

Good Works and the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] That's great. Good morning. Oh, that's pretty good. My name's Chris. For those of you who don't know me, if you're here for the first time, oh, there's a, could we maybe get the fan turned off? I think there's a kind of Typhoon 8 going on over here. Thanks. I'm going to be holding on for a little while. My name's Chris. I help out in the pastoral staff here. If it's your first time, you're just really, really welcome. And it's great to be just part of a family in the city where there's a lot of crazy things going on. I was talking with a neighbor in my building just this week, and he asked me this really interesting question. He said, why do I need to be a Christian to be good? He said, you see, I see a lot of Christians. And, you know, they go to church, and they tell me all the things that I shouldn't do, but then I see them at work, and I see them in the office, and, you know, they're as mean as nasty as everybody else. So why should I bother becoming a Christian if I can be perfectly good without God? And that's a pretty good question. You know, that's a pretty good question. And a journalist called G.K. Chesterton, he, when asked to justify believing in Christianity, he said, like, when you think about some Christians have done terrible things in the world, you think about the Crusades and different things, when asked to justify, he said, Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. He said it's been found difficult and left untried. He said, men have not grown tired of Christianity. They've never found enough Christianity to get tired of. What he's saying is there is what Paul is saying in this book of the book of Titus. He's saying the church which was going on in this Titus has lost sight of what true Christianity is. And we need to continually be reminded again and again and again of what true Christianity is, because in the church that this letter is being written to, there was division, there was backbiting, there was a lot of religiosity, but they couldn't see true gospel-centered Christianity. And what we've looked at so far, chapter 1 and chapter 2, Paul has said you need to come back to what the gospel really means, and then you need to have leaders who live it out. You need to have older men and younger men and older women and younger women who are investing in each other, who are modeling what it looks like to live out this gospel message. And today what we're going to look at, he's going to say, how are Christians to live in a society where there is a lot of injustice and hurt and difficulty, but Christians were meant to live counter-culturally reflecting the goodness of God. We're meant to be able to see, people are meant to be able to see something of how good God is in our lives. So we're kind of going to go through the passage in a little bit, but just remember this, when God gives commands, they always follow his declarations. What I mean by that is this, I don't know if you remember English grammar, but indicatives always come before imperatives. I'm an English teacher, so an indicative is, here we go, you didn't expect to get an English lesson, okay? An indicative is saying, this is who you are, this is who you are, okay? You are a Christian, God has saved you. An imperative is saying, what you have to do, now live like it. So Paul is saying, he's not, he never just tells you, this is what you've got to do. He always tells you first what God has done, and that's when you, what you do flows out of what he has already done for you, okay? And so we've looked in the last week about how God's grace has appeared through Jesus Christ. He saved us from the slave market into a relationship with himself. We are a new community. So what we're going to look at is really how we be this new community. First of all, how we love in a hate-filled world. Why we divide and hate, and then the power to change, the power to be different, okay? So that's where we're going. There's three things. Loving in a hate-filled world, why we hate and divide, and the power to change, okay? So if you've got your bulletin with you, come and track with me as we go through this.

First off, he says, remind them, okay? Remind them. That means it's not new information. It's a reminder in a harsh world. We've talked about the Cretan world before, how it was dog eat dog. Everyone was fighting against each other. But he says, remind them to be submissive to rulers and

authorities, to be obedient, ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy to all people, okay? So he's starting off talking about our attitude to authorities and rulers, and then he goes on to our attitude to everybody around us. And what does he say to the people who are in authority? He says, be submissive. And that, in Hong Kong culture, and in the political environments that we have going around the world, is a pretty tough call.

Some of us might say, are you calling me to submit to CY Leung? Or to submit to potentially Trump or Clinton? And Paul would say, yeah. Yes. Now, what does that mean? What does that mean? [6 : 15] Because some of us are going to struggle with this. What does it mean to submit? Well, it means you follow the laws of the land. You pay your taxes. You keep the speed limits. No one in Crete, where this lesson was written to, just like Greece kind of today, ever thought of doing any of that, okay?

