

Titus 3:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Analysis

Not by works of righteousness which we have done—οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἀ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς (ouk ex ergōn tōn en dikaiosynē ha epoiēsamen hēmeis)—emphatic negation of works-based salvation. ἔργα (erga, works) ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ (en dikaiosynē, in righteousness) are our best moral efforts. Paul demolishes all merit theology: salvation isn't earned.

But according to his mercy he saved us (ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἐσωσεν ἡμᾶς, alla kata to autou eleos esōsen hēmas)—κατὰ τὸ ἔλεος (kata to eleos, according to mercy) defines salvation's basis. ἐσωσεν (esōsen, he saved)—aorist tense: accomplished fact. **By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost** (διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαίνωσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου, dia loutrou palingenesias kai anakainōseōs pneumatos hagiou)—λουτρόν (loutron, washing/bath), παλιγγενεσία (palingenesia, rebirth/regeneration), ἀνακαίνωσις (anakainōsis, renewal). Baptismal imagery depicts spiritual reality: cleansing, new birth, Spirit's work.

Historical Context

This verse is Reformation bedrock: sola gratia, sola fide. Against medieval works-righteousness, Luther and Calvin recovered Paul's insistence on grace alone. The regenerating washing references baptism as sign (not cause) of spiritual cleansing. The Spirit's renewing work makes salvation effectual, not sacramental mechanics.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Do you functionally trust your works for salvation, or do you rest entirely on God's mercy and the Spirit's work?
2. How does regeneration (being made new by the Spirit) versus mere moral reformation describe your conversion experience?
3. In what ways do you still try to add your works to Christ's finished work as co-basis of justification?

Interlinear Text

οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ὡν ἐποιήσαμεν
Not by works of righteousness which have done
G3756 G1537 G2041 G3588 G1722 G1343 G3739 G4160

ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν αὐτοῦ ἔλεον ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς
we but according to mercy he saved us
G2249 G235 G2596 G3588 G846 G1656 G4982 G2248

διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαίνωσεως πνεύματος
by the washing of regeneration and renewing Ghost
G1223 G3067 G3824 G2532 G342 G4151

ἀγίου
of the Holy
G40

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 1:9 (Salvation): Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

1 Corinthians 6:11 (Righteousness): And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Peter 3:21 (Salvation): The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

1 Peter 1:3 (Grace): Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Romans 12:2 (Parallel theme): And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Ephesians 2:4 (Grace): But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

Ephesians 5:26 (Parallel theme): That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

Psalms 51:10 (Spirit): Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Romans 11:6 (Grace): And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Hebrews 4:16 (Grace): Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.