

Creekside Community Church
"Good News about Good Works," Paul's Letter to Titus
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"Extraordinary in the Ordinary"

Titus 2:1-10

When I graduated from college in 1970, and joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ, I was assigned to U.C. Berkeley – which turned out to be a lot different than anything I had experienced at Cal State Long Beach. In the early 70s Cal was the center of the anti-war movement and a rapidly growing counter-culture and I found myself surrounded by radicals, hippies, street people and really smart students in an environment of daily debates, demonstrations, confrontations and arguments. On my first Saturday morning in Berkeley, some guys from Christian World Liberation Front, another Christian group on campus which had adopted the tactics of the radical political groups, asked me to join them in preaching the gospel at the regional meeting of the Students for a Democratic Society which was held at the old Willard Middle School cafeteria in Berkeley. There were radical leaders from all over Northern California there for a strategy meeting when about a dozen of us Christians showed up. I had no idea what we were there to do but before long, our guys had taken over the microphone and began telling them about Jesus. The last thing I remember was a very angry radical charging one of our guys at the mike with the Willard Middle School's American flag - with the spear part of it pointed at his chest. Anyway, some of us were dragged out and some of us walked out, rejoicing in our minds to have suffered shame for the name of Jesus – even though what we did was incredibly stupid. But that was what we did in those days – anything to make Jesus the issue because we thought if people could just hear the gospel, they would believe it. We did slow motion football games on the beach and when a crowd formed to watch, we'd talk about Christ. We carried coffins around Cal and wore gorilla costumes and demonstrated with signs like "Got guts? Follow Jesus;" using any means we could to get the gospel out. We were creative, we were bold – we just weren't very effective. Later we discovered that Jesus had a better idea. Let's read Matt. 5:16. After telling His disciples that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world; that they are the way God will influence the world, Jesus says, "*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*" How do we get their attention? How do we turn their thoughts to God? Through good works, because that is what Jesus did. Jesus didn't just preach good news, He was good news. He went about doing good; healing the sick, freeing the oppressed, comforting the lonely, encouraging the depressed; and He calls His disciples to follow His example by loving our neighbor as ourselves in real, concrete ways. The early Christians took this command to heart and as a result, the early church grew at an astounding rate of 40 percent per decade. Michael Green writes, "The link between holy living and effective evangelism could hardly be made more effectively. In particular, Christians stood out for their chastity, their hatred of cruelty, their civil obedience, their good citizenship. They did not expose their infants. They did not swear. They refused to have anything to do with idolatry and its by-products. Such lives made a great impact." Princeton University sociologist Rodney Stark puzzled over how a marginalized, persecuted, often uneducated group of people were not only able to survive but thrive in the Roman Empire. He concluded the key reason was their willingness to sacrifice themselves out of love not only for each other but also for their community. He writes about the two great plagues that swept the Empire in 165 AD and 251 AD, killing a third of the population. "The willingness of Christians to care for others was put on dramatic public display. Pagans tried to avoid all contact with the afflicted, often casting the still-living into the gutters. Christians on the other hand nursed the sick, even though some died doing so. The pagan emperor Julian noted the followers of the Way "support not only their poor but ours as well." What grabs people's attention is our good deeds in normal everyday life; being extraordinary in the ordinary affairs of life; which is my title for Titus 2:1-10 where Paul tells us that the best evidence for the truth of the gospel is a changed life. This morning I want to look at three things in this passage. 1. The Motivation for Good Deeds (vs. 1). 2. The Arena for Good Deeds (vs. 2-10). 3. The Power of Good Deeds (vs. 5, 8 and 10): what changes us, how we're changed and the powerful impact of a changed life.

This fall we're looking at Paul's letter to Titus in a series called, *Good News about Good Works* because the theme of this letter is that the more we understand and believe the good news of the gospel, the more active we will be in doing good. We aren't saved because we do good: we do good because we're saved. God's free goodness to us

