

Who Is Doing The Gospel?

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Date: 04 May 2025

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, tonight we are continuing our study on Titus, and we've come to the section at the end of chapter 2, from verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, who are zealous for good works.

We've been working through Titus over the past few Sunday evenings. Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete, and Paul, who had been there with him and helped plant the churches there, is now writing to Titus to give him instructions as he leads the congregations across that island.

And so this letter is full of very practical, very helpful instruction for the churches there, and for the church here today as well. Our series is called *Because We Believe*, and that title is trying to capture the fact that in our Christian lives, there's two key things that we always want to keep in balance.

We want to always make sure that we're clear about what we believe and why we believe it, and so the gospel has got doctrinal content that we need to know.

But at the same time, we always need to think about the impact that that faith should have on our lives. So the gospel not only has doctrinal content, it also has ethical implications that we need to follow.

[1 : 44] So in other words, as Christians, we believe the gospel, and because we believe it, then we want our whole lives to be shaped by it.

And that's one of the big themes in Titus, the fact that our day-to-day lives, every part of life, as individuals, as a church family, should be shaped by the truth that we've come to know and believe. So when we're talking about good works, we are not saying that we are doing good works in order to believe, in order to be Christians. That's legalism. It's not the gospel. But we are saying that we seek to do good works because we believe.

We want the gospel to shape our lives. Tonight we've come to this little section at the end of chapter 2, which is one of these sections that you often find in Paul's letters.

They're just really short, just a few lines long, and yet they're bursting with magnificent theology. And so we're going to look at these verses together, 11 to 14 tonight.

[2 : 49] And for our title, we're asking the question, Who is doing the gospel? And as we look at this together, I'm actually going to do my sermon backwards tonight.

So normally I give you three points at the start of the sermon, and then we work through the passage. Tonight we're going to work through the passage, and I'm going to give you my three points at the very end. So we'll just go through these verses together and see what these verses are saying to us.

The first thing I want us to note is that just like the whole of Titus, these verses are wonderfully practical. It's highlighting several patterns of behavior that we want to see in our lives as Christians. So if you look at verse 12, you see that there's this beautiful balance of things that we want to say no to. We want to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and there's things that we want to embrace.

We want to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. And that pattern of some things to say no to and other things to say yes to is always present in our lives as followers of Jesus.

[4 : 06] So there are patterns of behavior that are unsuitable for the Christian. We want to renounce them. And at the same time, there's behavioral qualities that we want to see more and more of.

In other words, as we follow Jesus, every day there's going to be weeds in our lives that we need to remove, and there's going to be fruit that we want to cultivate. And so in verse 12, it speaks about renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions.

So in other words, we want to say no to the behavior that contrasts with what Jesus is like, and we want to say no to the behavior that is just conforming to the sinful impulses and instincts and desires of the world around us.

All around us, at work, in school, in the media, everywhere, people are enticed by the desire for wealth, for power, for sex, for recognition, for adoration.

People are chasing these things. The more they chase them, the more they get of them, the more that they want them. Jesus said no to all of that, and we are to do the same.

[5 : 18] And so instead of saying yes to ungodliness and the passions of the world around us, instead we want to embrace lives that are characterized by self-control, that are upright, that are godly.

Here, as said out at the end of verse 12. Again, so practical and so important. Self-control, that's a concept that the New Testament repeatedly highlights, and it stands in stark contrast to the way the world around us thinks, because today the message from our culture is be yourself, fulfill yourself, express yourself, find yourself, be true to yourself.

The Bible's message is control yourself. And the truth is, self-control is a hugely important and hugely positive dynamic in our lives.

And we can actually prove the positiveness of self-control by looking at the culture around us.

Because there's two fascinating examples from the world around us that confirm just how positive and important self-control is.

One is elite sports. You think of people at the very top of sports who are achieving the dreams of millions of people, whether it's in football, athletics, snooker world championships that aren't just now, whatever it might be.

[6 : 46] All of these people who are at the top of the sporting world have to be phenomenal at one thing. They have to be phenomenal at self-control. It's that discipline that gets them to the top.

And almost in the opposite way, but proving the same point, the other place where you see in the world around us the importance of self-control is when you see cases of serious crime.

Every criminal that our society is appalled by has done what they've done because of a lack of self-control. And so it's a massively important and immensely positive dynamic in our lives.