But Jesus paid his taxes. He says, give to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God what is God's. Why does he say submit? Well, in the culture, everyone was fighting against everyone. No one wanted to submit to anybody. And Paul says in two other places in this book, he says, wives and husbands, there's to be submission. Servants to masters, there's to be submission. All people now to authority's submission. God places authority structures over us to help protect us and for flourishing. That is God's design for people. Romans 13 says, there is no authority except from God, and those which exist have been instituted by God. Now, I struggle with this. You know, the present Hong Kong government has been established and permitted in some way by God. The U.S. president, whoever it will be, has in some way, will in some way be instituted and placed there by God.

Now, that doesn't necessarily mean they are just. It doesn't necessarily mean they are good. But in this context, the authorities Paul is talking about would actually make Hong Kong politicians, U.S. politicians, look like Mother Teresa. Because the Greek historian, Polybius, for what it's worth, wrote, it's impossible to find personal conduct more treacherous or public policy more unjust than in Crete.

Okay? The place where this is written. In Hong Kong, you throw banana skins at political opponents. In Roman times, you assassinated them and you executed their children. Now, why does he say submit to them? Now, I don't fully understand why God places certain leaders in positions. I don't understand it. But maybe sometimes he gives us the leaders we deserve to wake us up to our condition so that we see that our hope is found in God and in nowhere else.

But Paul says, even in this culture of, in Crete, which is so difficult, he says, submit to the laws of the land because in doing so, we obey God who has placed them there.

[9 : 03] But that doesn't mean, okay, passively just accepting whatever the government says without any question. Because the next part says, we must be ready for every good work. That means we're actively looking to engage in the needs of the city. We speak up where we need to. There is a kind of subversive kind of love here that accepts God as a higher authority than any government. Okay, so there's two things going on here. The only time when we don't submit is when authorities call us to violate God's commands.

Okay, in the Bible, prophets like Elijah come to unjust kings like Ahab and they confront him with his sin. Daniel disobeys a decree from Nebuchadnezzar not to pray to God. In Acts, when the disciples are commanded by the authorities to stop preaching about Jesus, they refuse. They say, no, we must obey God, not men. Okay, so when Martin Luther King saw the systemic racism that was going on in the U.S., he disagreed with the authorities, but he never dishonored them. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie Selma.

Have you seen the movie Selma? You know, there's this scene where the authorities have told Luther King, you must not march. You cannot march. But he knows that actually to not march at that stage would affect the cause of the fight against injustice and racism in the city.

So he organizes a whole load of people to go and march and to march over this bridge. And they're going on the bridge and then just as they're there, all the troops are around and they're coming into kind of combat mode. And at that moment, Martin Luther King orders everybody to get down on the ground and to pray, to pray for them. And as they're prayed and all the people, even on his own side, are like gearing up, ready for a fight, ready to kind of get their own back. Do you know what he does? He stands up and he turns around and he walks through his own people and says, we're going to trust God with this. He walks back and all his own side are furious with him. But you know,

that actually scene was what caused the President of the United States to begin to actually allow desegregation and all those other things to come into effect.

Because there is a subversive love, which doesn't just passively sit back, which honors authorities, but doesn't necessarily agree with them, but is so countercultural that whatever side you come on to, it is challenging. Because it's not hatred. I don't know if you, have you seen there's some, even in the States at the moment, there's a lot of anti-police riots. Have you seen some of those demonstrate?

[12 : 09] There's this guy called Ken Wabiki. He's this black guy who goes during the demonstrations and he's there. Everyone else is shouting hatred towards the police and he's there and he's going up and hugging the police officers. Have you seen that? It's on the news. And even his own side are like, how can you do that? But he turned around and said, you know, if you have a cycle of hatred, hatred, the only way to break that cycle of hatred is actually to turn in love.

