

# Opposition to the Gospel

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Preacher: Chris Thornton

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, my name is Chris. If you don't know me, I'm on the pastoral staff here. You're very, very welcome this morning. And it's interesting, just even as we're thinking about election and thinking about the city, because this book of Titus that we're going through as a series that Graham started us last week, and I'm just going to raise this a little bit, is a story, a letter that is written in a city which is going through turmoil in much the same way as in Hong Kong.

Our city is often feeling like it's in turmoil as well. You see, this letter that we're looking at is a letter which is all about how to be a healthy church in an unhealthy world.

That's why we're looking at the letter. We're looking, how do you be healthy? How do you be godly? How do you live as Christ wants us to live in a world which is anything but?

And the context of this book is just, I don't know if you know where Crete is. Crete is a beautiful island in the Mediterranean. It's a Greek island, and there are no dangerous animals on this island. It is a fantastic paradise of an island. But Paul, in the letter, he quotes a Greek historian who says, Cretans are always liars, beasts, and lazy gluttons.

[ 1 : 36 ] Now, that's not very pleasant. But he's not being racist here. He's being ironic. What he's saying is, the most dangerous animals on the island are people. Because we know from history, and other historians tell us, that the people were obsessed with money.

Here's what one guy says. He says, Money is so highly valued among them that its possession is not only thought to be necessary, but in the highest degree, creditable.

And in fact, greed and avarice are so native to the soil in Crete that they are the only people in the world among whom no stigma attaches to any sort of gain whatever.

This is a guy who's writing near the time of Jesus. And to get money, they'll lie. They'll stab you in the back. It's a dog-eat-dog world. There's political division. You can't trust anybody.

There's corruption. And to capital, many of the towns, their leaders are filled with pirates. Now, I don't know if you can imagine, but what about having your boss being Jack Sparrow?

[ 2 : 46 ] Because that's the kind of place... Now, maybe you feel that's what your boss is just like. But that's the kind of place that Crete was. And so Paul's chief aim in this book is to say, How do you live in a godly way?

And he starts off in verse 1, which we looked at last week. He says, I'm here on a mission. I'm writing this letter because there is a truth which leads to godliness in an ungodly world.

And, you know, how do you get to this godliness? Well, if you look in the verses here and have your bulletin here, there's a whole list of things which Paul says that elders should be godly about.

And, you know, the list is kind of, ooh, okay. And not arrogant, quick-tampered, drunkard, violent, greedy for gain. But you must be hospitable, lover of God, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. And you think, how on earth do I get the fruit of godliness like that in my life?

Because the elders were meant to model what everybody in the church was to be like. And the thing is, Paul is saying, the fruit of godliness in your life always comes from the seed that you plant in your life.

[ 4 : 01 ] You know, if you plant a tomato seed, you get a tomato plant. If you plant a durian seed, you get trouble. But if you plant the gospel and you water it in your life, you get godliness.

And you live a life that displays the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control.

And so, I want to look a little bit about how do you live in a godly way today? How does your faith, is your faith, if I looked at it, does it produce that kind of fruit?

So, there are a couple of types of people. And just recapping a little bit of what Graham said here, there's two kinds of people that are contrasted here. Two kinds of teachers.

There are the elders who, in this city, they're to hold firm to a trustworthy word. And there are some false teachers who are coming in and teaching something else.

[ 5 : 08 ] That's in verse 10 to 16. So, let's think about this in two ways. One is, what is the seed, the transforming power to live in a godly way?

And secondly, it will be, what is the seed that can destroy godliness in your life? Okay? Seed which brings godliness, a seed which destroys godliness.

Okay? So, let's dive in to the passage. Have it open with you. 5 verse 9. The elders are chosen to protect the church and their choice is not based primarily on how gifted they are, but it's based primarily on two things, their character and their doctrine.

Okay? Their character and their doctrine. And it's both the public and private life of the elders is meant to be that of a lover. Some of the characteristics.

Hospitable. That means somebody who loves strangers. They're to be a lover of good. They're to be self-controlled, upright, wholly disciplined. They're to have an integrity. Not perfection, but an integrity that shows and displays a love for God.

