

Good News and Good Works

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Date: 23 February 2025

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Thank you. I was going to try again. Excellent.

Well, let me greet you from a few groups of people. First, let me greet you on behalf of the pastors of Covenant Fellowship Church. That's the church where I get to serve. I've been there since 2006.

And we have a number of guys who regularly ask me there how Trinity Cambridge is doing. And so they've asked me to extend their love to you.

I also have the privilege, as Sean said, to represent the Northeast. So let me greet you on behalf of the pastors and the members in the Northeast region. I will tell you this. Our region is all but this church.

It's very, very geographically close. And so whenever I'm meeting with the other guys, they're always asking, how's Sean doing? How's Trinity doing? We carry you on our hearts.

[0 : 59] I would love for you to get to meet a good number of the guys from our region. Hopefully you have and will over the course of the years. We are going to be spending this morning in Titus 3.

So if you brought your Bible, you can turn there. We will get there eventually. There's some business we have to do up front, though. Let me share just a couple things. This message was birthed out of a burden that in an increasingly divisive culture, where compromise and compassion seems to have evaporated, and opinions and positions are further and further polarized, that the church would fight that trend, that the church would seek not to represent one pole or the other, but to represent Christ in all we say and do and how we do it.

And thankfully, I didn't have to make Titus 3 say any of that. Titus 3 does that for us. It organically is holding out for you how to live a gospel-driven life, what it should look like, at least in the elements that it hits.

Okay, so let me give you some background. Titus was a young pastor. He was trained up by the apostle Paul. And this letter is written to him as he takes over the church in Crete.

He's providing instructions and encouragement to Titus on how to lead the church, how to teach the church, and even areas he needs to correct the church.

[2 : 39] And we could jump into any one of those areas and really benefit from studying what he says about church leadership and what he says about correcting quarrels, roles of men and women, both young and old, and the area of Christian conduct, which we'll spend a little bit more time focusing on today.

But throughout all of those topics, there's one overarching message, burden, that Paul is holding out for Titus to hold out to the church.

And it's this. We should live godly lives because of the gospel. So the gospel, of course, it's the gospel that saves us.

But it doesn't just save us. It transforms us. It transforms how we think, how we feel, how we speak, and how we act.

You're going to see throughout this message, I was, I don't know if this was intentional or not, Sean, but throughout the service, there are various scriptures that we read out loud or were read to us that overlap with this very theme.

[3 : 46] So anytime you come to a service and you see, okay, the preacher seems to be saying what we just said in worship, that's not redundant. That is God-ordained repetition so that we hear it more than once and we learn and are changed by it.

And I come here to the first one of those. Right here, this call to be governed by the gospel in our life is reflected in Ephesians 2. For by grace you've been saved through faith.

Our salvation, friends, is not a result of works.

That's very clear in this passage. We are not saved by good works, by what we do. However, we are saved for good works.

So they don't make us Christians. They reflect that we are. We are created to live out the gospel in all we say and do.

[5 : 12] These good works we're called to are found in how we obey God's word. How we treat one another. How we cherish what God cherishes.

How we manifest the gospel through good deeds like service, giving, evangelism. And it's very important in the Christian life and particularly for the rest of this message.

It's very important that we strike the fine but important theological balance for the relationship between faith and good works. Because various Christians can fall a bit too far on either side of that.

Some may believe that your standing before God is based on the type of day you've had. Or how you've done this week. Where good works actually influence our standing before God.

And that's simply not true. It is the completed work of Jesus Christ that determines our standing before God. Okay, so we don't want to go so far as to say good works determine our relationship with God.

[6 : 12] But we don't want to react to that and jump all the way to the other side and say, Okay, in reform doctrine, good works don't matter. God saves. We're secured by the gospel.

Therefore, good works don't matter. We need to come to this theological fine line where we realize that good works don't save us.

But they are a trademark of the saved. They are an imprint on our lives to demonstrate, not to make us children of God, but to demonstrate that we are.

And just so you're aware, I'm not trying to shoehorn this idea into this letter to Titus. He says, Paul says to Titus in chapter 1 verse 16 about the people in Crete, They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.

So let's break that down. They're saying the right things. Maybe they're singing the right things. They're participating in the public reading of Confession in Scripture here on Sunday morning.

[7 : 24] But when you look at their lives, their lives deny their profession. And the vast majority of this letter is written to adjust and correct that problem.

So that our lives would be consistent with our profession. And let me ask you, do you have room in your reformed theology for this? The reformers had room for this.

The call to obedience was rampant throughout their preaching and their writing. So I hope you do, particularly since that's how we're going to spend the next 30 minutes or so.