There is something powerful and it begins to change the culture and the atmosphere. And that is what God calls Christians to do in challenging situations, to treat authorities with honor, but also to love. And frankly, Hong Kong is a divided and fractured society at the moment, right? I mean, you just look at the recent elections. It's the second anniversary of the umbrella revolution. And even in this church, we'll have different opinions. We'll see different sides and that's okay. But you know what I see? I see there's also a lot of hatred and slandering going on. I know people who defriend people on Facebook, Christians who defriend other Christians on Facebook. You know, they won't speak to each other just because they disagree. And what Paul is saying here, and you know, it's not just politics. It's also you go into offices, you go into homes, and there's so much brokenness. There's so much hatred, critical, negative, hate-filled language and division. And what Hong Kong needs is a people like what Crete needed, is a people who are ready to do good, who can disagree with graciousness, who display something of a totally countercultural mentality. How do we do this? Well, Paul goes on to say, and this is tough, speak evil of no one.

Do you know when I'm tempted to speak evil? And that word means to slander, is when people are speaking evil of me, right? Because you want to carry on that cycle. If you disregard me, I will disregard you. But he says, speak evil of no one. Because when we say, ah, she's so lazy. He's such a gossip. He's a loser as a leader. You know, we encourage that cycle of hatred. But here he says, speak evil of no one. Avoid quarreling. Be gentle. That means show consideration and reasonableness, even towards those who are unreasonable. He says, I will give my own personal advantage. I will give away for the sake of others. It says we show courtesy. That means meekness. That means a patient trust in the midst of difficult circumstances. Whatever you're going through. He says, patiently bear wrong done to us, but be quick to alleviate the wrong done to others. That's what that word courtesy means. And do you know what he says? He says to all people, all people, not just those that you agree with, not just those who treat you nicely, even those people who backbite, who gossip about you.

Not just the authorities, but in every single part of life. The call is for us as a church to be a counter-cultural, loving, gentle community. But that's, and I think deep down we want that, right? Don't we? We want to be in a society like that. But let's think about it. That's what we're called to be. But man, that is tough. That is hard. Why? Secondly, why do we struggle so much with that? Because I personally struggle. Verse three. 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. That's not a very nice description, really. But Paul says, all of us, all of us were foolish.

[16 : 29] That means ignorant towards God. We were slaves to various passions and pleasures. What he's talking about is we have placed our hopes in something other than God and it enslaves us. Because you see, when disagreement turns to hatred, when disappointment turns to bitterness, when admiration turns to envy, it's a clear sign that you're idolizing something. That means you're putting something in the place of God. You're putting your hopes in something. And someone once said, what you idolize, what you put your weight on, inevitably you demonize. What I mean by that is, do you remember there's that glass bridge that's opened in China, right? Have you seen that? That kind of like that crazy bridge. And, you know, there was so much hype when it opened, I can't remember how many weeks ago, and they drove a car across it to prove it was safe. And then, like, about two days later, they had to close it, right? Because there were cracks coming in it, okay? Now, when you place the weight of your hopes and expectations on a government, on a

relationship, on your kids, on anybody else, you're like you're driving your life onto a glass bridge that cannot hold the weight of it.

And sooner or later, it will crack in some way, and you'll see the cracks, and you will end up hating that bridge, whatever that is in your life. You know, we become bitter and angry by those who disappoint us. That's why, you know, so many marriages start out with people so infatuated with each other, but then a while later, the couple end up hating each other because they thought that the other person, they placed all their hopes on them. You place your weight on money, you'll get envious and jealous and hate those who are earning more money than you.

You place it on grades, and you'll envy those whose GPA is higher than you, okay? And you'll always feel like you're behind them. You've got to catch up. If you idolize your family, you can become a control freak, and your kids will hate you, or you hate your spouse for messing up your dream family.

You're not being able to forgive. Because when you put the weight of your life on anything other than God, it always leads to broken relationships and a broken society. That's what Paul is saying. Where do you see that in your life? Where do you see, where are you placing your hopes in your life? You see, the Cretans, they come out of a background where everyone's like this. Everyone's like this.

[19 : 07] And if you come out of a home or an office environment where everyone is constantly speaking negatively, or condemns you when you make mistakes, or you're never good enough, we're likely to replicate that in our relationships. But Paul says the only way to get free from that cycle is the good news of the gospel.

And the reason why we often keep speaking evil of other people is because we actually think we're better than other people, right? We think we're better than other people. That's why he says, we ourselves were like this. Listen, guys, if you want to live like different, you've got to realize that you're actually the same as everybody else.

