

Good Works

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 August 2015

Preacher: Adam Ch'ng

- [0 : 0 0] What was once bad is now good, and what was once good is now not just considered bad, to some it's considered even evil. The world no longer sees the gospel as the good news of salvation, but rather the bad news of oppression.
- In a world such as this, what are we to do? How are we to live? Well, here in Titus chapter 3, Paul wants to show us how we as God's people should relate to our world.
- How should we, as Christians, live in a world hostile to Jesus? In chapter 1, if we remember, Paul taught how Christians should relate to our leaders, who grows in truth and guards from lies.
- In chapter 2, he sketched a picture of how we should relate to one another, modelling good works and sound doctrine. And here in chapter 3, Paul is answering that very question, how should Christians relate to our world?
- When the world looks at us, what should they see? And right from the very beginning in verse 1, Paul leaves us in no doubt as to the answer. We must devote ourselves to good gospel work because of God's gospel truth.
- [1 : 1 8] Look with me at verses 1 and 2. See here that Paul kicks off by reminding the church to submit to and obey their rulers and authorities.
- Throughout the New Testament, we're consistently called to obey and respect government. We're called not just to be good fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives. We're called to be good citizens, obeying and submitting to our government.
- But let's face it, I mean, in a country like Australia, which has to be one of the most anti-authoritarian societies, we'll cut down any and every tall poppy that we can find.
- Politicians tend to be close to the top of that, don't they? I mean, after the AFL, bashing politicians is one of our great national sports. And yet, in some ways, Paul's calling us to do something quite different.
- He's calling us to submit to them, to honour them, to respect them. One thing I love about our church is that we pray for our government. I hope we continue to do that. And our lives have to be consistent with our prayers.
- [2 : 2 1] I hope that we here know our local member. I hope we've met them. I hope we pray for them. I hope we encourage them when they do what is right. And yeah, that we even pull them up when we do something that I think is not right.
- We're called to be a people of good work to those that God has set over us to govern us. I was speaking with one of my friends and he said, but what happens if I live in an area of Melbourne where my local member couldn't be any more against the gospel?
- They're pro-same-sex marriage, pro-choice, and think that Christian religious education is child abuse. How do I do it there? How can I be possibly expected to respect someone like that?

All the more reason. For in the darkest night, there the light shines the brightest, doesn't it? But Paul doesn't stop there. He moves beyond our relationship with government to our relationship with the world.

Notice the all-encompassing language that he uses in verses 1 and 2. Be ready for every good work. Speak evil of no one. Show perfect courtesy toward all people.

[3 : 31] See, Paul doesn't just have other Christians or the government in mind here. He's thinking about the entire community. He's calling us to be good and to do good to our world. Now, our church is called to be a center of blessing to our community.

We are to be the beating heart of good work, not just for Christians, but for all people. It's easy for us to think about the big and flashy campaigns to make poverty history, to fight against human trafficking, to change our national attitude towards asylum seekers.

All of these things are good. But good works start in the normality of daily life as well, don't they? Do we help that international student who's struggling with their studies?

Do we thank the support staff at work who are too often forgotten? Are we generous with our money to support the poor and the needy? Friends, we must devote ourselves to good gospel works.

But why? Is it because we're inherently good people? Or is it because we're trying to accumulate enough brownie points to get into heaven? Well, if we understand the gospel rightly, if anything, it's because we know we're inherently bad people.

[4 : 43] It's because we know that we'll never be good enough for God. We devote ourselves to good gospel work because of God's gospel truth.

What is that truth? The truth that God saved us. And that's effectively the heart of this passage. God saved us.

And I want us to look now at three ways in which God saved us, which should motivate us to do this good work. He saved us out of sin. He saved us by new birth.

And he saved us for the hope of eternal life. You can find those three things set out in your notice sheets. There are three things. What he saved us from. What he saved us by.

And what he saved us for. Verse three tells us that we've been saved out of foolishness, out of disobedience, out of being led astray. We've been saved out of the passions and the pleasures which once enslaved us.

[5 : 47] The malice, the envy and the hatred in which we once lived. So don't go back. God saved us out of that life.

