

# A Christian Person

*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: 21 January 2024

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

- [ 0 : 00 ]     Let me tell you a bit my friend Bob. Bob's the current moderator of the Free Church of Scotland. He's a lecturer in theology at Edinburgh Theological Seminary on the Mount.
- Bob is one of the gentlest, the humblest and most intelligent men that I know. He's a man who's got more letters after his name than I've got in my name. And he originally came to Edinburgh from New Jersey to study history.
- He came to Edinburgh as a non-Christian. He found himself living with a Christian guy. And his flatmate told him about Jesus. And his life changed forever.
- So what Bob does now on top of everything else, and he's been doing this for a good number of years now, most mornings he goes to Socton Prison in the west of Edinburgh. And he's there as a prison chaplain.
- Now, the Scottish Herald ran an article about him earlier this year. And this was a man called Kevin McKenna who picked up the story. From what I can tell, he's a respectful non-Christian.
- [ 1 : 09 ]     And he interviewed Bob on the mound about why he does what he does. And he wrote this. I wanted you just to put this on the screen so you could see it. He said this in this article. There's something incongruous about this man.
- The leader of one of Scotland's oldest established churches, each day entering a domain that points more to the existence of the devil than of Jesus.
- Now, that word incongruous, in classic, why use three little words when you can use one big word writer's style? It means something that doesn't quite add up.
- Two things that just don't seem quite to go together. In this case, what is it that makes a highly respected church moderator and academic not want to use their time to climb the career ladder, but to use it to go into a prison?
- Now, Titus 3 tells us what motivates a person to want to do that. Now, we always talk here at Brunfield about how we want to be, both corporately and individually, as we live our lives in this world, we want to be walking question marks.
- [ 2 : 29 ]     That we live the kind of lives in front of people that would cause others to say about us that we don't believe what we hear you proclaim.
- We don't believe what you believe. We think it's borderline if we're honest offensive. But we cannot argue with what it seems to make you do in your life.
- Now, if you want a little intro into this, Paul wants to see this island of Crete. He wants to see it full of walking question marks. And it's all tied up with the central idea of this letter that's verse 1 of chapter 1, if you've got it there.
- And it's really simply this, that God's truth leads to godliness. Maybe think about it like this, and I'm a simple person.
- I like to think of things simply. I was making a lasagna sauce the other day. I don't know if this is just our house or our marriage, but this is what we do when it comes to adding ingredients.

[ 3 : 36 ] So we would talk about putting mushrooms in the sauce. And we would talk about putting carrots in the sauce. But we would talk about putting garlic through the sauce.

Does anyone else do that? No? No one's with me. Okay. But we're coming back last week, and we're just talking to one another.

And we thought, why on earth do we use a different word there to describe garlic? And I think this is why we do it. We want to say, we don't want to just taste a little bit of garlic. Actually, we want the whole of the garlic to go through all of the sauce.

Mushrooms in, garlic through. See, when God's truth goes through a person and through a church, it results in godliness.

That's what he's saying. It results in godliness. Now, chapter one, we thought about elders. We thought about men who are full of Christ-like character, who want to serve and love others like Jesus.

[ 4 : 41 ] They are called to guard and teach the truth. Okay? And we thought about last week how that truth is meant to be passed on. It's meant to reverberate like a ball in a pinball machine all the way through the different people in our church family.

Young, old, male, female. God has called us as a church family to help each other figure out what faithfulness to Jesus looks like in our different life stages.

And that's why for some of us here, and it's so wonderful to meet new people. But let me just say maybe one big thing that you can do this year off the back, maybe, of this series is come more to the center.

Because this is God's design for the local church. That this would be, we thought about it last week, the godliness gym. This is where you're going to meet people who are going to help you grow in godliness.

This week, it's all about Christianity going public. This is J.C. Ryle, the former bishop of Liverpool. He said this, Now, the world that we live in may have given you the impression that your Christianity is kind of like what was said about children way back in the day.

[ 6 : 05 ] That children should be seen, but not heard. Let me just say there's zero chance of that happening in this church. But maybe that's what you think. Maybe you've been given the impression that your Christianity, it might be okay in here, but it certainly doesn't belong or work out there.

Well, here's a question for you as you think about that. And maybe particularly if you're not a Christian here today, I'd love you to just engage in this little question here. What do you think being a good citizen looks like today?

What's some of the words that come to mind? What kind of person do you picture? What does a good citizen look like today? Let me just tell you how you would have answered that question in the Roman Empire.

The Romans had this thing called the Via Romana, the Roman way. And it was this list of virtues that every Roman citizen should aspire to have and to be.