To sum it up, God alone saves. The evidence of God's salvation is seen in our lives, is seen in how we act and speak, in our good works.

We can say the right things, but it's the good works that reveal what we believe. And I want to come to Titus 3 now and break it just into two points.

[8 : 30] The first one is the power for godly living. Before we read God's word at this point, would you pray with me? Father, as we come now to Titus 3, we thank you for the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

We thank you for Titus. And we thank you for all of the hands that preserved your word from its initial writing to now. Lord, ultimately, we thank you for preserving your word for our reading and our benefit.

Holy Spirit, now would you act through the preaching of your word to apply it to our lives, to give us the sweet conviction that comes through illumination, and to help us rest in and trust you more.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let's jump into verse 4. We will come back later and pick up verses 1 through 3. So Titus 3, verse 4.

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 that being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

[10 : 01] 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. So Paul lays out this gospel foundation. In the midst of all of this call to gospel living and to good works, he lays out this gospel foundation because he doesn't want Timothy or the Cretans to be confused on the role between the two.

Look at the verbs in what I just read. If you've been out of school a while, those are the action words. Look at the verbs. God is the one doing all the action.

We are the one being acted upon. God appeared to us. We didn't discover Him. He appeared to us. He saved us. We didn't somehow crack the code on salvation.

He actively saved us. It wasn't because of good we had done. It's not like, oh, that person's doing great. Let me save them. It was because of His mercy.

[11 : 15] He washed us with regeneration. He renewed us with the Holy Spirit, pouring richly on us through Jesus Christ.

Justification is not due to our own merit or our own works. It is simply by His grace. And because His grace is poured richly on us, we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We are recipients of salvation, objects of salvation, not participants in salvation. And this is demonstrated throughout the Bible as salvation belonging to God.

It's captured beautifully in Revelation 7. Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. It doesn't belong to us.

God owns it, and He gives us the gift of salvation, does the work of regeneration, and we are just humble, unworthy recipients, which is why our response to our salvation internally ought to be gratitude through and through.

[12 : 30] We don't somehow say finally or congratulate ourselves. We just bow our heads, raise our hands, and worship.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus bore our sins, saving us and washing us with regeneration so that we are born again.

As a result, we become children of God, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, heirs of eternal life. Jesus Christ and nothing else, Jesus Christ and no one else, saves us.

The classic hymn captures this, nothing can for sin atone. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Jesus, not of good that I have done, putting our works in their place.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. And then that chorus, oh precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

[13 : 43] I'm underscoring this. This is probably review for many of you. We don't ever want to tire of hearing this. But we don't ever want to tire of anchoring ourselves in this when we're going to talk about implications of this.

Let me just underscore the importance of this for the believer. If we're going to talk about obedience, or we're going to talk about self-discipline, or we're going to talk about sexual purity, or we're going to talk about marriage or parenting, or whatever it is, evangelism, if we don't ground the conversation first in this truth, this gospel truth, the Christian life ends up becoming a list of to-dos, not a list of outflows from the gospel.

And so Paul grounds Timothy in this, sorry, not Timothy, Titus, in this. He then calls Timothy, nope, not Timothy, Titus. He then calls Titus to ground the church in this.

And you may be here as a guest. You may be here for the second or third week, and maybe this is the first time that you've heard this. That Jesus alone can save.

That it's not half Jesus and half you, but Jesus alone can save. And so if you're hearing this for the first time today, let me tell you, this is not something I've innovated.

[15 : 12] This has been the gospel of Jesus Christ for 2,000 years. And each time it's declared, each time it's preached, is an invitation from God to respond to it today, to entrust yourself to it today, to place your faith in the only one who saves today.

Today is the day of salvation. If you've come with somebody, talk to them after the service about this. If you've not, or you'd prefer, you could talk to me or to Sean about this after the service.

Don't leave this place today without taking action toward God and entrusting yourself, your soul, and your eternity to the capable and perfect hands of Jesus.

Now to the rest of the church for whom this has been reviewed, let me ask you, does the gospel still shock you?

Are you still overwhelmed at the immeasurable grace that comes to you through the gospel of Jesus Christ? Does it still elicit gratitude and worship and joy?

[16 : 26] It's not difficult, though it is glorious, to come together and sing when we're led by wonderful musicians, but it's not difficult to sing praises then. With your life in your heart, in the privacy of your own home, do you worship God just out of blown away gratitude that you are saved, that you are born again, that you have a security in heaven because of the work of Jesus Christ?