Self-control. So crucial. We're also told to be upright. Again, very practical. It's from the same word, family, as the word righteous. It's just reminding us that God wants His people to do what's right. God wants His people to do what's right. And that's all part of living a godly life. And that's just the opposite of the ungodliness that we want to renounce.

[7 : 52] We want to live a life that's devoted to serving and honoring Jesus. So verse 12, very, very practical. And verse 14 is the same. Again, big, big practical emphases here.

We're to be redeemed from all lawlessness. We're to be zealous for good works. Again, all of this is making us think in terms of practical application.

The Christian life is always going to involve departing from lawlessness, embracing stuff that's good with ever-increasing zeal.

And it's a reminder that the Christian life, growth in the Christian life is always involving just that wonderfully simple balance whereby Jesus is taking us on a path where there is less stuff that's rubbish in our lives and there's more and more stuff that's good.

And that's actually what everybody wants. Everybody wants less rubbish in their life and more good. The big problem is that we don't always have the right understanding of what's good and what's rubbish.

[9 : 02] But in all these ways, we can see that there's just very big practical emphases in these verses. So as we ask our question, who is doing the gospel?

It would be very, very easy for us to say, well, it's us. There's all this stuff that we've got to do.

Or perhaps maybe more accurately, if we say, who's doing the practical side of the gospel? Who's doing the practical application of it? We think, well, it's us.

But I want you to see something in these verses tonight that is so important to remember. These verses are very, very rich.

They're presenting the whole scope of the gospel from the appearing of Jesus to the return of Jesus. And within that, there's all this magnificent teaching around practical behavior. But we have to look at these verses and we have to ask the question, who is doing stuff in these verses?

[10:11] And the answer is God. Everything in these verses is stuff that God is doing.

And to help us see that, I'm going to lay the verses out a little bit differently. So same verses there, but I've just laid it out so you can see the pattern of the structure that Paul is using.

And so let's go through that and see what it's saying. First of all, it tells us the grace of God has appeared. And that little sentence right there, the grace of God has appeared, is just such a magnificent summary of the Christian faith.

In terms of the Christian faith, what's it all about? It's about the fact that something has appeared. Christianity is centered on the appearance of something utterly crucial and something that on our own we would not have and that we would not find.

And that's captured by the theological term revelation, which is a massively important concept in terms of the gospel. God has revealed something to us.

[11:26] God has revealed a body of truth to us. And central to that revelation is Jesus Christ. It is in and through him that the fullness of that revelation comes.

Everything that God is revealing comes through Jesus and finds its fullness in Jesus. Something has appeared. So what's appeared?

Grace. And you might have heard that word a thousand times, but it's a word that you need to stop and think about again and again and again.

God is revealing something to you, but he is not revealing requirements. He is not revealing expectations. He's not revealing conditions. He's not revealing restrictions.

He's not revealing some weird set of religious rules. He is revealing grace. Grace. And grace is the word that the Bible uses to describe God's determination to give you far more than you could ever earn or that you could ever even imagine.

[12:46] Grace is the language of a gift. Grace is unearned favor. Grace is unlimited blessing.

Grace is unrelenting love. And so often, man-made religion is based on some variation of the concept of earning our way up to God.

Grace is the opposite of all of that. Grace is God meeting you and God blessing you and God pouring out his kindness upon you. And so if you want to think what grace is like, then you can maybe just sort of remember this acronym.

There's various acronyms about grace. But you need to remember that grace is generous. In the gospel, God wants to give to you out of his extraordinary kindness.

Grace is also relentless. Grace is also relentless.

[14:02] Grace is abundant. Grace is abundant. Grace is abundant. So there is no half measures with God. There's no stinginess. There's no hesitance. His desire for you is just to flood your life and your eternity with goodness.

Grace is also compassionate. Grace is also compassionate. That's one of the things that I absolutely love about street pastors is that it's just driven by compassion for people that you could so easily walk past.

And that's a glimpse of what the gospel is like. That Jesus is meeting us with his tender, kind, compassionate heart.

And so no matter how messy or broken or stupid we feel, Jesus meets us with his grace.

And last of all, grace is extravagant. And it's so important that you realize that when, if you are trusting in Jesus or if you put your faith in Jesus, when you get to heaven, you are going to say, wow.

[15:19] I never imagined the half of it. Grace is generous, relentless, abundant, compassionate, and extravagant.

And in the gospel, that grace has appeared. God is meeting us with his grace.