We should no longer be slaves to self-centered passions and pleasures. We should no longer hate others, loving only what they own, but not who they are.

We've been saved out of that life and into a new life of good gospel work. So remember. Remember who you once were before God saved you.

And don't go back. One of the simple pleasures of studying at Bible College right now is being able to watch daytime TV. Often sandwiched somewhere between Ellen and Judge Judy, you'll find ads for about 100 different diets.

There's a few. I saw that there's the African mango diet. The carb lovers diet. The fat smash diet. All these ads are all pretty much the same, aren't they?

[6 : 51] I mean, they'll show you the photo of before and after. However, they'll interview that lovely photoshopped person. And they'll normally ask them something. That person will normally say something like, as trivial as it sounds, I just don't have the cravings for junk food anymore, do I?

I mean, I used to, but since I've been on the African mango diet, all I want to drink is exotic mango juice from the jungles of Namibia. I, to be honest, don't even know if Namibia has jungles.

But you see, the last thing, as trivial as it is, they don't want to go back to life as it once was. And if it's true for them, how much more so must it be the case for us who have been saved out of sin?

Who have been saved out of death? Who have been saved out of that life into a life of good gospel work? Why would we ever want to go back? But you see, God not only saved us out of sin, he also saved us by new birth.

Look with me at verses 4 to 6. We see here, Paul is calling us to do good works. But he's also clear that God definitely did not save us because of them.

[7 : 59] No work, however good, is ever good enough to deserve God's love. Isaiah reminds us that even our most righteous acts are no cleaner than filthy rags.

None of us deserved to be saved. But according to his own mercy, God saved us.

We've been saved. But it's not our merit. It's all God's mercy. Ephesians 2 reminds us that we've been saved not by good works, but for the good works that God has prepared for you and for me.

Well, how did God save us? Verse 5 says that he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

The Holy Spirit has washed us clean of our sin. Ezekiel 36 says that God has effectively given us a heart transplant. He's removed our hearts of stone.

[9 : 06] He's given us hearts of flesh. He's put in us his Holy Spirit so that we might be able to walk in his statutes and obey his rules.

He has given us a new birth, a new heart, and a new life. You see, not only has God saved us in the past for a life of good gospel work, he gives us his spirit in the present so that we can live that new life of good gospel work.

And God has given us his spirit through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who lived that perfectly good life that we've been called to but could never have lived.

Jesus Christ who died the death that we should have died. It is through him that we are saved. It is through him that God has given us his spirit. It is through him that we have a new life.

Why should we devote ourselves to doing good work? Because God has saved us by new birth. But we've also been saved for the hope of eternal life.

[10 : 18] Look with me at verse 7. Here we see that our salvation doesn't just look to the past and the present. It anticipates the future. It looks forward to the hope of eternal life.

A hope of which you and I are co-heirs with Christ who is the true heir of all things. Peter tells us that unlike any inheritance in this world, that inheritance is imperishable.

It is undefiled. And it is unfading. It is kept in heaven for us. Our hope of eternal life, unlike the hope of this world, is not vain or empty.

We can be devoted to doing good work today. Because the gospel gives us a certain hope for tomorrow. Some of you may remember earlier this year, the events surrounding Andrew Chan and Mayurin Sukumaran, two of the Bali Nine.

It's said that when Andrew Chan found out that his final plea for clemency had failed, he said nothing. And he walked away. They couldn't find him in the jail for a number of hours, but eventually his lawyer did find him.

[11 : 38] And they found him comforting another prisoner. And they marveled. They wondered, what gives a man that freedom? What gives a man the peace to comfort another prisoner at the very moment he heard that he has only days to live?

This is what Andrew Chan said a number of years ago. When I got back to my cell, I said, God, I asked you to set me free, not kill me.

God spoke to me and said, Andrew, I have set you free from the inside out. I have given you life. You see, Andrew had the hope of eternal life. He was free even in the darkest night of his soul to do good gospel work, confident of his imperishable inheritance, the hope of eternal life.

Why devote ourselves to good work? Because God saved us. He saved us out of sin. He saved us by new birth and he saved us for the hope of eternal life.

This is what verse 8 says. 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.