Now, I think I found 15 of these online. Let me just give you four of these, and you'll see where we're going with this. So here's four of them. Clemensia, I think you pronounce that as. It's this idea of gentleness, of meekness of spirit.

[ 7 : 19 ] Industria. Again, you'll see where our English words, so many of them come from. That you should want to play your role in being productive and working for the flourishing of society. Severitas, that sense of self-control and civic responsibility.

Pietas, that sense of devotion to and compassion for others who you rub shoulders with every single day. This is what the Roman Empire wants to see in its citizens.

But you have to say, if what Epimenides observed about Cretans at verse 12 of chapter 1 is correct, then we can be pretty confident that no one from Crete is going to be up for an MBE for services to society anytime soon, if that's the attitude.

Yeah? You can have all the moral aspirations that you want, but whatever the people in this island of Crete are filling the tank of their lives with, what it's producing is just not cutting it.

Now, see what you have there in the opening few verses of chapter 3 with that backdrop. Paul's not plucked these things out of thin air. This is so much of what Rome longs to see in its citizens, but it just cannot seem to produce.

[ 8 : 41 ] However, the gospel of Jesus, as like garlic, it works its way through a people and through a church, what does the gospel of Jesus produce in the lives of everyday Cretans?

Do you see? People who are ready for good works, people who are gentle and who avoid quarreling and people who, and I love this, who show perfect courtesy towards all people.

Do you see what he's subtly doing? Only the gospel can deliver the goods. Now, here's three quick things I think we learn from this chapter as we bring this series home.

Here's number one. It's that the gospel equips us to live in society. So we should embrace the call to be a blessing to our culture and our world.

How do we do that? We'll just see some of the things that he rhymes off there. By being submissive and being obedient to those who are in places of authority. So long as what we're being asked to do doesn't call us to compromise on being loyal to Jesus and his words, not because we are sticklers for religious rules, but because we believe that that is precisely how human beings will flourish and have life.

[ 10 : 07 ] We're called to be those who have the biggest interest in the flourishing of the people in our communities. Now listen, our politicians might not always get our vote, but they should always have our prayers.

How different the believer in the world is going to look who is obedient, who is marked by gentleness. Do you know what? Someone made the mistake of going on social media this morning and it was not a gentle place.

Do you know what I think? Gentleness is one of the most underrated virtues in our world today. People who don't default just to speaking evil of people. On the contrary, some people, someone who is known as someone who is ready for every good work, how appealing is that today?

Think about how this is playing out in your schools, in your places of work, in your neighborhoods, in our universities, in our colleges. Do we live the kind of lives in our community that people say, we're just really glad that you're here?

So that when people say Christianity is bad for society, we can say, I don't think that's true. You know, there's recent research done by the London School of Economics on Christian debt charity, Christians Against Poverty.

[ 11 : 29 ] Some of you might have heard of them. Apparently, apparently, their army of volunteers and their organization, get this, contributes 32 million pounds to the UK economy each year.

Isn't that amazing? 32 million pounds. Now, you've got to ask, what makes people want to do that? Well, Paul goes on to give the most wonderful description of the gospel.

And it is breathtakingly profound, and I want you to see it. I've been asking myself all meek, why mention it now? Well, I take it as we think about living our lives out there, for the glory of Jesus, as we love our neighbor, once you get this, the gospel, it totally changes how you view other people.

In other words, when this message goes deep, our hearts should grow soft. As we think about the people in our world, our hearts will grow soft.

And that's just the second thing for us to see here, is that the gospel changes us so that we love other people. You see, here's what the Christian was by nature before Jesus found us, from verse 3.

[ 12 : 44 ] Do you see it there on the outside? We were foolish. We were disobedient. We were so easily led astray by our passions and desires.

And that's what was playing out on the outside of our lives. What was playing out on the inside, what was driving it all, was malice and envy. Now, malice is just the opposite of that word unity.

We were hating and being hated. And all of this is just code for that once upon a time, the Christian was just like every other person in this world.

Take that in for just a minute. Because it is profoundly important that we understand it. Isn't that incredibly humbling today? And isn't that also incredibly liberating today?

And maybe I just want to speak into the lives of those for whom I know this has been a really, really rough start to the year. You know, if 2024 was like a 100 meter race, you feel like you got out of the blocks only to feel like you tripped over and landed flat on your face.

[ 13 : 56 ] And you're just into the race. And there's so many of us that are experiencing that. And dear friends, I want you to see the heart of this God here.

Do you see it in verse four? His heart is goodness and loving kindness. And that's a reference to his never changing covenant, pursuing love for his people.

And if you want a wee trail to go on this afternoon in terms of scripture, there's a Psalm 23 flavor to that phrase. The God who came in the person of Jesus to seek and to save the lost.