in Christ motivates us to treat others the way He has treated us. Paul and Titus recently began a number of new churches on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea which are already struggling to survive because of the culture of Crete and Paul leaves Titus behind on the island to get these young congregations to the place where they can not only survive but grow, by getting the right leaders into these churches who can correct the false teaching which is already rampant in them. Today we'll be in the second chapter of Titus and we'll start by looking at the motivation for good works. *"But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine."* (Tit 2:1) In contrast to the false teachers Paul has warned Titus about who are teaching myths and the commandments of men, Paul tells Titus to speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine: to preach the word of God and the gospel of what Christ has accomplished for us; what Paul called earlier in this letter "the truth which leads to godliness." When I was younger I would have expected the things which are fitting for sound doctrine would be theological issues: stuff like predestination, foreknowledge, eschatology, soteriology and all the other "ologies" of theology. But as we'll see in vs. 2-10, the things which are fitting for sound doctrine are how people should live as they apply the gospel to everyday life. A theme that runs all the way through the New Testament is that the Christian life is simply believing and applying the truths of the gospel to life; trusting in Christ's love for us which He proved once and for all by doing for us what we could not do for ourselves; and then treating others the way He has treated us. Vs. 2-10 is similar to what were called "The Household Codes" of the Greeks and the Romans which defined the relationships and responsibilities between husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves and citizens and the state. There are some similarities but the biggest difference between the codes of first century secular society and the commands of the Bible is the motivation to obey them. The list of commands in vs. 2-10 is entitled the things which are fitting or appropriate for sound doctrine, the appropriate response to the gospel. And Paul concludes this list of commands with the reason to take them seriously in vs. 11-14 which we will look at in depth next Sunday. *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."* Everyday Christian behavior begins and ends with the gospel; what Christ has done for us. We don't do good so God will accept us or so He'll love us; we do good because God has accepted us and proven His love for us. That's our motivation for good deeds. That's why the commands of vs. 2-10 are surrounded by the gospel.

Why is this important? If we don't begin and end with the gospel, we no longer have Christianity and we will find ourselves both incapable and unmotivated to obey these commands. The Christian life is our response to the truth of the gospel but if I don't begin with the gospel, I will find the life the New Testament describes both undesirable and impossible to live. That's one reason so many kids raised in churches walk away from the faith. They haven't ever really understood the gospel; the good news of what God has done for them because of His great love and mercy. For them, Christianity is simply Moralism; rules to obey – because that's the way they've heard the Bible taught by their parents, their Sunday school teachers and their pastors. The Bible has always been presented as more things you need to do. But "things we need to do" is not the focus of the Bible. The focus of the Bible is on Jesus and what He has done for us. And unless we see every command of the Bible through the lens of the gospel – which is the way Paul presents this list of commands – we will neither be motivated to obey or able to obey because our obedience is our response of faith in the gospel and in the love of Christ. The thing that kids need to hear from their parents, their teachers and their pastors more than anything else is *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* Eph. 2:8-10. Our kids need to know that God loves them and accepts them because of what Christ has done, not because of anything they do or fail to do. So why do good works? Not to be saved but because we have been saved and good works is what God saved us for. Years ago, I heard a story which really illustrates the different motivation the gospel provides. A woman was married to a very grumpy, demanding husband – not like any of the husbands here this morning, I sure – but this guy was a real pain. He had high standards for his wife and he constantly left notes around the house reminding her of those standards. "Wash my clothes today." "Pick up the laundry at the cleaners." "Have my dinner ready by 5." "Sweep the porch." "Clean the bathroom." Everywhere she looked, there was another note, reminding her of something else she needed to do. He never thanked her or showed any appreciation for the things she did. He simply demanded more. Well, one day the man died and his wife felt more relief than she did grief. No more notes. No more reminders of

something else she failed at. The woman eventually married again and her new husband was the polar opposite of her first; kind, undemanding, appreciative and always putting her first; she felt like a queen. One day she was cleaning out a drawer and discovered an old note from her first husband, "Clean this drawer." She felt the familiar feelings of resentment return and then she realized that she was doing all the things her first husband demanded she do for him for her second husband without really even thinking about it. That's a great illustration of the difference between gospel motivation and moralistic motivation. In one, we are responding to the unconditional love of Christ for us; in the other, we are trying to prove something or get something we otherwise cannot get. That's the motivation for good deeds.

