We were spiritual zombies. We looked like we were alive. We looked like we had life, but internally, spiritually, we were dead. Again, this is not a feeling like, "I felt dead on the inside." No, this is a reality. Dead is what we were. Oh, we have spirits, that's what animates our bodies, however we had no spiritual life. We were dead to God, dead to Christ, dead to the work of the Holy Spirit, dead to the truth, no effect, no real impact. How much impact does anything have on a corpse? Answer, zero, zip, zilch, nothing. Nothing at all.

We'd hear the truth, but we wouldn't embrace it. It would bounce off of us like words bounce off a dead person. We'd ignore it, we'd reject it. However, after regeneration, Christians have physical life and spiritual life. The non-physical part of the Christian, the heart, the very core of their being, that is recreated so that they have new life. They become a new creation at the very core of who they are. And again, this isn't, "I feel like a new person," like after you take a shower, get a makeover and enjoy the results of a diet. No, this is God graciously giving spiritual life to a person, creating her completely, recreating her completely, 100% anew, even though she looks no different than before. So why is regeneration necessary? Because we are dead in our sins.

The third question we want to ask and we want God's word to answer is this. Who experiences regeneration? Who experiences regeneration? Look back at Titus 3:4, Paul tells us six times in these verses who it is that's regenerated. Let's take a look at it. Verse four, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 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 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."

So who is regenerated? Answer, those who are saved, those who have God and Jesus as their Savior. Notice Savior is used of the Father, in verse four, and Jesus in verse six. Again, listen to Colossians 2:13 again, it puts it this way, "You who were dead in your trespasses, God made alive," that's regeneration, "God made alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, that he set aside, nailing it to the cross." Think about that. That in regeneration, it takes the list of our sins, the list of our crimes against the law of God, takes that, nails it to the cross, paid in full, washed away, purified from all of that in our lives.

This was universal Christian teaching in the first century. We've heard this from Paul, that it is Christians, it's those who are saved, who are born again. Listen to Peter, 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the god and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His mercy, he has caused us to be born again." Here's James, the brother of Jesus, James 1:18, speaking about God, "He said of His own will, He brought us forth." He brought us forth. That's regeneration. "He brought us forth by the word of truth." And then, John, again, this is in John's first letter, the book of first John in chapter five verse one, says, "Everybody who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." So regeneration is only experienced by people who believe in Jesus, who trust Him, trust Him and Him alone to save them from their sins, who have their sins forgiven. All of that became true for them because God, in Peter's words, caused them to be born again. Look again at 1 Peter 1:3. So only followers of Jesus are regenerated. Only those who have salvation have experienced regeneration.

The fourth question that we want the Bible to answer is this. Who does the regenerating? Who does it? Who accomplishes it? Who is it that actually makes the follower of Jesus a new creation? Answer, look back at Titus 3:5. Titus 3:5 says, "By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." John 6:63, Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life." The flesh is no help at all. You cannot give yourself spiritual life. You cannot give yourself eternal life. You cannot in your body, by your flesh, by anything that you do, give yourself life. It is the spirit alone who gives life. Paul just quotes Jesus in 2 Corinthians 3:6 when he says, "The spirit gives life."

This is the consistent teaching of the Bible, and I want you to see this, so turn to Ezekiel 36, Ezekiel chapter 36. That's page 807 in the blue Bibles. Ezekiel 36. The background here is that Israel has rebelled against God, chiefly through idolatry. She has broken the first and second commandment. She's gone after other Gods. She's taken the God of Israel and combined him with other gods and is worshiping everybody. He sent them prophets and His mercy to turn them from their rebellion, but they refused. They rejected them and even killed some of them.

After a few hundred years of this, God punishes Israel through defeat in a war. Babylon comes in and just decimates the southern nation of Judah. He takes the people there, and Nebuchadnezzar, the king who defeats them, takes them and exiles them into the land of Babylon. This is exactly what God promised he would do in Deuteronomy 28, if they did not fear him, if they did not love him, if they did not walk in His ways. However, as we've been seeing in our text, this was not the final word to them. God is merciful, He's gracious, and He forgives. He would make a new covenant with them to replace the one that they broke.

The new covenant is what began with the coming of the Spirit in Acts chapter two, and it's described in Ezekiel 36, verse 25. You see that there? Ezekiel 36:25 says, "I will sprinkle clean water on them and you shall be cleaned from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. I will cleanse you." It sounds a lot like what we heard with that word "wash" in Titus 3:5, right? Verse 26 continues, "And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put in you, and I will

remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Sounds a lot like regeneration and renewal from Titus 2:5, right? That's because it is.

And verse 27, "And I will put my spirit within you and I will cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." Now, verses 28 and following, there are these land promises that will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to Jerusalem and when he reigns as the world's king for a thousand years. Now, what I want you to see is that the indwelling Holy Spirit is connected to regeneration in Ezekiel just like it is in Titus 3. Now, now that you've seen that... So here's the Holy Spirit. He is the agent. He is the means. He's the one who accomplishes regeneration both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is the teaching.