[ 6 : 20 ] And it comes from holding firm to the trustworthy word. Elsewhere, it calls that the doctrine of God as Savior.

The grace of God that brings salvation. So, in other words, the elders' job, it says, verse 9, is to instruct or to encourage people in this sound gospel doctrine so that the church also becomes lovers, and they are also to bear the fruit of godliness in their lives so it overflows into the church and into the world.

That's God's mission strategy, by the way. Your life is God's mission strategy for attracting people to see how good the gospel is. Okay? So, how does this happen?

How does the gospel produce godliness? I want to tell you two things that the gospel does. The gospel changes what you love, and it changes what you hate.

Changes what you love, changes what you hate. The elder is a lover, a lover of good, who knows that the ultimate love of God is in the gospel.

[ 7 : 36 ] So, 1 John 4 says, We love, we love because He first loved us. In other words, all love for God only ever comes out of a response to seeing His love for you first.

Do you get that? You've got to see His love for you first before you can respond in love for Him. And the gospel tells you that by saying, You can only see His love if you realize two things.

One, you're far worse than you dare imagine you could be. You're far worse than you are. If you think you're okay, you haven't understood the gospel. You are far worse than you think you are.

Your sin deserves this, but you're far more loved, secondly, than you could possibly imagine you are.

You're worse than you think you could be. You're more loved than you could imagine and ever dare you could be. And in the cross, when you see the cross, and as Christians we talk about the cross all the time, but we see that there's a God who chases after us even when we're running away from Him.

He loves us to the point that He would die the death you and I deserve. And if you trust in Him, you can be utterly secure, knowing that nothing you've done, no merit you've done, no achievement can ever change the security that you find in His love.

[ 9 : 01 ] You're a child of God. Your past is wiped out. The shame, the guilt is gone. Your future is secure. You're held in His arms. There's no need to fear, no need to worry, no need to live in guilt.

He holds you. Like a mother with a newborn child, whatever you're going through, He holds you.

That's the gospel. But if, I don't know, like you or me, I've been in church a long time.

I've heard that. I know that. And every day, I forget that. Every day, I forget, because stuff happens. Stuff happened this morning. Stuff happened this week.

You know, I make poor choices. I get frustrated. The life kind of overtakes me. And I forget that God loves me. I forget that there is this amazing gospel.

And I just kind of get back into me. That's where it goes. And John says in his book, Following On, he says, I want you to realize that when you run back to God and you see again, in the midst of your craziness, you get a glimpse and you see His love for you, His preciousness of your life.

[ 10 : 14 ] Do you know what happens? It changes you to want to obey Him. Because love always expresses itself in obedience. And the reason I don't obey is because I don't get His love.

And my heart hasn't been changed by His love. And the thing is, if you don't see the depth of your need of God, if you don't see, if you're kind of so wrapped up in the world and what's going on in your life, and you don't see regularly, day by day, this gospel message of the love and the grace and the mercy, you're worse than you could believe, but you're more loved than you could imagine, if you don't see that day by day by day, what happens is, we begin to go astray.

And when you begin to see, well, maybe I don't really need God that much. Maybe you're going to be like the French philosopher Voltaire who said, of course God forgives.

It's His job. And you don't see how costly God's love for you is. And if you don't see how costly His love for you is, then you'll never get a lifestyle of radical love that is called to be a shining light in the world around.

I don't know if you've, have you ever seen somebody who was addicted to their job and then they fall in love. You ever seen that? You see, I think it's very funny because you see this guy or this girl and they're just hardworking, they work late, you can't get them to go out, they've always got to finish work, and then one day, something happens.

[11:49] Everything changes. Suddenly, they're trying to sneak out of work early. Suddenly, they are kind of sneaking out of the office to take kind of private phone calls in hushed tones.

Suddenly, you know, before they were kind of miserable, so and so, but then there's this kind of little cheeky grin which comes on their face and they're kind of nice to everybody. It's amazing. Do you know what I mean?