Let's look at the arena for good deeds; how the gospel changes us in the arena of everyday life. Here are the specific things Titus is to speak which are fitting for sound doctrine. Paul addresses older and younger men, older and younger women, Titus himself and slaves as he instructs Titus in applying the gospel to the ordinary affairs of everyday life. Paul begins with the old guys in the church. "Older men are to be temperate, (self-controlled: ability to focus yourself upon doing God's will and saying no to anything that distracts you or weakens you in that pursuit) dignified (acting appropriately and honorably, not easily frustrated or angry or quick-tempered. I've noticed a tendency in many men over 50 to become increasingly short-tempered and intolerant and apparently Paul noticed the same thing in first century Crete;) sensible (another word for self-controlled, prudent, reasonable) sound in faith (living by a literally healthy, well-informed and accurate faith in Christ and the gospel) in love (warm, sacrificial, other-centered affection) and in perseverance (not giving up or giving in.) If you like me are an old guy, that's what applying the gospel looks like for us; nothing extraordinary or heroic; just a man who controls his temper, his fear, his desires, his laziness and anything else that gets in the way of being a calm, reasonable and dignified gentleman; or a warm, loving man of faith. When I read vs. 2, I think of Jim Holst who served as the chairman at First Covenant Church in Oakland when I worked there. Jim led the annual church business meetings which got pretty emotional at times with people making all kinds of emotional pitches and accusations; and Jim always kept his head. He was always in control, dignified, calm, reasonable and respectful. One day I asked him how he was able to do that in the face of some very unreasonable people and he just said, "Because I didn't do it in the past and I learned my lesson." That's the kind of older man Paul describes here.

"Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, (just like the older men) not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, (which implies that this was a problem for the older women of Crete. We see similar warnings for the Christian women in Ephesus in Paul's letter to Timothy. Apparently the older women had time on their hands and would often spend it talking too much or drinking too much. Instead as women who have believed the gospel, Paul ways the older women should spend their time) teaching what is good, so that they may encourage (literally train) the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, (Why would the younger women in the church need to be trained by the older women to love their husbands and children? Probably because loving them did not come naturally in this culture. The word Paul uses for love here is a warm, affectionate love. Mom sets the emotional climate at home. When she is warm, affectionate, encouraging and welcoming; her husband and children want to be at home. When she is preoccupied, critical or cold, her husband and kids want to be anywhere else but home. But only the older women can teach the younger women that. They've lived with their husbands and kids longer and they know some stuff. So instead of wasting their time gossiping or escaping, they're training their little sisters which I think is really cool. They help each other in their walk with Christ.) to be sensible, (again that word for self-controlled. It appears so often in this passage that maybe the Cretans were lazy gluttons) pure, workers at home, (We need to be careful here that we don't read this verse with a 21st century bias. "Workers at home" is not about the "mommie wars" and whether moms should have their own careers or devote themselves entirely to their home and family. The key word for the women of Crete would be workers, not home. Women didn't work outside the home. The issue Paul is addressing is what they do at home; whether they're idle or industrious. Proverbs 31 is a great example of an industrious, hard-working and

productive woman and Paul is saying that older women need to train younger women in how to be productive and industrious in their homes) *kind, being subject to their own husbands*, (When we looked at this passage in our staff meeting this week, one of our staff said, "I'm glad you're teaching this passage and not me," because of this verse. We live in an egalitarian culture and many women naturally bristle at any idea they need to be subject to their husbands. I thought Christ came to set us free, but this looks like Paul has joined the Taliban. What has this got to do with the gospel? Be subject? To him? I'm more fit to lead than he is. If I followed him, we'd be broke before the year is out, and all he'll do about it is to change the channel. Did Jesus know that Paul was writing this stuff? The truth is, a lot of sincere Christian women want to ignore this passage. And if that's where you're at this morning, I'm asking you to try to lay aside for a few minutes the baggage of centuries of bad behavior by men, and try to see what this passage is actually says. First, being subject is not gender specific and has nothing to do with inherent worth or dignity. Jesus Himself is our example of submission as He not only submitted Himself to God but became a servant to all. All Christians are commanded to submit ourselves to each other, putting the interests of others before our own. Being subject is not an attack on our worth or dignity because the Son subjected Himself to the Father and as a result was exalted over all creation. Like Jesus, as Peter writes in 1 Peter 3, wives are to be subject to their husbands because it is Christlike. Second, submission is not a personality quality. Some have confused being subject to being weak, docile or fearful; but Jesus was the strongest and the most fearless of men. And Peter uses Sarah as an example of being subject to Abraham – yet if you read the story of Abraham and Sarah, you'll notice that Sarah was a very strong personality and never failed to tell her husband exactly what she thought. So don't confuse submission with weakness. Third, submission isn't a refusal to take responsibility for your own decisions. No Christian – man or woman - can say, "But I was only following orders." We are ultimately responsible to God and if we have to choose between obeying God and obeying somebody else, God always wins; whether we're talking about being subject to the government, to the church, to parents or to a husband. Submission is voluntarily putting the desires of others before our own out of conscience towards God. First, it is voluntary. I have to subject myself. If someone makes me submit, it's not biblical submission. It is my choice, not someone else's, whether it is Jesus submitting Himself to His parents, or citizens are subjecting themselves to the government, or church members subjecting themselves to the elders of the church, or servants subjecting themselves to their masters or Christ subjecting Himself to God; we subject ourselves. It is our decision. Second, it is a decision we make out of conscience towards God. Christians are to subject themselves to the government, church members to elders, children to parents, Christians to fellow Christians and wives to husbands NOT because those we subject ourselves to are our wise and unselfish and wonderful leaders, but because Christ commands it - just like He commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church; not because their wife is attractive or loving or easy to live with, but because Christ commands it. Submission is simply recognizing God-ordained authority and voluntarily submitting ourselves to that authority. As one wife put it, "Submission is just ducking so God can hit my husband." Finally in most marriages, submission is a continuous attitude and an occasional decision. Look, the only time you submit yourself to anyone is when your desires are in conflict. Submission is unnecessary if you agree. You only submit when you disagree and a final decision has to be made and somebody has to have the last word. Most Christian husbands and wives discuss decisions and hash things out until they come to an agreement; and smart husbands who love their wives don't make decisions their wives oppose unless they think it's necessary to obey God because God commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church and to put her welfare and interests before his own. Now the reason Paul gives to Titus for the older women to train the younger women in applying the gospel to their life is one we'll talk more about it a minute, "*so the word of God will not be dishonored.*" We'll come back to this.