I hope your answer to all of those questions is yes, yes, and yes. But if not, if you find yourself not stirred regularly in gratitude, or you're not regularly just worshiping God for the goodness of the gospel, or you've assumed the gospel because it's just so familiar to you that you don't reflect on it when you're taking action in your Christian life.

If any of those places are found wanting, let me just encourage you in that very place today, before you lay your head down tonight, do business with God, ask for his help, read the scriptures, confess any sin that's getting in the way of that type of response, glorious, grateful, awe-inspired response to the gospel so that our Christian lives are fueled by a grounding in and appreciation for the gospel.

In Titus 3, this is of particular importance because it's this gospel that Paul holds out that empowers godly living. He's not just reminding them that they're saved, you know, put a period at the end of that, turn the page, now let's talk about how you behave.

No, it is the very reason and the very power for their change. It's the power for godly living. One verse before what we read, in verse three, it says, for we ourselves were once foolish, dishonest, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another.

[18 : 35] Wow, what a list. What happened? That they were once that way but are that way no longer. What happened? Well, what happened is the gospel. What happened is the gospel changed them.

The gospel changed how they view other people, how they view wisdom, how they view the word of God, how they view the purpose of their lives. We reflected this in the reading that we don't belong to ourselves any longer.

First Corinthians six says, you are not your own for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Now that passage is taken, that verse is taken from a passage talking about purity, talking about sexual purity. That's only one application of this gospel. We are bought at a price.

We don't belong to ourselves. So treat your body as though it belongs to God and not to you. Salvation by grace has rescued you.

[19 : 37] Now we're called to live like we're rescued. That's where the power comes from. That's where the liberty comes from. And God doesn't just save us and then say, hey, listen, here's how you're supposed to behave.

Good luck. He gives us his Holy Spirit. Right there in the verse. It's poured out on us richly.

He is poured out on us richly. So if your reflections on the gospel are merely quick and passing thoughts, friend, you are going to be powerless to change in the area of greatest temptation in your life.

Let me just spare you a lot of heartache and failure. Don't go to war with your sin apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ. You will change for a time.

You will see spurts of victory followed by seasons of failure, followed by great discouragement and then conviction and then spurts of victory and then seasons of failure.

[20 : 47] And this cycle will go on and on in areas where you're seeking to change the most. ground yourself here. Ground yourself in the power of the gospel, walking in the power of the Holy Spirit who fills us and empowers us.

First John promises us that he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. So don't go after your worldliness without him. Go after it in the power of Christ.

Our success in godly living is going to be proportionate with our appreciation of and gratitude for this gospel. Milton Vincent says, the more I embrace and experience the gospel, the more I delight in the worship of God, the more I express, the more expressive my joy in him becomes and the more I yearn to glorify him in all I say and do.

Where does the power for all that come from? Back at the beginning, the more I embrace and experience the gospel. gospel-driven living leads to God-honoring living.

The Christian life is not marked by guilt-driven living. There's no power in that. It's not marked by status-driven living. Let me just make sure I'm holier than the person next to me.

[22 : 21] If my sins just aren't as bad as those others are sharing in small group, I'm doing okay. Well, that's status-driven living and there's no power in that. The Christian life is not compliance-driven living.

It is gospel-driven living. It's not obedience as some albatross on us. It is freedom to obey because we've been liberated and empowered to live differently.

So that's power for gospel living and that's Titus 3, that center section of Titus 3. Now let's go to the next section where we'll go before and after that and we will look at pursuing godly living.

What does it look like to pursue this? Now that you know it's supposed to be grounded here, what does it actually look like? What should you be aiming for? Now before we read the beginning of Titus 3, I want to underscore this is not just a Titus issue.

Throughout the scripture, I'm going to hit four citations just to make the case, but throughout the scripture, there is a regular claim from the gospel on how we live.

[23 : 30] It is relevant and it matters. Ephesians 4 starts, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Colossians 1 says, walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Psalms 1 says, blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.

And then back to the New Testament, Romans 6 says, do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

The implication of being freed from our sin, having our sins paid for, does not mean we've been freed from a master and now we are free to do as we wish.

[24 : 43] The gospel does not set us, in setting us free, it doesn't make us independent. It transfers us from one kingdom to another, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

We are no longer slaves to sin, praise God, but we are slaves to righteousness. So much of the Western mind is looking to move towards self-expression and self-determination and those things are just antithetical to the word of God.

We have been slaves to righteousness, purchased by Christ. We are not our own, we've been bought at a price. That's what's held out for us as we now pursue godly living.

And so we as Christians need to choose every day to believe that the gospel is true. That belief is a pursuit of godly living.

