

The Gospel Life

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Preacher: James Forsyth

[0 : 00] We're going to gather tonight in the book of Titus, Titus chapter 3, if you want to pull out a pew Bible and turn there with me. I'm going to read the first eight verses of this chapter.

It's one of Paul's letters, writing to Titus on the island of Crete. Throughout the course of this weekend in our church planting conference, we've been thinking about how the gospel begins to shape the kind of mission we should do, how the gospel begins to shape the kind of lives that we concretely live.

That the gospel isn't just something that has saved us for eternity, and now we're kind of sitting around with a bus ticket for heaven just waiting for that day. But rather, the gospel is so full, so complete, that his love actually recommissions us to be useful for God today.

And this is one of those passages that helps us understand that connection, the connection between the gospel that we believe and the lives that we actually live. So let's look at it together, starting in verse 1 of Titus chapter 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.

[1 : 15] 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.

But when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

Not because of the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. And we poured out in 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.

This 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.

Friends, this is God's Word. So as we come to reflect on it together, let's go to him in prayer. Father, once again, we ask that you would meet with us by the power of your Spirit.

[2 : 23] For we know that your Word is perfect, and it always speaks clearly, and yet our minds and our hearts are slow and are dull, and so we don't always hear clearly. So I pray that you would come in these moments and do something in us.

Do that thing that you know that we need. Some of us need challenged. Some of us need encouraged. You know, Father, what it is we need tonight. So come in the power of your Spirit and speak that word of grace, that we might understand more of your love and its implications for our lives.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Okay, two things that I love to do. First is exercise, and the second is eat.

Now, these two things are not always complementary, so you need to try and keep them in balance. And then one day I found the perfect balance when I found myself eating donuts while on a run.

Anyone else ever find themselves doing something similar? Well, by the time of our time together, I'm hoping to persuade you that it's a good idea. Okay? So to get to that, let's dive into our text. I want to look at this text where Paul is going to call us to embrace the gospel life, to understand that connection between the gospel we believe and the lives we actually live.

[3 : 36] He's going to call us to embrace a gospel life of joyful obedience. Context starts in verse 1, if you want to look down with me, where Paul gives us this command.

He says, remind them. He's talking, of course, to the first Christians there in Crete, but by extension, God is also speaking to us this evening and says, remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work.

Be ready for every good work, Paul says. Now, this command is a deliberate contrast with some corrupt leaders that were introduced to earlier in the book of Titus.

In chapter 1, we read about these false leaders, these corrupt leaders who have been rebellious and insubordinate and haven't followed the Lord or his word and have proved themselves to be unfit for any good work.

And as they are unfit for any good work, so Paul calls us not to be like them, but instead to be ready for every good work. Verse 2, he tells us that we're to be, Christians are to be, model citizens.

[4 : 46] See it there, speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, show perfect courtesy to all people. It's such a kind of earthy, practical wisdom from the Bible.

He's saying, be models of kindness and love, especially with the words that you use. Especially in the language that you would use to speak of others. Of course, this starts with those who are closest to us.

How often we have a tendency to be hardest toward, harshest toward those people that we actually know and love the most. Perhaps it's our spouse.

You know, you can always tell when you're in the office when someone's speaking to their spouse on the phone. Because they say, yep, okay, got it, bye. Right? They speak to their spouse in a way they would never speak to anybody else.

And that's often, sadly, the way. Not just our spouses, though. Of course, this extends to our roommates, not gossiping about one another behind each other's back, but looking to find ways to encourage and build one another up.

[5 : 49] Extends as well, of course, to our teens and to our kids, finding ways to build one another up. Never texting anything to anyone that you would not say to them in person.

We are to use our words to be model citizens and encourage one another, especially those who are closest to us. But isn't it a problem that it's not just those who are closest to us?

See what Paul says there? He says, speak evil of who? Just people you love? No. Speak evil of no one. People we find challenging. People we find difficult.

But we're not to speak poorly of them either. We remember our mother's instruction, right? If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything. Even when it is the time to speak up and perhaps in cultural moments there is a need for the church to have a kind of a prophetic voice to stand up for the truth.

Well, even in those moments, we're not to be quarrelsome. We're not to be contentious or obnoxious or difficult. We're to be model citizens in the way in which we use our words, both with those we love and with those we find challenging.

[6 : 56] I think Paul gives us the positive alternative to this command in Colossians. Remember when he says, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. I just wonder, it's a challenging thing to think about.

Of all the words that you've said today, how many of them could you put in that category? Seasons with salt, gracious, always seasoned with salt. Paul is saying this is the kind of language that Christians should have.