Because the reason I can be so mean to some people is because I get a warped view of myself. It's what we called performance-based religion before. Do you remember us talking about that?

The PBR virus. You know, I think I'm okay. You know, I'm okay. I look around at everybody else, and they're not okay. Right? And so I begin to judge them. And as Christians, we're experts at this. We look around at the world around, and we say, look at those terrible pagan people around us. You know, they're all getting drunk in Lang Kui Fong. Isn't our society so wicked and greedy?

[20 : 21] And all these different things. But I put my money in the offering last week. I'm pretty good. And Paul is saying, don't you see that society around you, the politicians you criticize, the boss you gossip about, is a mirrored image of what you are like without God.

We're all kind of level playing field. And we can't go around saying, look how bad society has become. Because don't expect people who are not Christians to live up to Christian morality and then condemn them for it.

Because we need to say, there but for the grace of God go I. If it's not for God's grace, that would be me. In fact, that often is me, but I just can't see it.

You know, some of us may say, well, I'm not really that bad. You know, there's a guy called Francis Schaeffer. And he said that when you're born, God kind of places this invisible tape recorder around you.

Now, this is the 1960s, so like, I don't know what it would be today, like, your iPhone, invisible iPhone around you to record you. And he said, it records every moral judgment we make of other people.

[21 : 34] Every time we say, you should, you ought to, he's so lazy, all those kind of things, he records it. Just on, off, on, off. That's all it records. Every time it makes a moral judgment.

And day after day, it's recording. And at the end of our lives, we'll appear before God, and many people will say, God, you shouldn't judge me because I didn't know everything that you told me about.

Or I wasn't really that bad. And God will say, okay, I won't hold you to my perfect, just standard, if you think you didn't know.

I'll simply judge you on the basis of how you judged everybody else. And so he'll play the recording, and then you'll hear your own voice condemning you again, and again, and again.

And none of us will be able to say, I was better than somebody else, because none of us passed the test. That's what Paul's saying.

[22 : 37] Not, doesn't sound like good news, but when the world tries to tell us, you know, I'm okay, you're okay, we're all okay, really? Is that, why do we have so much terrorism, and violence, and hatred in the world, if we're all okay?

But what religious people do, we say, I'm okay, everyone else is not okay. Thank God I'm not as selfish as those people are. And Paul is saying, I'm not okay, you're not okay, we're not okay. That's the starting point for change. That's the starting point for a change in society. You know, I was going to, Sying Poon MTR has this lift, where there are two doors, there's an in and an out, an exit, and what I discovered was, when you go, when you're in the lift, and you want to get out, it's actually quicker, not to go out of the exit door, it's quicker to go out of the other door, straight onto the road.

Okay? So, I kind of do this quite regularly. The other day, I was getting in the, I was standing outside, waiting for the lift, waiting to go into the lift, and just as it opened, about 10 people came out of the lift, like this, and I'm standing there, for 15 seconds, thinking, why are you guys so lazy? It's 10 seconds, to go around the other way. Why do you have to come back this way? And then, I realized, that tape recorder was going.

[24 : 12] Right? Because, I was beginning to hate those people, who were coming out, and I'm sure that every time I do the same thing, they think the same.

Right? There's this cycle, that we go through. And you know, just think how many times you do that, with car drivers, cyclists, you know, your boss, your spouse, that recorder was going over time. Right? No love. It's because I think, that I'm better than them. I'm okay, you're not okay. And I've forgotten, that what the gospel does, it diagnoses me, and says, actually, Chris, you're not okay either.

But if we left it there, that would be a little bit depressing. The, the passage goes on. Okay? The passage goes on. We're called to be a people, who are people of love.

The passage goes on to show, actually, we hate because, we are putting our trust in things, other than God, and we're thinking we're okay, apart from, by ourselves. But then the passage goes on, to say this.

[25 : 22] But, but, but, but, but the grace, the goodness, when the goodness and kindness, the loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us.

He saved us. You know, that, that is an amazing but. That's a beautiful but. It's more beautiful than my but. It's, it's, it's a but, which says, in spite of all those other things, God does something.