That's the first step. We've got to ground ourselves there. But in our text, Paul gets specific. And he holds out two categories. There's not only two in the Christian life. These happen to be the two that Paul is calling us to.

[25 : 52] The first is the category of humility. Take a look at verses 1 through 3. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another.

All of those commands I'm capturing under this heading of humility. And that's something we cherish, something we pursue, simply because the scriptures call us to it, specifically here in verses 1 through 3.

And our humility is something that we express to all people, to our neighbors, to our coworkers, to our social media friends and followers, those in authority, those under authority, members of our family.

Christ was humble in all directions, Christians, and we're called to be the same. So let me break this down to the very things that Paul addresses here in verses 1 through 3.

[27 : 14] First, our humility should result in submission to authority. And that means authority we agree with and authority we disagree with.

As a broad marker, Christians are called to be a submissive, peaceable people. This should be the case in church, to the authority that God has placed over the church here, in relationships, at work.

This should be the case in how we talk about authority on social media or in our engagement with and our engagement about government and politics.

This should simply mark the Christian's attitude. Now that doesn't mean that we're to follow authority when it's calling us to oppose the word of God.

But it does mean in disputable matters, though you may vehemently disagree, the call here is submission to authority. And we can do this for one primary reason.

[28 : 18] Because we know who holds ultimate authority. We know that in the end, even wrongs being done now, that all things will be made right.

That no wrong will go unaccounted for. No injustice will go unpunished. For the Christian, the injustices have been punished in Christ.

For the unbelieving world, they will be judged on the last day. And there is ultimate justice and ultimate righteousness. We know who holds ultimate authority, which gives us faith in the temporal to submit to the authority that God has placed over us.

next, our humility should result in obedience. The very word implies that there are rules or guidelines or instructions that we are supposed to come under.

And again, this individualism, self-determination, it rubs right against that idol in our culture. So often, we determine right and wrong by whether it agrees with what we already think.

[29 : 27] Do you listen to sermons that way? Are you tempted at all to listen to a sermon like, oh, okay, that preacher was wrong and the only rubric you've measured it by is what you already think instead of by the word of God?

If we measure right and wrong by what we already think, we will forever stay wrong in areas that we have wrong. We won't be changed. We won't be challenged because we'll never receive the information, the truth that God is looking to give us.

It's as though at times our perspective is never permitted to be examined or questioned. And so we need to adopt this pursuit of obedience in our humility that Paul is calling us to.

And then lastly, our humility should result in kindness. kindness. This passage focuses on our treatment of others. It uses words like courtesy, gentleness, avoiding quarreling, and speaking evil of others.

How you treat other people reflects what you believe about the gospel. Harsh treatment of others reflects a spirit of judgment and arrogance, neither of which can exist long at the foot of the cross.

[30 : 49] And so the Christian is called to treat others with gospel-driven humility. It's a mark of mature Christianity.

All right, I promised you two things that Paul addresses here. First was in verses 1 through 3. Let's jump over the section we already read and pick up down in verse 9. This category is the category of unity.

Now the unity that's described here is aimed at the household of God. It's another theme that Paul repeats in many of his letters because disunity is so easy and so prevalent.

But when God's people live in unity, loving one another sacrificially, it speaks loudly of the gospel that they profess. We are told that they will know we are Christians by our love for one another.

So Paul comes back to that over and over and over again. Now I want to be clear. We're not talking about uniformity where we all think the same and act the same and we watch all the same shows and we listen to all the same music and uniformity, if you've ever been in a place that's totally uniform, it's weird.

[32 : 08] Like it's unnatural. You can feel like something's not right in that place. That's not what unity is. Unity actually is a gospel-driven commitment to not allow diversity to divide you.

Unity, a pursuit of unity protects the existence of diversity and allows our many different interests and gifts and backgrounds and experiences, allows them to coexist in a diverse body of Christ who is all pursuing this unity in Christ.

So it doesn't eliminate diversity, unity, but it protects it. We may think differently about public policy or about foreign affairs, but we have Christ in common.

We may think differently about what type of application of the gospel should apply to this or to that, this area of life.

We may think differently on how this doctrine gets applied in our homes or this doctrine gets applied with our kids or this doctrine gets applied in our friendships, but we have Christ in common.

[33 : 26] And what we have in common as Christians is far more important and far greater than that which threatens to divide us. If you believe that, then you are securing unity in the body of Christ.

This is why Paul exhorts Titus, not Timothy, but Titus, in verse 9. He says, avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him. Knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned.

