

Know and Speak the Truth

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[0 : 00] Father, we ask that you would continue to pour out your Holy Spirit upon us as we read your word again and as we think upon your word. Father, we ask that you would not just help our minds to be conformed to your word, but that we would be disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, who are learning to live for your glory.

Father, we ask that your word would touch our hearts and bring before us those different ways that we deceive ourselves and think your word applies to others and not to us.

And as well, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would deal with our fear of your word, our fear that your word will hurt us, that you will hurt us. Father, draw us to yourself.

Make us mindful of your son and his death on the cross for us. And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen. Please be seated. So I don't know how many of you, how carefully you are listening to Rachel read the Bible, but I know that the first time, and I'll be honest with you, many, many times when I'm reading the Bible, my eyes are just going over the page fairly quickly.

I'm not really taking it in. But I remember the great shock when I saw it in the Bible that all Cretans are liars, lazy beasts, and gluttons.

[1 : 24] And then it says, this saying is true. That was a huge shock to me because it seemed as if the Bible is perpetuating prejudice and, in fact, encouraging prejudice.

And that was separate from the fact that the first time I read this text as well, it really, it came to me or it felt to me as if the Bible was being very sexist as well in terms of how it treated women.

And so, you know, it's part of the reason why in the early years of my Christian life, which probably went on way too long, I would keep reading parts of the Bible that I found helpful to me.

And parts of the Bible which troubled me, I would steer away from them. So I wouldn't read books like Titus very often because of the apparent sexism and prejudice and encouragement of sexism and prejudice that I saw when I read the book of Titus.

So I know it's not really, some of you, if you're guests, you're maybe even surprised that I would be sort of talking about this in public. But the fact of the matter is that many of us, maybe for decades in our Christian life, are afraid to read parts of the Bible because of things that it says in it.

[2 : 37] So we're going to look at Titus. So it would be a great help to me if you got your Bibles out. We're going to look at the type. We're going to look at Titus chapter 1. And we're going to go through the whole chapter. And let's just see what it says and what it doesn't say.

How it confronts our hearts. How it confronts our culture. And at the end of the day, we desperately need God's word. And it's going to begin in a surprising way.

In a way that, in fact, if we take it seriously, is going to trouble us even more. Listen to how it goes. And in the original language, the first four verses are one complicated, long sentence.

And I like pointing these things out that has some grammatical flaws in it as well, by the way. And it goes like this. Paul, a servant.

That's a *doulos*, sometimes translated as slave. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.

[3 : 52] To Titus, my true child and a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. And as I said, it's a complicated sentence, and there's some grammatical issues.

But here's just a few things for you to know about Titus. Titus was Exhibit A in the Council of Jerusalem when they were trying to have a debate as to whether pagans who became Christians had to be circumcised.

And Titus was Exhibit A as a pagan who had become a Christian, and the church in Acts 15 decided they didn't have to. The pagans, for many of us guys here, it's not a requirement to become a Christian to be circumcised.

And Titus as well, this book is being written to Titus by Paul probably in about the year 63 or 64, a couple of years before Paul himself is martyred under Nero.

And Paul is giving Titus advice about how to order and structure the church, because there's been an evangelistic campaign in the island of Crete, and many people have come to faith.

[4 : 59] Paul has moved on, and now Titus is to bring some order into the situation. But here's the thing. If you could put up the first point, that would be great. This is, on one hand, going to seem like it's a very, very obvious point, and not actually very surprising or important.

But we need to spend some time on this, because it's actually very mind-blowing, and very important to us to understand who we are and what goes on in the world.

The true and living God, self-revealed in the Bible, never, ever, ever lies. In the time that the New Testament was written, in paganism, one of the things about the pagan gods, they lied all the time. They lied all the time.

That doesn't mean that pagans lied all the time, but the gods lied all the time. If you think about it for a second, members of the great faiths, some of the great religions on the planet, in Hinduism and Buddhism, it's not, I'm not saying that Hindus, as individuals and Buddhists, that they lie a lot.

I'm not saying that at all. But truth is a complicated, it's not really grounded. The desire to tell the truth and the seeking of telling the truth isn't really grounded in the religion and the philosophy.

[6 : 25] Because at the end of the day, in both of those faiths, the goal is to get beyond difference, to understand that all things are one, truth and falsehood, evil and good, you and I, tree and me, that ultimately the distinctions between these things are apparent and not real, and the whole goal is to get beyond good and evil, beyond difference, and ultimately beyond truth and falsehood.

So it actually means that the idea of us, and if we're honest, human beings both greatly desire to know the truth, we're also afraid of the truth, but how is this desire for the truth grounded when ultimate reality is ultimately going beyond all difference, including the difference of truth and falsehood?

In Islam, once again, not saying that individual Muslims lie, but in Islam, God is God. If he wants to tell a lie, he can tell a lie. If he wants to tell the truth, he can tell the truth. Who are you to speak to him? Slap, slap, slap.