You know, we, we, we talk a lot about sin here, in, in Watermark, because here's the thing. You will never see the beauty of the stars, until you see them against the night sky.

You will never see the beauty of God's saving grace, until you see the true state of your own heart. If you rush into just talking about how Jesus loves you, and Jesus saves you, and you don't see the other side, you will not capture, your, your heart will just be lukewarm.

You go, yeah, Jesus is okay. He's all right. But you see, when you get just what you're really like, then when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appears, and it's not from anything that I've done, it's not from any way that I'm good.

[26 : 39] On the lovability scale, I'm kind of minus 10,000. That loving kindness comes, and you know, that word loving kindness is the word philanthropy, it's from where you get philanthropist from.

It literally means a love of people. In a world which is filled with hatred, God is brimming over with love for people. Do you know that? He's brimming over abundantly.

He has philanthropy towards us. In 1942, in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, there was a group of Scottish soldiers, and they were building a bridge in the camp for the Japanese, and a shovel went missing.

The Japanese guard became furious, and he demanded the culprit, whoever had done it, to own up, or every person there would be killed. No one responded.

No one admitted. The officer drew his gun, and at that moment, one of those Scottish soldiers stood silently, stepped forward. The officer, in rage, beat him to death.

[27 : 50] Just as his fellow prisoners were carrying him away, they did a recount of all the shovels that were there.

Do you know what they found? Every shovel was there. They had miscounted the first time. When news that that guy had stepped forward and taken the hit for everybody else, when the news of that sacrifice spread through the camp, how do you think the people responded?

Did they go, oh, that was quite cool. Good guy. No, do you know what happened? It transformed the way the prisoners behaved towards each other.

They started to resolve their conflicts. They treated each other as brothers. They began to sacrifice for one another. This really happened. Because of that guy's sacrifice, they saw something beautiful, and it began to break that cycle.

That's what the Christian message is about. That's why we say we need more Christianity, because that's what Jesus does for us. He takes the bullet. He takes the hit for us.

[29 : 09] And in a world of religious and non-religious people, of cruel and unjust authorities, who mocked and hated him. People who actually kind of represent you and me.

He was the only one who had ever perfectly done what Paul commands us to do. He's submitted. He's obedient.

He speaks evil of none of them. He's gentle to them. And he responds with a subversive love, where as everyone is mocking him, he replies and says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they're doing.

You see, if I was to ask you what your recorder has been recording in your life this week, where you've been speaking evil of others, where all that other stuff has been judging, all those things, where I've been saying, I'm not going to forgive others for what they've done to me, we need to revert our gaze and to look up here.

And you know, we know this as Christians, but do you know what? Do you know why Paul says, remind them? Because we just forget again and again. And Jesus said to a prostitute who tearfully ran to him for forgiveness, he who is forgiven much, loves much.

[30 : 36] You know, when we lack love, a lack of love is a lack, indicates a lack of a sense of forgiveness. You know, as time goes on, we think we're actually, hmm, Jesus' sacrifice.

Yeah, it's cool. Maybe we feel we don't really need it. You know, it's good. Maybe because we don't feel we really deserve it or we can't believe it's true. But he says to us, my grace, when the goodness and kindness of my Savior, Jesus Christ, appeared, he saved you, not because of anything that you have done, but only because of his mercy and grace.

You see, once you get that, and do you know what? You're going to have to keep getting it with the people that you're struggling with right now. What we need is this.

If you want to change to be the person God calls you to be, you don't just need more education.

Okay? You can read book after book on dieting, but it doesn't give you the power to diet.

As Christians, we need a power to change us, and that's my third thing. We're called to be this kind of people. We're not like that because we're leaning on so many other things.

[31 : 55] We're trusting in ourselves. We think we're okay. But God's power to save us and change us comes here. Next verse.

That word for regeneration is only found in one other place in the Bible, which is in Matthew 19.

And when Jesus says, in the new world, that's the same word, in the regeneration. Regeneration is God renewing the whole world.