But let's move on to Paul's instructions to the younger men in the church. "*Likewise urge the young men to be sensible;* (again we see Paul's emphasis on self-control, which must have been a great need in the culture of Crete. All these other character qualities are based in the ability to control oneself; to control our appetites, our emotions,

our fears and our faults; and apparently self-control was not a natural part of Cretan culture.) In the context of speaking to young men, Paul also talks directly to Titus himself; *“in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, {with} purity in doctrine, dignified, sound {in} speech which is beyond reproach...”* Titus is to be an example of all he teaches. When we talked about elders in chapter 1, we saw that in the early church, leaders lead primarily by example. They demonstrate so that others can imitate. So Titus is to be an example of all he teaches others *so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about (notice now, not Titus but) us.”* (Titus 2:6-8) The speed of the leader determines the speed of the team. The church will reflect the leader and so the most important thing Titus can do to change the culture of the church is to be an example of that change himself. So I had to ask myself, “Am I an example of good deeds? Do I look daily for ways to do good? Am I knowledgeable and precise in my understanding and communication of the gospel and the great doctrines of the Scriptures? Would people describe my speech as gracious and beyond reproach?” And all of this is motivated by the reputation of Christ, the gospel and the church...*“so the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.”* As a pastor and elder, this is a sobering passage for me because it says that Creekside will be a reflection of my strengths and weaknesses, just as your family or business or whatever you lead will be a reflection of your strengths and weaknesses. The most important responsibility we have as leaders is to be an example of what we want others to be and if I’m not doing myself what I’m critical of others for not doing, it is the height of hypocrisy.

Finally Paul tells Titus to apply the gospel to employment. *“Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.”* (Titus 2:9-10) “Bondslave” was the common Greek word for any slave or person who owned by another. Since one third of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves many of the early Christians were slaves; which is why Paul includes instructions for believers who are slaves in many of his letters; in this case, how slaves should conduct themselves in light of the gospel. They are to be the best slaves they can be, pleasing and not argumentative, honest and not stealing, but demonstrating their faith in the gospel by the way they serve so that they will adorn or enhance the gospel in every respect. None of us here are slaves although your boss may have not got that memo, but we can still apply these verses to whatever work we do. I had a friend who worked for Kaiser Steel who was very open about her faith at work until her supervisor said, “If you thought less about Jesus and more about steel, you’d be a lot more valuable to this company.” Ouch. The New Testament says that Jesus should make us a better employee, not worse; which is why Paul says the motivation for behaving this way is to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect; which we’ll talk more about in a moment.