He's giving us what we could never earn. And if that word, grace, and that concept of grace, if it's not central to your understanding of Christianity, then your understanding of Christianity is not accurate.

And if there's anything in your understanding of Christianity that involves you being good enough for God, or you working your way up to God, or you doing certain stuff to reach a certain standard, then this is going to sound a bit rude and a bit blunt, but you're dead wrong.

That's not the gospel. The gospel is about the grace of God that's appeared in Jesus. And then from that starting point, I want you to notice all the words that are next to the round bullet points.

[16:32] So, I hope they all look the same shape to me because I don't have my glasses on. But these ones are all round, the first set. So, we've got this word, bringing. We've got this word, training.

We've got this word, who gave. We've got this word, to redeem. And we've got this word, purify. Why? Who's doing all those words? It's God.

God is doing them all. So, God is bringing salvation for all people. The gospel is a message of grace that's appeared for everyone.

And so, this is just a wonderful example of what we call the free offer of the gospel. That the gospel is freely offered to everyone. There's no restrictions on race or class or status or history or ability or understanding or anything.

The message of the gospel is for everyone in the whole world. The invitation is for everyone. Every time the gospel is being spoken to you, God is speaking to you.

[17:40] He's inviting you. The promises are for you. The offer is for you. The word all in the Bible is so important because all includes you.

And the key point that that statement there is made is that the gospel is not about us bringing satisfaction or suitability to God to try and impress him.

It's about God bringing salvation to you. You're not bringing stuff to him. He is bringing salvation to you through his son.

And all we have to do is trust him. And if we do trust Jesus, if we come to faith, so if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, then you step onto our journey.

And we call that journey sanctification, which is just the process whereby we become more and more like Jesus. More and more into the people that God created us to be. And here, Paul describes that word of that work of sanctification in terms of being trained.

[18:43] And that word for trained is a fascinating word because it's actually the word that's used for raising a child, helping someone to get to maturity, teaching them, raising them, bringing them up.

And as we say, as part of that, that's going to involve saying no to some things, renouncing them and embracing other things, seeking to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.

The key point, though, is that the trainer is God. He's the one doing the training. So he's training us to renounce ungodliness and all other things that are unhelpful and that we're better off without.

He is training us to embrace the patterns of behavior. So you could easily look at those verses and think, oh, those verses are telling you renounce, live self-controlled lives. And in a sense they are, but actually these words are telling you that God is training you to do that.

He is helping you and guiding you. This is describing something that he is doing. And that training affects how we live now in the present age, but it also needs to shape our perspective of eternity as we wait the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[20:02] We've been trained to live out in a way that's always conscious that Jesus is coming back. And that return of Jesus is a blessed hope.

It's culminating in experiencing the glory of God as it's revealed in Jesus Christ. All of that is possible because he gave himself.

And this is where we see just how extravagant the grace of the gospel is. Everything rests on Jesus' desire to give.

But in order for us to be saved, he could give nothing less than himself. And this is just taking us to the very heart of what the gospel is all about. Our sin deserves death.

We need a Savior who will die in our place. Jesus says, I'll do it. Take me. And these four words, these five words are just magnificent.

[21:10] It speaks about the one who gave himself for us. And so gave is telling us that it's all voluntary.

It's willing. It's an unconditional gift from God. Himself is pointing us to just who this is. This is God the Son. The fullness of God's beloved Son.

Perfect in every way. Given so that every need of ours would be met. And all of it is for us. It's for us. It's for you. He gave himself for you. And we've got to make sure that we recognize the magnitude of that.

You know, so often we get the gave and the for the wrong way round in life. Because often we are drawn to follow idols.

[22 : 16] Idols can appear in so many different ways. Whether it's our job. Whether it's the person we're in love with. Whether it's a political movement. Or ideology. What people think of us. Or whatever it may be. We will find ourselves giving our lives for them.

So we just give ourselves into our job. And months and weeks. Weeks and months and years disappear.

We're chasing more and more and more. Giving ourselves for our job. Or to impress our boss. Or giving ourselves to have more financial security. Or giving ourselves for more popularity.

Giving ourselves for the expectations of people at school. Or colleagues.

Or advertisers. Or whatever it might be. There's a thousand demands on your life. And so often we are giving ourselves for them. The gospel is the complete opposite.

[23 : 21] Jesus gave himself for you. And we immediately just become the recipient. Of his extraordinary grace.