And you're thinking, what do they have for breakfast? But you know, you know what's going on, right? You know what's going on because their love for their job has been replaced by a greater love.

And when they begin to have this greater love, their behavior changes, right? And that's the way the gospel is meant to work in your life because we love ourselves, we love our comfort, we love our ambition, we love all this stuff, and that's where sin, the selfishness is.

But when you experience the love of God in the cross, through His care, through His working in your life, when you experience it, not just know it here, when it actually hits you down here, you know what it does?

[13:03] It changes you. It cannot but change you. And it changes what you love. It changes how you spend your time. It changes the people around you you want to serve and love.

And the gospel gets displayed not just in the kind of cheeky grin, but in the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, all the other stuff. That's what happens.

And the more that you see the sin in your life, the more you repent, the more you realize how amazing God's love for you is, the more it begins to change you.

You don't become perfect, but you begin to bear that fruit because you have that seed in your life. So let me ask you, are you increasingly seeing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control in your life?

Are you seeing evidence of that regularly? Not perfection? Because if you're not, then the chances are that the gospel might be here, but it's not here.

[14:19] That you haven't understood just how amazing his love for you is. Richard Sibbes, who was an English pastor 500 years ago, he says, if Christ has once possessed the affections, that means the love, what you're passionate about.

If Christ has possessed your affections, there's no dispossessing of him again. A fire in the heart overcomes all fires without. So do you have that fire in your heart which is kindled by his love? Because if not, then we need to pray and repent and say, God, I want you to rekindle my cold heart and make me that bearer of fruit who loves you from the heart.

That's the first thing the gospel does. The second thing the gospel does, it changes what you hate. There's some strong language in this text. It says things like detestable, disobedient, and when God's people see God's goodness, their desires change from loving what was wrong to hating it. You begin to hate it. You see, when you love your child, you hate what causes them pain. You hate what causes them sorrow. And when you love God, you hate what causes him pain.

[15:49] And you increasingly hate sin. You don't want to get close to it. You're not kind of like creeping up to it just to see how far can I go before it bites me. You know, if I was to put a cobra in your bed and ask you to lie down next to it, would you be saying, oh, I wonder how close I can get before it bites me?

I don't think you would. I think you'd be saying, don't let that thing near me. Get it out of here. Even if you put it in the cage, I don't want it in the room. Defang it, just throw it out. I don't want it there. Right? Because you don't, you hate something which you know is dangerous and something you know is going to kill and destroy.

But that's often how we deal with sin. We say, let me just, you know, I'll just get next to it, but I won't touch it. I'll smoke, but I won't inhale. Right? You know?

But people who love God have the same reaction as you would have to having a cobra in your bed towards sin. The more God changes what you love, He changes what you hate, sin becomes less appealing, good becomes more lovely.

[ 17 : 07 ] That's what the gospel does in you. So that's what God is wanting to happen in these elders as they're teaching and living out this gospel that's to flow into the church.

But there's a problem here. And the problem in this church in Crete is there's another seed that's being sown. There are insiders in the church here who are planting a seed which if it's left unchecked would be worse than a durian farm.

This is a seed that destroys love, destroys joy, destroys peace and kindness. And it's a seed that if it's sown in the church becomes so unappealing to the world around.

You know, the reason why many non-Christians do not want to be Christians is not just the gospel message. It's because of the lives of Christians which are being planted in a seed which is not the gospel.

And here's that seed. Do you know what it is? Religion. Self-righteous is performance-based religion. This is the seed which destroys the power for godliness.

[ 18 : 36 ] We're going to look at verses 10 to 16. You see, Paul is like a doctor here who's diagnosing a common condition. You know, I call it the PBR virus, the performance-based religion virus.

And it's got to be, it's like a cancer that's got to be rooted out in your life. Otherwise, it will suck you in and destroy you. Verse 10. Here's how Paul describes people sowing this seed of religion.

There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, especially of the circumcision party. Now, that sounds like the rest of Cretan society. Verse 16.