A world filled with hatred and pain and sadness and injustice. He's going to renew it all. Not like you renew a library book. He's going to renew it in the sense of, you know, the cold, harsh winter of Narnia becoming thawing and becoming a glorious spring, joy-filled land.

He's going to, he renovates your stained, moldy, disheveled heart to become a heart of love. This is the gospel promise. That he is bringing you into, you know, God creates the whole world in Genesis chapter 1.

[33 : 13] Do you know he does another creation? And that's the creation he's doing in your heart. When if you become a Christian, he makes you a new creation. He's renewing you. He's making you different.

You are the beginning of the new world I am making. That's what he says to us as a church. His spirit is in you. If you're not a Christian, the Bible says you need a heart transplant.

You need a new birth, a new operating system. And it only comes as you recognize the darkness of your heart. But as Christians, we can underestimate what the new birth means.

You know, cowards like Peter have power to be courageous. Haters like Paul have power to be lovers. Whatever you're struggling with right now and you're thinking, I'm not sure if I can really change.

I'm not sure if I can really get through this. Then Paul says to you, you have a living, breathing God who lives inside of you by his Holy Spirit who's poured out on you richly and he is the power you need to be able to live the life that you cannot live otherwise.

[34 : 26] Why do I struggle with my own desires? I mean, you might think, that sounds great but in my life I struggle. We still live in a fallen world.

We still live in a difficult, broken world. We're not all we should be. But between Jesus' first coming and his second coming he says, I've given you power to change.

The power of my spirit. So who are you relying on at the moment as you're thinking about that tape recorder and where you struggle?

You may think it's legitimate the hatred or the words that you're spaying to your kids, your spouse, your boss, all those other things and it may well be legitimate.

But legitimacy is only relevant if you're part of this world and not part of a new creation. You see, the power is like this. I was moving furniture the other week and I had a desk.

[35 : 27] It was a very heavy desk. I was kind of carrying along and I was struggling and I had to lift it up into the truck and I was standing there and I just wasn't getting anywhere. I mean, I'm Mr. Muscles as it is.

But, you know, and I was trying to lift it up and I looked over to the truck driver and kind of said, like, help. And do you know what he did? He pressed his little button on the side and this platform went and I just walked in.

I was like, that's cool. Now, God says, when you are struggling by yourself, trying to change yourself, trying to make it all happen, trying to love the people who you just detest, good luck.

But you can either rely on yourself or you can turn to the one who has given you the power to be changed and you can say, I need you. God, I need you.

My boss is an idiot. I can't stand him but I need you to help me to love him not speak evil of him.

The government, my spouse, my kids, I don't know what it is. I need you.

[36 : 40] You can try and carry that load. You can try and say, well, it doesn't matter. I'm just going to live my own way. But God calls us, if you're a Christian, to be different and he empowers you to be different. And the reason why we so often live with so much less Christianity is we've made it all about ourselves.

We've made it all about relying on my things. We try to put our hopes in anything other than God. And God says, I've given my spirit to you. It is the power you need to change.

It is the glorious way that as a community, if we run to him day in, day out, do you know what you'll see? You'll begin to see lives which are different from the world around.

you'll begin to see a people, when other people treat us badly, we supernaturally have a grace to be able to respond with kindness and gentleness and love because we know, we know better than them.

But I have been saved by an amazing God and his love is what sustains me. He is good. Let me pray. I'd like you just to think for a moment about what's been playing on your tape recorder this week.

[38 : 13] Who are the people that you struggle with? What are the times where you're just so tempted to see everything that's wrong with everybody else?

And I want you just to come and think about the cross for a minute. And I want to see you there. See yourself there.

And I want you to see Christ. And I want you to see that when he says Father forgive them he says that to you.

He says that to me. And Father we just we need your spirit.

If we're to be the church you call us to be if we're to be the husbands and the wives and the parents and the students and the citizens and the people who are doing good in this city but do good when we see injustice and when people treat us badly we don't we don't kind of continue that cycle of hatred and revenge Lord that is so hard.

[39 : 40] In fact it is impossible if it wasn't for you. And so I pray that you give us your Holy Spirit's power fill us this week to be different change us make us new let us see you.

Amen. Day ■ alley blood