We often feel as though we need to prove how much we are worth. By demonstrating how much we can give. To our families. Our work. Our reputation.

Or whatever it may be. We feel we need to prove our worth. By how much we can give. It never feels like enough. The gospel confirms your worth. By revealing just how much Jesus was willing to give for you.

He gave himself. And he did that. Let me tidy up all my scribbles here. He did that to accomplish two things. To redeem us.

And to purify us. And again. He's the one who's doing it. So redeeming. That's the language of redemption. The language of being brought out of slavery.

[24 : 28] And we are being redeemed from lawlessness. And so from all the ways in which people have departed. From God's wise guidelines in their lives. And all the ways that things have become a mess and chaotic.

We are being called away from that. And so this is where it's so important to recognize. That often we think that to be able to be lawless. To be able to have no rules in our lives.

To be able to do whatever we like. That that would be freedom. But it's always slavery. And so things like greed. And lust. And jealousy. And bitterness. And selfishness. And laziness. And addiction.

And anger. We think that these things are going to release us. If we just do them. And yet all they will ever do is enslave us. Jesus has come to redeem us.

From that grip of slavery. And place us on a new path. And that new path is a path. Whereby he's purifying for himself. A people who are zealous for good works.

[25 : 25] Now when we hear that language of purity. And of zeal for good works. It can all sound maybe a wee bit kind of pious. Or maybe it seems a bit sort of awkward. And sometimes our instinctive view of sort of things like that.

Is to think well you know sin's not that bad. It's a bit rough around the edges. But it can be good fun. And a kind of pure religious life. Like what's been described there. Is a bit weird and stifled.

And awkward. But we must not think like that. Because to think like that is to be deceived. Because Jesus. When Jesus wants to purify us. He doesn't want to make us into religious weirdos.

He wants to make us into people who live lives characterized. By stuff that's good. And beautiful. And that we do really really well. And so when we are doing good stuff. Good works. We're just doing things that are good. And we're doing them well.

[26 : 25] And we're doing them with his help. And the scope of that is so broad. Jesus wants our lives to just display the best of what he's created. So he wants us to be brilliant husbands.

Wonderful wives. Patient parents. Committed colleagues. Diligent students. Fantastic musicians. Excellent listeners. Kind neighbors. Loyal friends. Great company. All these good works in our lives. Will fill our lives. With love. And joy. And confidence. And laughter. And purpose. And generosity. And thoughtfulness. And all the good things that God has created us to share and enjoy.

All of that just comes under the great banner of the gospel. Whereby Jesus is building a community where we love God and love one another. But the key thing you need to see and keep remembering. is that he's doing the redeeming.

And he's doing the purifying. And so if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian. You're no longer under the grip of sin. Because he has redeemed you.

[27 : 25] And you can live a life that is being emptied of rubbish stuff. And that's been filled up with good things. Because he's purifying you for himself.

And all of us. All of this is teaching us. That the whole of the gospel. From justification to sanctification. From salvation to serving.

From conversion to completion. From stepping out in faith. To coming home in glory. It's all God's doing. Who's doing the gospel?

God is doing it. And this is where I want to conclude with my three points. At the end. Because this just summarizes everything that I want to say.

In this passage we see divine initiative. Divine accomplishment. And divine enablement. I've run out of time as always. But I'm just going to mention very quickly. What these are referring to.

[28 : 26] Divine initiative means that. In terms of the gospel. God starts it all. God plans it all. Because God wants it all. And divine accomplishment means.

That he does it all. So the father sends his son. The son comes and lives and dies. And rises. All to the level of utter perfection. And the Holy Spirit applies. Everything that he accomplishes.

To us. As we are united to Jesus. And divine enablement means that. With every step we take. He helps us. And that is true. At our conversion.

And it's true. At every step. We take. He enables us. And he helps us. And this is so, so, so important.

Because so often. In our Christian lives. We are crippled. By the phrase. By the voice in our head. That says. I can't. I can't.

[29 : 25] You think. Could I. Could I get involved in this at church? I can't. Could I be a street pastor? I can't.

Could I come to the prayer meeting? I can't. Could I become a member? I can't. Could I tell people. That I think.

I've become a Christian. I can't. But. Whatever. Step. You need to take.

In following Jesus. The question. Is never ever. Can you. The question. Is always. Can God. And well you know the answer to that question. Don't you. He can. Let's pray together.