Now, turn to John 3, John chapter three. In John chapter three, page 983. John chapter three, Jesus is also talking about regeneration. He's also talking about being born again, and he's also going to connect the work of the spirit to regeneration. Notice chapter three, let's start on verse one. Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus. He was a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher from God and no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." So you might think Jesus would say something like, "Hey, thanks for saying that," or, "Do you have a question?" Notice what he says, "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, this is truth. This is really true. This is something you really need to understand, Nicodemus.'" And not just Nicodemus, but you and me too. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Now, Nicodemus clearly doesn't understand what Jesus is saying, but I want you to notice how Jesus answers. How does he answer this question about being born again? Verse five. Jesus answered, "Truly, truly." There it is again, a second time. This is very important. That's why I said before, this is one of the most important truths that you and I could ever know. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Now, let's think about that for a second. The water, we saw this in Ezekiel 36, we saw this in Titus 3:5, the water refers to the spiritual cleansing that we read about in both places, the washing, but notice, in order to enter the kingdom a person must also be... What does the text say? Must also be born of the spirit, verse six. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear it sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit."

So Jesus is talking about the work of the Holy Spirit and regeneration and birthing people again and notice what He does, He compares the work of the spirit and regeneration to the wind. We've all experienced wind. Well, let's slow down a second and think about this analogy. There are five points about the wind that help us understand the work of the spirit and regeneration. Look at the text. First, like the wind, the spirit is invisible. You can only see the effect of the spirit, just like

you can only see the effect of the wind, you cannot actually see the wind, you cannot actually see the Spirit. He is invisible.

Second, like the wind blowing, the spirit is active. But think about it, just like there's no set pattern to the wind blowing, there's no set pattern to the work of the spirit. You cannot set up rules. You cannot set up regulations for how He works and when He works and who He works on in regeneration. You can't do it. The wind, it works, the wind is active, but the wind is free. Third, just like the wind blows where it wishes, that's where we're going next. That's what Jesus says. The wind blows where it wishes.

Well, just like the wind blows where it wishes, so the Spirit does as he wishes in regeneration. He's in complete control of it. He regenerates how he wants, when he wants, and whoever he wants. Remember 1 Peter 1:3, He, that is God, has caused us to be born again. He caused our birth, our spiritual birth. Remember John 1:13, regeneration is not because of our heredity, not because of our activity, and not because of our choice. Being born again is because of God. How much control, how much say, how much choice, did you have in your first birth? Think about it. How much input did you give to that? How much did what happened on the day you were born, how much did that have to do with your activity and your choices? Answer, nothing. Nothing at all. Just like your mom on that day, the Holy Spirit does it all. You simply receive. You are passive in this entire regeneration thing. You did nothing to birth yourself the first time and you do nothing to birth yourself the second time. From beginning to end, regeneration is a work of God alone.

Fourth, "Just like you can hear the wind but you can't see it, so you can see the effects of the Spirit, but you can't see him." I think maybe that's a restatement of the first one. And then number five, "Like the wind that you can hear but you don't know," notice the text, "where it comes from or where it goes, so it is with everyone who's born of the Spirit." There is an unpredictable mystery about regeneration. We see the effect of the spirit, but we can't control Him. We can't set up just the right environment that kind of invites Him in, and then that just kind of causes people to be regenerated.

When the Spirit does the work of regeneration, He does what He wants, how He wants, to whoever He wants, just at the right moment when He wants. Just like the wind, just exactly like the wind. So the Spirit accomplishes regeneration. He does it alone. We don't help the wind, we don't create the wind, we don't control the wind, and He does not regenerate with the help of any human being at any point in regeneration, and we never ever help Him with this.

At this point, you'd expect question number five, correct, but we're going to pick that up next weekend. Don't forget, the interview with our new pastor is going to come after the last song, so you're going to want to stick around to see that. I'm telling you, unreal. Now, as I close, there really is just one question that you should have at this moment. If you've been listening, if you've been paying attention to what we've been seeing in the Bible, the answers the Bible's been giving to our questions, then really there's one question and only one question that should be coming to your mind. And the question is this, "Have I experienced the new birth? Have I been born again?"

Has this happened to me? Do I have the regenerated life of God living in my soul? Am I a new creation? Have I been born again? Do I have spiritual life?"

If you're not sure about that, two things, three things... Number one, when this is over, like right now, you should press pause and pray. You should cry out to God, "God, I don't know if I'm born again. I want to be born again. Jesus said I must be born again. Please, Father..." You should pray right now. Second, if you need to talk to somebody, email us [info@redeemeraz.org](mailto:info@redeemeraz.org). Email us, we'll talk to you. We would love to set up a time to talk with you. Email us as soon as you can, even right now. [info@redeemeraz.org](mailto:info@redeemeraz.org). And finally, make sure you are here next week. Make sure because we're going to answer the three really the most critical questions for us in this study of regeneration. We're going to ask those next week, so make sure that you are here. Join me in prayer.

Father, we have only scratched the surface of what it means to be born again. We need you. I need you. Please help us understand this truth, but help us understand it in such a way that we understand our own selves in light of who you are and what your word says. This is not meant to be intellectual. This is not meant to be something that we just fill our heads with, check the box, and keep moving. No, this is the most critical reality. Jesus said it three times, we must be born again or we cannot, we will not, enter heaven when we die. It is so important for us to understand this. Please, please help us understand these truths in a way that opens our eyes to the truth about ourselves. Please help us with this. In Jesus's name, amen.