His heart for you today is one of goodness and loving kindness. You know, there's a five letter word beginning with M that's behind salvation and see it in verse five.

And do you see how it's not merit? Do you see how it's mercy? When Jesus died on the cross, dear friends, his blood covered all of our sins, all of our shame.

[ 15 : 11 ] And when the spirit came and he applied that work of Jesus to our lives, he washed us clean. And what that means is that God is not sitting in heaven as our heavenly father, having done all that for us, secretly disappointed that we're not somehow more in control of everything that's going on.

Like we should be better, that we should have life more sorted. No, no, no, no. He is saying, because of Christ, because of the spirit, he is saying, would you run to me and would you know that I love you as a heavenly father?

He saved us because of the goodness and loving kindness. And do you see how we are justified? Verse seven, and justified is just that biblical word meaning made right with, declared right in the sight of.

That happens to us by his grace. Do you know what grace is? It's the way I heard it years ago and I think it works. Just imagine somebody ran up to you in the street and hit you in the face and you hit them back.

Right? That would be justice. Imagine if somebody ran up to you in the street and hit you in the face and you didn't hit them back but you said, I forgive you. That would be mercy.

[ 16 : 29 ] But imagine that somebody ran up to you in the street, hit you in the face, said, I forgive you. You said to them, I forgive you. You didn't hit them back and instead you took them out for an ice cream. That would be grace.

Getting something that we just don't deserve. Do you remember that? Some of you will know that hymn from years and years ago. Wonderful grace that gives what I don't deserve, pays me what Christ has earned and lets me go free.

Wonderful grace that gives me the time to change, washes away the stains that once covered me. We are saved by grace. We walk by grace.

It is grace that saved us. It is grace that gives us home. This is how committed this God is to you. Do you see when it comes to the hope of the future, no matter what's going on in your life today, he has future-proofed it by his blood on the cross.

And if that was us before, do you see after? Now the Christian is someone who God has transformed and who is now devoted to, verse 8, Jesus shaped good works for his glory.

[ 17 : 40 ] That's the message presumably that's excellent and profitable for people. And that's the message from verse 9 is in danger of being undermined in Crete. Somehow that it robs Jesus of his absolute sufficiency.

If you like, perhaps this is people with a Jewish legal flavor to it who are promoting merit and not mercy as the way that you and I and people are made right with God.

And it's no wonder that the Pharisees, as you meet them in the Gospels, that they look down on people. Because if you think, verse 9, that your adherence to the Old Testament law or the fact that you're from the right place or the right stock makes you right with God, if that's how you view it, then surely that's got to affect how you view and treat other people.

Paul says, if it persists, you need to compassionately and carefully, Titus, root it out. The Gospel changes us so that we love other people.

And then thirdly, and this is lastly, we bring this series home with this. And thirdly, the Gospel encourages us to take our opportunities. Now, can I just put out two words here? There's so much we could say here, but here's two words just to notice.

[ 18 : 59 ] Notice the word speed at verse 13. And here's a little insight into Paul's ministry teamwork mentality.

Verse 12, we get these individuals who are rhymed off. We get Artemis. We get Tychicus. We get Zenas the lawyer. And we get Apollos. Now, it's just worth pausing.

There's lots we could say there. But something that my heart was drawn to this week is how Paul speaks of Apollos. Now, in the New Testament story, this is a man who God has equipped with a wonderful speaking gift.

And so many try and stir it in the New Testament as we see some follow Apollos, some follow Paul. Some say, Paul, you're not as impressive as him. But I love the way that Paul will speak so positively of Apollos behind his back.

That he will celebrate the gift that this man has been given by God. And he becomes proof that envy and malice, the gospel has taken them out of his heart.

[ 20 : 10 ] He can promote a brother behind his back. Best guess is that Apollos and Zenas are probably soon to be stopping off in Crete on their way to Africa to continue their ministry there.

Paul wants the church in Crete, when those two arrive, he wants them to help them on their journey. Right? Maybe think of it like this, like one of these moving walkways that you'd get in an airport.

You know the kind of things? The things that are designed to speed you up. If you think about it, we are called to be that for every single person who comes through these doors for however long or for however short a time.

That because of the welcome and love that they've received in this church family, that people leave here with a stride in their spiritual step.

Let's say it's just one of the greatest joys that we have as a church family to be able to do that. We always talk about how our goal here at Brunsfield is that people would leave in a better place with Jesus than when they came.

[ 21 : 22 ] People would leave with a stride in their spiritual step. So look around. Who's new here today? Maybe who's here for a short bit of time. How can we as a church speed them on their way?