They profess to know God but deny Him by their works. They're detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Now, I'm thinking as I read that, Paul, that's not very nice.

Can't you be a little bit more peacey, a little bit more tolerant? But this challenges me because actually, the Bible is never tolerant of what will destroy love, joy, peace, patience, and all the rest of it.

[ 19 : 46 ] And, you know, Jesus, as well, uses His strongest language to describe the Pharisees, the religious leaders, who are also infected with this virus.

Now, let me give you a little bit of information about who these people are in the church. Verse 10 says, they're of the circumcision party.

Now, I don't know about you, but putting the word circumcision and party in the same sentence doesn't sound like a good idea to me. But the Cretan church here were Jewish Christians.

And some of them, they came in some teachers who were also Jewish Christians who claimed, okay, you can be saved by faith in Jesus. That's good. But to be a good Christian, you've got to keep this list of rules.

You've got to be circumcised. Don't eat this. Don't eat that. Okay? Keep yourselves ritually pure. Okay? People who break those rules, they're the bad Christians. People who keep the rules, they're the good Christians and they can look down on the bad Christians and kind of condemn them occasionally because that's what good Christians do.

[ 20 : 58 ] And these teachers were bringing division, not peace, division, upsetting whole households, it says in verse 11. And Paul says, it's the job of the elders and Titus to silence them, to stop them sowing these seeds because these are toxic.

They will rip the love and the joy and the peace out of this church. It sounds strong, but actually, it's what a doctor would do if there is a disease where he's riddling a patient.

So I want to share with you four results of this performance-based religion because we might look at this and think, well, that's, okay, I'm not tempted about circumcision personally.

Okay? That's not things which we struggle with. Well, let's have a look at some of these things. The first result of PBR, performance-based religion virus, is it makes you proud or despairing because

PBR appeals to every one of us just like the circumcision party appealed to the Jewish people there because every one of us has performance tendencies.

Right? We live, whoops, okay, I'm not performing. We live in a culture which basically from the time when you're born to the time when you die, you kind of judged on your performance, right?

[ 22 : 30 ] You judged on your grades, you judged on your job appraisal, your pay, your marriage, your kids, you're judged on performance and if you're successful, you're elevated and if you're failure, you're demoted and that's the way it works, right?

Okay? That's the culture we live in. But what we subtly mistake is the need to perform in society with our ultimate identity and worth and value and we kind of, that's where we get in trouble because we define ourselves by our achievements.

We compare ourselves to everyone else just to check that we're okay or not and we never compare with God but just with each other and you know, if we've achieved our targets, we kind of think that, you know, my spiritual condition is pretty good.

You know, if I've read my Bible today, I feel like I'm good, right? and we can become self-sufficient, proud. I kind of, my sense of need of God becomes like my need for ice cream.

It's kind of cool and refreshing but I don't really, I can kind of live without it because when you're operating like this, if you think you're doing okay, you've chicked the Christian boxes, you've come to church, you've given the offering, you think you're okay but then, if you're operating like this, you talk to a friend and they say, do you know what time I get up every morning to read my Bible and then you're like, man, I'm a lazy bum or like, that guy is like, he heard from God three times last week and then he went to, he quit his job, went to help in a soup kitchen and 150 little babies got saved and I just stayed in last night and all week and I just watched Netflix.

[ 24 : 19 ] Right? And you compare yourself. Right? And we either get to the point of saying, okay, so I've got to be a better Christian, okay, let me go and feed some more babies somewhere or we get to the point of, oh, I know I'm going to be a second class Christian.

You feel that kind of despair and whenever you see you're kind of, you're not quite meeting up to the mark, then what happens is it heaps this ton of guilt and condemnation on you and you either try and work harder or you give up and you know what?

I've never met one person in my entire life who feels trapped under guilt and condemnation who's filled with love, joy and peace.

Never met one. They don't exist. Do you know why? Because that's not the seed of the gospel. because performance-based religion never leads to godliness.

It leads to just keeping rules but it doesn't change your heart and some of us here, I know, live under this guilt and you wonder why you haven't got any joy and it's because you've listened and you're believing and you're infected by this virus and the gospel's coming to you and saying it's not on your performance that Christ has died for you and you're accepted.