And we should have a profound cultural impact in our day of outrage, in our day that loves to meet irate and inflamed language with equally irate and inflamed language.

Christians can have a cultural impact, a cultural witness by speaking differently. Be model citizens, Paul said in summary. Be living examples of kindness and love.

But the question we want to ask tonight is, why? Why ought the life of the Christian be distinct? Why ought it to be different?

[7 : 54] What is it that motivates and empowers Christians to live lives that are different to the rest of the world? To be these kind of model citizens?

And Paul's answer is obvious but very important. His answer is, well, the why behind this, the reason our behavior should be different is simply because of the gospel.

So let's look at that together. In verse 3, we read, For we ourselves were once foolish. Christians, we, me, you. We 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.

Paul invites Christians, he invites us to remember where we came from. Jesus did not come from the glories of heaven to earth to find us at the kind of top of the moral chosen pole.

Jesus hasn't called us to be Christians, kind of picking us for his team because we were like the best people around. No, Jesus came from the glories of heaven to earth to find us at the bottom in order that he might save us.

[9 : 04] That's the gospel that we celebrate. We don't look down upon anyone else or think ourselves better than anyone else because we know that it is us who need a savior.

We used to be like those corrupt leaders in Crete, rebellious, caught up in the cycle of hatred, contributing to the cycle of hatred that has so decimated lives.

But, verse 4, you see it there, but. Now we are free to live a different way. We used to live that way, but we don't have to live that way anymore.

Now, if you put one finger at the start of verse 4, put your second finger at the end of verse 7, and see all the words that fall in between your fingers. In the original Greek, the language that the New Testament was written in, these verses make up one big, long sentence.

One sentence that's somewhat complicated and a little bit intricate because Paul is unpacking a few related ideas at the same time. So let's see if we can catch the flow of this big, long sentence that runs from verses 4 through 7.

[10 : 15] It starts in verse 4 by Paul telling us that we are to live differently. He says, but we don't have to live that way anymore. Why? Because the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior has appeared in Jesus.

We don't need to live like we used to live anymore. Why? Because the goodness and loving kindness of Jesus has appeared. Now, as soon as he starts this thought, Paul almost gets distracted.

He interrupts this thought straight away in verse 5 because now that he's brought up Jesus, he's excited to talk about him. See, to Paul, Jesus is a little bit like the squirrel that once Jesus is on his mind, he's got to talk about him a little bit more.

We can't just leave it there. We're going to have to reflect on the beauty of the gospel for a minute. So having started this thought in verse 4, verses 5 through 6, he interrupts his thought to say, to underline the content of the gospel message.

And that's what you can read there. You see it, verse 5. We're saved not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to God's mercy. Develops this thought in verse 6 by describing how believers have been washed.

[11 : 26] We've been cleansed by renewing and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who hasn't been given to us in small measure, but has been poured out on us richly, we read, through Jesus Christ our Savior.

The result of all this is given in verse 7. We're justified by his grace. We're heirs according to the hope of eternal life. We've been brought back into our right relationship with God, not because we've earned our way there, but because Christ has been so good to us.

And because of that, we now wait an eternity in heaven. Now, after this gospel interruption, verses 5 through 7, Paul in verse 8 returns to his original thought.

So the first thought was, we live differently because of the gospel, because the loving kindness of God has appeared. Let's talk about that gospel for a minute. But now, verse 8, let's get back to our point.

You see it there? He returns to his point by saying, this saying is trustworthy. So this gospel summary that I just gave you, it's trustworthy. You can trust this summary of the gospel.

[12 : 32] If there's anything in your life that you should be dogmatic about, that you can be sure of, that you can be certain of, it's that the gospel is true. You can insist on it because, you see why?

So that those who have believed in God, verse 8, may be careful to devote themselves to good works. Start and see the connection here between the things we believe and the life that we live.

This is the gospel that you must insist on. Why? In order that those who believe this gospel will devote themselves to good works. So a summary of this passage before we have some applications.

We could summarize it by saying, we used to live in foolishness. We used to live in deceit. We used to be as much of a disaster, if not more, than anybody else living on the face of the earth.

We were unfit for any good work. But now, we've experienced the grace of God. We've experienced the grace of Christ. Our sins have been forgiven, and his Holy Spirit is here to enable us and empower us to live a different way.

[13 : 46] Before, we were unfit for any good work. But now, we can be fit for any good work. He's calling us to connect the dots between the gospel we believe and the life that we live.