Listen, out in the world there are countless voices that are happy to give you something that is fruitless to fight and quarrel over. They are happy to give you something that will distract you from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whether it's news outlets, social media influencers, I know I've mentioned social media like four or five times. You'd have to talk to me offline. I do think, I keep mentioning it because I do think it is particularly divisive in the body of Christ.

[34 : 57] we can get into that later. This message is not about social media, but I at least want to acknowledge yes, I know I keep mentioning it. It's not all bad. I'm not like anti-social media, but we need wisdom, don't we?

Each of us has a responsibility to build unity in what we say and do, no matter where we say and do it. In personal relationships, that means living at peace with one another, refusing to gossip about people.

Even if you think what you're saying is just in fun, is just well intended, it's harmless, be careful of any area of your life where you say this is just harmless sin.

That's a frightening phrase to come across the lips of a believer in Jesus Christ. We must guard against that. We must also stand ready to forgive, not allowing grudges, judgments, or bitterness to grow.

With many of you, I spent a lot of time yesterday focusing on this very thing. But we also bear the responsibility to build unity in how we use words in public, not just in private discourse.

[36 : 11] Everything you say online is public speech. do you approach your use of that platform in a way that underscores and builds the unity of the Christian church?

When tensions arise, disputes arise, are you eager to get face to face with someone so that the unity doesn't fracture?

You can be, you can have full conversation when you're in person face to face. Are you eager to do that? When there's tensions between you and another believer, is that unsettling in your soul?

Are you driven to go and resolve that to ensure the relationship is solid? Paul is very clear here.

You see how harshly he talks about those who stir up division. He calls them warped and self-condemned. that's harsh. That's kind of, it harkens back to Matthew 23 with the brood of vipers.

[37 : 17] You know, it's this really categoric type of terminology. Why? Because those who are actively stirring up division are a threat to the unity of the body of Christ.

And it's how we treat one another and how we do life together that gives the loudest visual example of the goodness of the gospel. So those who are stirring division within the body of Christ are working at absolute counter purposes with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says, have warned them in case they're just doing it out of ignorance. Warn them again in case the first time was just proud they didn't receive. Then have nothing to do with them.

So the caution here is what to do about that person who's stirring up division. Let me just bring it back home a little bit more and encourage you don't be that person. Don't be that person who is going to stir up division in the body of Christ.

How do we avoid that? Well we don't just swallow our pride. We don't just forget the concerns we have. We visit the gospel of Jesus and then we move forward in gospel driven power to deal with our concerns and then to release to the Lord and trust to the Lord what we're not able to resolve.

[38 : 40] Let me come to the end here because there are remaining verses in Titus 3. We're called to pursue good works throughout this book particularly here in chapter 3 and then in verses 12 to 15 it seems like Paul's just getting to that perfunctory part of each of his letters verse 2.

Where he's just saying okay I'm signing off say hi to this person tell this person I'll call them tomorrow you know it's those sections at the end. Don't skip over them in your Bible reading because there are going to be not just names that you don't recognize but real nuggets of truth and there is one here take a look at verses 12 to the end.

When I send Artemis and Tychicus to you do your best to come to me at Nicopolis for I've decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenos the lawyer and Apollos on their way.

See that they lack nothing. This is just personal business right? But look at this he comes right back to it in his signing off and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works so as to help cases of urgent need and not be fruitful.

All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be to you all. So he actually interrupts his signing off to say okay I don't know if I've said it enough.

[40 : 04] Let me just say it one more time. Call the people to devote themselves to good works. Call the people to devote themselves to good works. So let me ask you in closing are there areas of your life that are largely untouched by gospel power?

are there patterns of sin that you've just gotten comfortable with? I'll thrive in other areas God will deal with this one in heaven.

Do those around you ever express concerns for areas that you don't think are really a problem? Did you once have a greater passion for godly living than you do now?

If you said yes to any of those let me just encourage you we're called to live godly lives because of the gospel.

So in that particular area let today be the first day that the gospel shines light there that the gospel sheds power there. Pursue humility pursue unity pursue a life worthy of the calling that you've received.

[41 : 21] And be sure not to detach that pursuit from the gospel of Jesus Christ but do it in the power of Christ. Let me pray. Father thank you for your word and thank you Lord that there are portions of this word that are just exalting that we can just relish in the portions that talk about your nature and your goodness.

And Lord let us remember all of those let us ground ourselves in all of those as we come to a passage like this that calls us now to something. Lord give us your spirit that we would never disconnect the two but that we can relish serving you with each word we speak and each action we take because of what you've done in and for us.

we ask in Jesus name Amen.