Before we leave the arena for good deeds, I want to call three things to your attention. First, remember vs. 2-8 are not just a list of rules to keep. They begin and end with the gospel. These are the things which are fitting or appropriate for sound doctrine; how to behave in view of what Christ has done for us. And the motivation for doing these things which we’ll look at next week is the gospel. Second, this list is an application of the gospel to a specific group of people in a specific culture. Remember, Crete is Pirate Island, filled with pirates, con men and criminals and famous for its dishonesty, its laziness and its over-indulgent culture. During staff meeting this week, a couple of our staff shared about life on islands they had spent time on in the South Pacific and the Caribbean and island life is often different than mainland life, especially in the tropics. Food is often easier to get, life is slower and more self-indulgent; crime is sometimes more common because people would rather steal than work. That’s true in some places in the world today and it was true on Crete in the first century. The word of God is eternal and therefore always countercultural in every culture and the more Christians believe the gospel, the more countercultural we become. So while vs. 2-10 are applicable to every culture, they are particularly applicable in Crete.

How does the gospel lead to the character qualities listed here? Let's take one: self-control. In the crime-ridden, lazy, and self-indulgent culture of ancient Crete, how would the gospel lead to self-control? First, the gospel changes the way we define self-control. In religion, self-control is seen as the suppression of myself for a higher good; repressing what comes natural so that I can be a better person. But I'm fighting what I naturally am which makes self-control feel like self-denial and depriving myself of what I really want. But Jesus changes all that. When He comes into my life, He gives me a new heart and a new character so that the way He wants me to live is no longer unnatural but natural and fulfills my deepest needs and desires. I no longer have to control myself, I get to control myself – I've been freed from the destructive urges of my flesh and given the power to live the kind of life Jesus knows will make me happy. Self-control is His gift to me because He loves me and wants me to experience fullness of joy. Self-control is no longer repression of my true self but the expression of my true self. I find that the more I exercise self-control, the better I feel about myself and the better life works. Christ gives me the desire and the ability to live the way He wants me to live – that's the gospel. So the list in vs. 2-10 are the result of applying the gospel and specifically to applying the gospel to the culture of Crete. In applying the gospel to American culture we might come up with a slightly different list; one that emphasizes selflessness and living for others in an extremely selfish and individualistic culture; or of being content with a simpler lifestyle in an extremely materialistic and consumerist culture.

The third thing I want you to notice about this list is that the gospel is applied in community. All the commands here are given to the community of believers: to the older and younger men, the older and younger women, and to slaves. Titus is to be an example to the community of the things he teaches, the older women are to train the younger women because we apply the gospel together, not by ourselves. The church should be a counterculture where we see and learn the values of the gospel from one another. That means we have to know each other up close because we can't be an example nor can we imitate anyone from afar. The Christian life is as much caught as it is taught and that's why we emphasize small groups as the way we grow as followers of Jesus; we have to live in community together with like-minded believers in order to grow to maturity. If you're not in a group yet, check the website or the information desk or drop me an email and I'll help you to find the right group for you.

Before we close, let's look briefly at the power of good deeds. Why apply the gospel to our life? Why be extraordinary in the ordinary arena of everyday life. Paul repeats the same lesson three times. Vs. 5, "*... so that the word of God will not be dishonored.*" Vs. 8, "*... so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.*" Vs. 10: "*...to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.*" Can you see why doing good is so powerful? We are the only Bible many people will ever read and the impression people have of Jesus will be the result of the kind of people they observe us to be. That's why the church is called the body of Christ. We are Jesus' hands, mouth, and face. We are the way people see Him because He lives in us and the way they see Him is as we live consistently with the gospel in our normal, daily lives. Years ago, I heard about a country where preaching the gospel is illegal and yet many people were becoming believers. When asked how this was possible, the Christians there replied, "We are compelled to live such distinctive lives that people are compelled to ask us why?" We may have reached that place in America. We live in such an anti-Christian culture that the only way we are going to be able to influence people to come to Christ is the way the first Christians influenced the pagan culture in which they lived; through the way we live. "*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 5:16) We must be good news before people will listen to good news. That's what Jesus did. The apostle John writes that God became human to reveal Himself to us; that no one has seen God at any time but that Jesus has explained Him. What do we learn about God from Jesus? When John the Baptist was thrown into prison, he sent one of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the Promised One or do we look for someone else?" Jesus told John's disciple to return to John and to report what he sees. Blind people see, lame people walk, deaf people hear, lepers are cleansed, dead people live and poor

people hear good news. Who but God could do such things? Who but God would do such things? Jesus' good deeds revealed the utter goodness of God; that He is far better than we would ever dream possible. If you are not a Christian, the bible says that the kindness of God leads us to repentance. Taste and see that the Lord is good. No good thing does He withhold from those who trust Him.

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