Now, the reason this point is so important is that gospel living, Christian living, is really misunderstood by a lot of us in the church.

And I'm really talking now specifically to Christians. There's no reason that people who aren't Christians should have any understanding of what it means to live as a Christian. But even for Christians, even for those who believe in Jesus, we often misunderstand what it means to then follow him.

The studies show, the statistics show us, that the majority of Christians buy into a form of what we would call legalism. That they say, okay, I'm going to live my life now because if I don't follow God's laws, then he's really going to be unhappy with me.

So, I've got to obey in order to remain in his favor. Other believers might not believe in this kind of legalism, but they've fallen into what we call a kind of licentiousness.

[14 : 56] This means it doesn't really matter whether I obey or not because God is going to forgive me anyway. So, on the one hand, you have a group who says, you've got to obey or God won't be happy. On the other hand, you have a group that says, it doesn't really matter if you obey or not because God's going to forgive you anyway.

And the gospel comes and says, both of those things are wrong. Both of those things are wrong. And the solution isn't some kind of middle ground between the two. The solution is a third way.

I've got a gospel way to think about it that stands in contradiction to those other two. So, perhaps you've found yourself thinking one of those approaches.

That legalistic approach where you kind of think of God, his expression on his face right now as he looks down on you is frowning. And he's sort of just seen your latest report card and he's not very impressed.

Or perhaps you fall into thinking of God as the genie. You know, you've kept up your side of the bargain. So, now it's time for him to deliver. The gospel comes and says, it's neither of those.

[15 : 55] It's something different. It's this thing called gospel obedience. Gospel obedience contradicts legalism because it says, you are his beloved son or daughter by grace.

And his favor is eternally secure. You didn't do anything to earn it and you can't do anything to lose it. So, fear should not be motivating you to obey. Gospel obedience, though, also contradicts licentiousness because what sense does it make you?

If you're truly in a new relationship with this God who loves you and you love this God, how could you carry on living as if you weren't in relationship with him anymore? Of course, you want to live in intimacy with the ones that you love.

The gospel comes and says, we have this new way of living. We've been saved because God has been kind to us. And now the grace that saved us frees us to live new lives for God.

Because of what Christ has done for us in the past, dying on the cross, because of what he's going to do in the future, returning to make all things new, we are a people who live in between, who live in this present moment with the power of his spirit to live with freedom, to live with joy, to be who he always made us to be and do what we were always intended to do, motivated and empowered by his love toward us.

[17 : 19] It's the gospel, and it's the gospel alone that helps us understand our place here on earth and the importance of following him with joyful obedience.

Now that we've been loved by Christ, we can start to live like Christ. We can connect the dots from what we believe to how we live.

Now, a couple of applications on this, short and then we're done. Two quick applications on this theme of joyful obedience that were helpful to me as I reflected on this and hope will be helpful for you as well.

The first one is, I wonder how much we believe that the gospel life, joyfully obeying God, is really good for us, is really great for us.

That the most sort of hedonistic thing we could do would actually be to follow our God. See, the problem is that the alternative to joyful obedience is what the Bible calls sin.

[18 : 25] Sin is doing those things we're not meant to do. It's not doing those things we are meant to do. All of that surface behavior that proceeds from the heart that's far from God. But we need to wrestle and understand that the scriptures promise and make really clear that you know sin will never make you happy.

Sinning never makes us happy. Now, it always promises that it will. If you think about it, in the moment of decision, when we choose to sin, when we choose to go against God's will for our lives, it's because we think we'll be better off going that way than the way that he has commanded.

And yet, it over-promises and under-delivers every single time. We were just made for so much more than sin, and sin can never satisfy us.

Now, I think we know this to be true. A few examples, I think, that jump immediately to the mind. And first of all, we know that impurity and pornography will never make anybody happy.

That we were made for more than that. Because we know that nobody ever looked at pornography and then said, man, I feel really good about myself now. I'm really becoming the kind of person that I want to become.

[19 : 33] I'm really living the life now that I think I really want to live. No, we know that we weren't made for that kind of small stuff. We were made for true intimacy and real relationships that are joyful and beautiful and complicated and difficult and messy.

And yet, which in the end are much more satisfying to creatures who've been made in the image of God. Joyful obedience will make us much more happy than sin. Or think perhaps of materialism.

The temptation there is in our day and age to think that getting that next thing will be the thing that makes us happy. So maybe it's the next promotion, the next home, the next car, the next pay raise, the next whatever it is.

As if you're going to get hold of something and then you're finally going to be happy. So we're just waiting for the iPhone 37 to come down. And that's going to be the version that makes us happy.