[13 : 06] Friends, you notice that Paul is not driving a wedge between believing in God and devoting ourselves to good works. He's saying it's not just enough to believe in God's gospel truth, nor is it enough to just do good gospel work.

He's not saying either or. He's saying both and. He's telling us that right thinking must lead to right living. In fact, if we do not devote ourselves to good gospel work, we've got to wonder how much we actually really believe God's gospel truth.

Charles Spurgeon once said that works of righteousness are the fruit of salvation. So, if we're not bearing the fruit of righteousness, do we really have the root of salvation?

Why do we teach the Bible? Why do we care about good theology? Not for the sake of information, but for the sake of transformation.

If we focus exclusively on God's gospel truth, but neglect good gospel work, we run the risk of actually prioritizing the means over the ends. What scares me, knowing my own heart, is that in my efforts at times to guard sound doctrine, I can actually totally miss the point.

[14 : 33] Because truth shouldn't stop at knowledge. It must not stop at knowledge. God's gospel truth has to transform our minds, touch our hearts, and train our hands.

When people visit our church, I wonder what they're struck by. Is it look at how much they know, or is it look at how godly they are?

I really hope that it's the second. I really do, because God's gospel truth must always produce good gospel work. But for the one gospel truth, there are a hundred worldly lies.

You see, where Paul called us to devote ourselves to good gospel work, because of God's gospel truth, he warns us in verses 9 to 11, against life-killing legalism. I want you to notice in verses 9 to 11, that these foolish controversies, actually have nothing at all to do with the gospel.

What are they about? They're about genealogies, dissensions, quarrels about the law. Unlike the excellent and profitable gospel, these controversies, are unprofitable.

[15 : 41] They're worthless. Instead of allowing deep gospel truth to produce a life of good gospel work, some Christians were obsessed with stupid cultural practices that only created division and life-killing legalism.

Instead of celebrating the gospel of salvation, they were refastening the shackles of condemnation. And if you've ever experienced this before, you'll know just how destructive it can be.

Churches that obsess over reading the right version of the Bible instead of knowing Jesus as the word. Churches that insist on wearing particular clothes, but not being clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Churches that demand allegiance to a denomination over one Lord, one faith, and one birth. Well, Paul tells us that these people are warped and sinful and self-condemned, and we are to have nothing to do with them.

You see, this is far more serious than just riding your hobby horse a bit too hard and a bit too fast. This is actually replacing the life-giving gospel with the dead hand of legalism.

[16 : 53] In chapter 2, Paul told us that good work adorns the gospel. Legalism kills it. What word is on the lips of our church?

What truth consumes the life and work of our community? Is it the truth of the gospel? The life-giving message of freedom that God saved us? Or is it a perversion of the gospel?

A hate-filled burden of legalism that enslaves our souls? As Paul comes to the end of his letter, he wants to remind Titus of what is most important. You know, it's too easy for us to gloss over these final words in verses 12 to 15, to dismiss them as an empty formality.

But we mustn't miss what Paul is doing here. He's giving Titus and the church a real opportunity to engage in the good gospel work that he's called them to do. See that Zenos and Apollos, two real people, lack nothing.

Remind the church to devote themselves to good works, especially in cases of urgent need. Friends, if Jesus saved us when we were at our worst, should we not care for others at theirs?

[18 : 08] At the end of the day, Christian or not, what we believe shapes how we live, doesn't it? Our lives are but an outward expression of an inward reality.

So what do our lives say about what we believe? Do our lives live out good gospel work? Do they speak of God's gospel truth?

Do they shine his saving light? In the darkness of this new world, people will hate the light for the light exposes the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The world may hate what we say, but can they fault how we live? I pray that we might not just speak the good news, but that we might live the good life.

That it wouldn't just be on our lips, but it would be on full display in our lives. May God enable us to shine his lights in his world and may he equip us to speak his gospel truth and to live out his good gospel work so that all might honour the Son.

[19 : 20] Let's pray. Loving God, thank you for the great truth of your gospel that in your Son, Jesus Christ, you saved us.

Remind us of this great truth and may it motivate us at all times to live a life worthy of the gospel, to do good for others, and so that through our lives people might see the beauty and the glory of your Son in whose name we pray.

Amen.