Let me just say, if you're a visitor here today, you've picked a cracking Sunday to come. See the word urgent in verse 14. Paul wants this fat church family to be devoted to urgent needs.

And we've got to ask, haven't we, what are the needs that are around us just now? What are the gifts and resources that God has given you? Are you that for such a time as this person who happens to come to this church family who can meet a need that exists in here?

Now, I forgot to bring it up, but there's a letter that went around this morning about what we want to do for the care of this building, about our roof, right? The roof's been leaking a little bit.

We want to take the financial hit now so that the future generations of this church will not be burdened by the roof. And if you're somebody who can contribute to that in many holistic ways, please get involved with the gospel vision behind that.

[ 22 : 36 ] Could you get involved in our kids' work here today? You know, we've got so many young people who come here now. That is such a blessing. But speak to Pete and he will tell you that we're just desperate for people to come and get involved in kids' work and kids' ministry.

Is that something that you could get involved with today? What's the gospel need in here? But also what's the gospel need, the urgent need out there? Let me just say the gospel need in this country has never been greater.

Have you ever considered gospel ministry? Something that I do, Keita does, Pete does, Archie does.

Have you ever considered giving your life to gospel ministry? Let me just say there is no greater joy than doing this. Are you at the point right now in your life where you could give a day or so a week to helping somewhere?

Can I just say flexible working for our generation of workers? That opens up with huge gospel opportunities for us that a generation before us just never had.

[ 23 : 44 ] Do you find yourself in a job that doesn't require you to be geographically tied as once it did? Are you free to be able to work from somewhere else but you can still work from Edinburgh or come in a day or two a week?

Let me just chuck one out there. Could, for example, you get involved in what God is doing down in Peebles with Archie and Katie? Could you get involved with that? Do you see, maybe some of you are here today, you're thinking about what your future holds, jobs that you can apply for.

Friends, let me encourage you to factor in the gospel need into those decisions that you make. What is the urgent need out there?

Paul says to this church family, he wants them to be ready for every good work because grace-saturated believers who are living question mark kind of lives in our world, let me just say they will always draw the questions.

They will always draw people's attention. Wherever you are, whatever tomorrow holds for you, what could this look like in your life?

[ 24 : 52 ] Listen, just as we close, let me take you back to my friend Bob. You know, tragically, Bob's wife Heather died of cancer back in the summer of 2022.

Remember exactly where I was when I heard the news. And when the prison heard, they got in touch with Bob and they said, listen, some of us would love to come and show our respects at our funeral.

Bob said, listen, we would love to have you there. And what started out is just a few of them. By the time the word had spread and got round the prison and the day came, two busloads carrying a hundred men and women, both current and retired employees, came to be there, right?

You read the article and this is what it says. The story goes that when the inmates were told that the prison was going to shut down for the funeral for a number of hours so that everybody could go to the funeral and pay their respects, meaning that everyone was going to be confined to their rooms for that period of time when all the staff were away, every single inmate was more than happy to oblige.

It's a walking question mark kind of life, isn't it? What kind of life causes prisons to shut? Only the gospel can do it.

[ 26 : 09 ] A godly one that's been deeply affected by the grace and loving kindness of God in Christ. Friends, that needs to go through a person.

Here's what I want to do. Let's just be quiet for a moment. And I'd love us just as we finish this series to just pray. And let's ask that God by his spirit, as we respond to this, as we think about our individual lives, would help us to understand what it's going to mean for us to be a people who are ready for good works.

And then I'll pray. We just thank you, Lord, for the words of Jesus, that he says that he is the good shepherd.

Father, thank you for your goodness and your loving kindness to us expressed in the sending of Jesus.

Father, I pray as we respond to this message today and to this letter to your words, that the words of Psalm 19, verse 7 would be true, that the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

[ 27 : 31 ] And Father, I maybe pray particularly this morning for those who are maybe struggling, who are maybe hurting, who are maybe at points of life where they face new things, new seasons.

Lord, I pray that you would guide us. Pray for Pete and Terry this morning, Lord, as they go. We pray, Father, and confidently as they move to Wales that you have good works prepared for them in advance for them to walk in.

Bless them as they go, Father. Pray for Jenny this morning as well, Lord. We pray for her, Lord, that you would help her hand to heal. Father, we think of so many others in this church family who are maybe grieving or hurting right now.

And Father, we pray that the truth of who you are, the truth of the gospel, Lord, would bring such comfort and peace to us right now. Father, we thank you for each other.

We thank you for this journey through this letter of Titus. Lord, help us to be a church family who's committed to truth and committed to each other. And committed to making your glory known as we live our lives in this world.

[ 28 : 40 ] Father, we just thank you for your love for us. And we pray all of these things in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.