Now, of course, we know it won't. We know that our hearts have been created with such infinite capacity that they can never be filled by stuff. Even if you owned everything on earth.

[20 : 38] That our souls can really only be satisfied when we're in relationship with God. Or even the example of our own text. The temptation we have to speak evil of others.

We know that that isn't for our good. When we use our words to beat others down or to get our own way or to prove ourselves right. We know that that doesn't lead to a satisfying life.

That we've been made to love God, to love our neighbor. And that we flourish when we walk in the joy and the freedom that comes with humility and putting other people first.

Here's the point. Joyful obedience, the gospel life, will bring more fulfillment than anything else on earth. There is nothing better you can do for your own joy than to glorify God in your body.

There is no better way to live this life on earth. And so we don't want to bark up the other trees of money, sex, and power and think those things are going to make us happy.

[21 : 38] Because they won't. Following Christ is what our souls long for and what our souls need. So, first, joyful obedience is good for us.

Second, and on this I close. It's also important to note the esteem that we see in the book of Titus, which is that joyful obedience isn't just good for us. It's also really good for our world.

Really good for the world in which we live. For our witness and mission in this world. Throughout this book of Titus, Paul has reiterated a few times how the lives that Christians lead impact the reputation and reception of the gospel message.

Now, that should be a challenging thought to Christians. Paul essentially says, listen, the lives that you lead will make the gospel easier or harder to believe. If you live like a hypocrite, then people will see you and say, man, Christians are all hypocrites and it'll make the gospel hard to believe.

Whereas if we live in the newness of life and the power of the Spirit, then there'll be something attractive about that and it will make the gospel easier to believe. And so Paul calls us to live this kind of life.

[22 : 50] To live a life that will be compelling to the watching world. To live a productive life that will be attractive to the watching world.

So, a few years ago now, I'm in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was the denomination I'm a part of. It was their general assembly. And I get up one morning and I go for this run.

And I'm plodding along at my unimpressive mile pace when suddenly it hits me, right? The smell of Krispy Kreme donuts. Now, I had to call my brother, thanks Ed, and say, hey, do they have Krispy Kreme in Edinburgh?

And he said, they do now. And in fact, when it opened, it was so busy that the traffic got backed up all the way to the M8, right? So, this is what, you know, the most obese nation in the world, America.

The second most obese nation, Scotland. Let's go, right? Two nations united by their love of donuts. Well, here I am running down the street when this smell hits me. And what do I do? I stop. I stop and I look at the sign.

[23 : 55] Do you know what the sign of Krispy Kreme says? It says, hot now. Not hot earlier. Not hot later. Hot now. And a dozen for \$12.99, right?

So, before I even went in, the deal was done, right? And you can ask me how many I ate and I will not tell you. Have you ever walked past one of those places?

Maybe you can even smell it now, right? The liquidy goodness of donuts you can swallow whole, right? Paul, in a sense, is saying that's the kind of impact our lives should have on the world.

We should live the kind of life that stops people in their tracks. That the scent allures them to kind of pause and look at the sign. That some of them will even come on in.

That our lives should have the aroma of Christ. That will be compelling and attractive to the world that's watching on.

[24 : 57] That they would see something in us that they are drawn toward. That they are enticed by. Now listen, Paul's not naive. He's not saying live this way.

And, you know, every second person is just going to fall on their face and say, well, okay, what must I do to be saved? But he is saying that our lives can have an impact.

That they can have a compelling witness. And if we do these small things, if we stop joining our colleagues and ridiculing our boss. If we put away anger and hostility and seek to live with gentleness and humility.

If we start to clothe ourselves in the gospel. Start to connect the dots from the gospel we believe to the lives that we live. If we start to love others as Christ has loved us.

Then people will be stopped in their tracks. They will be drawn to the gospel. Because of the lives that we are living here on earth. So, it's the gospel and the gospel alone that helps us understand why life matters.

[25 : 58] Obedience to God. It's not motivated by legalism. Do this or he'll get you. The cross has already satisfied his wrath. Nor though is it motivated by license.

Doesn't matter how you live, he'll forgive you. We're in a love relationship with him. We want to live lives that honor him. Instead, it's this kind of joyful obedience that understands the connection of the gospel to our lives.

And as we run around busy from one thing to the next. We want the aroma of Jesus just to make us pause. That we would savor the forgiveness and power we have to live new lives.

And then we also want to begin to smell like him. That wherever we go, we ourselves will spread the aroma of Christ. Amen.

Let's pray together. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Amen.