[ 25 : 43 ] It's only his performance and you need to be free from that but some of us have settled for being mediocre Christians. God's standards are too high so I'll just kind of live down here.

You know, it's too, you look at these lists and you feel, wow, I can't get there. You feel burdened and so you choose to perform in other areas where you think you can be successful like work or family or those other things but you're missing out on joy and purpose and peace and love because you're not running back to the gospel seed.

It makes you proud or despairing. The PBR virus is powerless to change the heart. That's the second thing. You see, the circumcision party, they had their rules to keep everyone pure from the culture around them but the crazy thing is that Paul in verse 15, he says, to the pure, all things are pure.

To those who've been washed by Jesus' blood, they're pure but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure and then he goes on to call them detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

What's he saying? He's saying, these people are advocating keeping all these rules to stay pure but inside they're just as dirty as defiled as anyone else out in the culture. And you know, Jesus says something very similar.

[ 27 : 09 ] He says, woe to you teachers of the law and you Pharisees, you hypocrites because that is what it is. It makes you a hypocrite. You clean the outside of the cup and dish but inside you're full of greed and self-indulgence.

And I think all of us in some way or other have, including myself, I see this hypocrisy in my own heart.

I say what I believe here but in my life there's this gap. You see, if I come to you and I give you a nice watermelon and I, as you look at it I've kind of cleaned the outside and I come to you and I say, hey, would you like a drink of water?

Maybe you're not thirsty. And you say, okay, yeah, yeah, I'll take it and then I say, oh, yeah, just one thing. I produced a urine sample before, just before and I haven't cleaned out the inside.

Would you like a drink? Now, the outside of the cup looks great but would you want to drink anything from the inside of the cup if the inside is dirty and defiled?

[ 28 : 38 ] The thing is, much of our Christian lives we spend polishing the outside so well and we forget about the inside because the thing is, if you clean the inside, the water's going to splash out and it's going to transform the outside anyway.

But we can be so busy in church doing activity after activity, reading our Bibles, serving, doing all these different things and you think you're okay because you think I'm doing all this for God.

But if your heart is not being propelled by God's love for you, God looks at that in the same way that you would react towards a urine sample being in the drink of water.

It's detestable. And I know this for myself because it's so often I come to the point of saying, have I done enough for God?

What must I do for God? Have I reached the standard so that I'm okay? But if God's love is not propelling you, you'll be like a husband who dutifully serves one wife but secretly wishes he was with another.

[ 29 : 56 ] Because what happens is, you know, have you seen a dutiful son? I've seen this. I've seen a dutiful son go and visit his mother in hospital but there's no love.

And you know, there's a coldness. There's just a clinicalness to the way they go about their duty. They've done it. They visited their mother. But there's, the warmth is missing.

The joy is missing. And as a church, a church which is going to live must be a church which is filled with joy.

And joy, not because I've got a whole load of duties that I've got to get through to be a good Christian, to read my Bible, to do all these things because I have to. But because God's love compels me, draws me in a relationship with me.

And I wonder if you are like that with God. I wonder if you are. And don't mishear what I'm saying because it doesn't mean that you have to always feel this overwhelming passion to serve or to give or to do all the things that as Christians we should do.

[ 31 : 17 ] You know, a mother who has to, who loves their child will change their nappy, the diaper, and they're not thinking, wow, this is amazing. But there is a love and a duty which go together.

It is not just we obey out of love for Christ and not out of duty. Duty without love is deadly. But love always involves duty. And if you clean the inside of the cup, you will see that even though it's, sometimes you just don't feel like you want to read your Bible.

Sometimes you just don't feel like you want to serve or you want to give. Or before you do it, you, before you do it, ask God to change it. Do it anyway. But ask God to change your heart in doing it. Don't just stop doing it. Ask Him to change your heart. Ask Him to refuel and refire your love for Him as you do it.

Okay? It makes you proud. The PBR virus makes you proud. It makes you, it's powerless to change your heart. Only the gospel can change your heart. Third thing is, performance-based religion blinds you to your own condition.

[ 32 : 33 ] It says in verse 16, they profess to know God but deny Him by their works. That's a strong statement. They profess to know God. They profess to know God but they deny Him by their works.

You see, performance-based religion stops you seeing your need for God and His grace. And you can see everyone else's need for grace. You can see everyone else's need for change but not your own.

You know, you listen to a sermon and you think, I wish my husband or wife could hear this. Right? And you don't see how it should apply to you.

I was sitting in a, I was sitting in a restaurant the other day and I was listening to two, two women kind of gossiping about their colleagues. And they were saying, oh, they're so judgmental, they're so this, they're so that.

And I was listening to them and thinking, you're so judgmental and you're like this. And then I stopped and thought to myself, do you see, all the time, performance-based religion is one of the things that just gets me every time.

[ 33 : 47 ] And we're just infected by it. And we need the gospel to keep reminding us, to keep reminding us you are more, you're worse than you can imagine you are, but you're more loved than you could dare believe you are.

Let me speak to some of you. It's worse, performance-based religion is worse than if you think you are not a Christian, if you're not a Christian.

If you're not a Christian, you know you're not a Christian. Right? Okay? You know where you stand. But if you're in church, week in, week out, listening to sermons, giving money in the offering, going to community group, and you think you know God because you've done all those things, you're in trouble.

You're in trouble. Because just as sitting in a garage doesn't make you a car, sitting in church doesn't make you a Christian. Because why do you think God would accept you if you say, because I'm not a bad person?

Look at all the things I've done for God. I've got a loving heart. If you say any of those things, you're not a Christian. You're not a Christian. Because God looks on the inside of the cup and He says, that is disgusting.

[ 35 : 08 ] Whoa, that's strong. But Christianity says, though you're worse than you think you are, God, through no merit of your own, through the blood of Christ, has come and He has washed you through His death on the cross.

It is only through His blood. It is only through His grace. It is only through His death for you, not because of how great your performance was, that you can now stand to the pure, all things are pure.

You can stand before God pure in His eyes, beautiful in His sight, valued, loved, holy. And He says, I am pleased with you, not because of your performance.

Your performance sucks, but because of His performance. That's the gospel. That's the gospel. So if you're living on your parents' faith, you're living on any other thing, you need to come and talk with me or talk with a community group leader or otherwise because you need to get right with God today.

So where do we go with this? Where do we go with this? A couple of things. You see there are these two seeds. And the thing is, we need to always, in Hong Kong, it's so easy, I see it all the time, that we go to churches and choose churches because we like the music or we like the programs or we like all kinds of other things.

[ 36 : 56 ] But this passage is telling us you need to evaluate a church, a community, all those other things. You need to evaluate your own life on not just whether something works for you but is the gospel being taught in that church?

Or is, you need to, we're pragmatic here. We want to work out what works for us. But there is, doctrine is important. What you believe is important because it always flows into your life.

And so you've got to, you've got to know how do we evaluate what different people say? Because if you don't, your joy is at stake. Your joy is at stake.

The godliness, that fruit, that mission to the world is at stake. But here's the difference. When you hear this kind of, you see this list of things that we should be as Christians.

You see it for elders. You can see it in all kinds of, how do you stop just kind of falling back in as I do regularly into PBR virus, into this performance-based religion?

[ 38 : 09 ] One of my mentors, a guy called Tim Chester, he wrote this. And he calls performance-based religion legalism. He says, legalism says, you should not do this.

The gospel says, you need not do this. Legalism says, you should not sleep with your boyfriend. You should read your Bible every day. You should not get drunk.

You should witness to your friends. You should not lose your temper. None of these are good news to someone struggling with these issues. To them, it is condemnation and sounds oppressive.

What the gospel says is, you need not get drunk because Jesus offers a better refuge. You need not lose your temper because God is in control of the situation.

Sin is always making promises and the gospel exposes those promises and false promises and points to God who is bigger and better than anything sin offers.