Just being a bit, sorry, I don't want to be dismissive. But God is so sovereign and so powerful, he can do literally whatever he wants, whatever he feels like, it's completely and utterly up to him. In a sense, he's not bound by having to tell the truth.

And so, and then you think in our modern world, you know, in university probably, there'd be many, many people in university that say the whole idea of truth and knowing the truth is a modernist conceit.

[7 : 50] That any claim to know the truth is really just a claim to know power and to desire to have power over others. And, I mean, one of the ironies is if that you say then is your claim that all truth claims are just power claims, is that claim that you just made an attempt to have power over me.

They'd want to insist that it was true, not actually a claim of power. That, in fact, in both the ancient and the modern world, on one hand, humanly speaking, existentially, we have a great desire, we have this complicated relationship with truth, but as part of that complicated relationship with truth, we do want to know the truth.

We know that we ourselves tell lies, but we hate it when somebody tells us a lie. Sometimes, in relationships, we want to bring the truth out in the relationships.

Others, times, we're hoping that our wife or our husband will not speak the truth to us. We have complicated relationships with the truth, but what's it grounded on? One of the reasons that in the modern world that the truth is very hard to ground is because at the very heart of modern thought, this is the government, this is the media, this is the university, this is arts and entertainment, there's a great incoherence.

Because as a key building block of how people think in the modern world is the belief that life came about completely and utterly by random chance.

[9 : 22] And after life came about, then evolution happened. So in a sense, the modern story is, life came about completely randomly by chance.

Eventually, men and women descended from the apes, therefore know the truth and tell the truth. That doesn't make any sense whatsoever. It doesn't follow at all.

The Christian story, the big overarching story, is a very, very, very different story.

And I think that the Christian story, as revealed in the Bible, is the only story that actually makes sense of our lived experience. The Christian story is that fundamentally, the true and living God, self-revealed in the Bible, never, ever, ever lies.

And this God who never, ever, ever lies, and only is the truth and speaks the truth, that he created and sustains all things and made human beings in his image.

[10 : 28] And so it is that we human beings have a desire and a drive to speak and to know the truth. The true and living God, self-revealed in the Bible, he is the same one who's created all things, designed, in a sense, all things, sustains all things, made human beings in his image.

And therefore, we have a fundamental desire and drive to know the truth and to be in the truth. That in our heart of hearts, we want to be people of the truth, not people of the lie.

To tell another group of people that they are people of the lie would be a huge offense. Every human being wants to be part of the people of the truth.

So some of you might say, George, okay, this is, this went really in a different way than I thought this text was going to go. But this is how the book of Titus begins, by making these very, very bold claims about God.

But some of you might say, George, but the problem is we all lie. Like, George, you lie, don't you? You've lied in the past. You lie today. You're going to lie in the future.

[11 : 38] Like, how does that fit in with your story? But you see, this is actually, once again, why I believe that it's only, if you think about it, that the biblical narrative, the biblical meta-narrative, is the only narrative that makes sense of our experience.

Because as I described at the beginning, just a few minutes ago, how the biblical narrative works, I didn't complete the narrative. And to complete the narrative is that the true and living God, who has, in a sense, existence in and of himself, is the one who's created all things, designed all things, he sustains all things, he made human beings in his image.

And at some point in time, in our primal history, we human beings decided that we would be God. I think Genesis 3, regardless, for any human being, secular, spiritual, not religious, there is no story more true that has ever been written than Genesis 3.

But Genesis 1, 2, and 3 explains so much of human life and human endeavor. So human beings rebelled against God and desired to be God, to have his role.

And in doing that, we became bent, we became twisted. And God did not annihilate his image in us, but our reflecting the image and the likeness of God became impaired.

[12 : 59] We became impaired. We became bent or twisted. And so on one hand, we now have a complicated relationship with God. On one hand, in the depths of our beings, we long and yearn for the true and living God.

On the other hand, in the depths of our beings, we do not want God to be present. We want to be God ourselves. We want to know the truth. On the other hand, we don't want to know the truth. We want to be able to manage and massage what is said so that the truth that is said in public or about ourselves will be ones that further our own ego and our own drives and desires.

But at the same time, we want others to speak the unvarnished truth to us. Unless it hurts. We have a very complicated relationship with the truth. And I think only the biblical narrative actually grounds that at a very, very fundamental level.

And it reveals to us why it is that we need a savior. That I can never leave myself to save myself. I can never leave myself to fix myself.

It doesn't matter if I have an out-of-body experience. It doesn't matter if I meditate, if I learn physics and anthropology and poetry and music and business and all of those other things.

[14 : 08] I can never leave myself. I can never leave my bentness, twistedness, fallenness. Those aspects of me that still very much show and reflect that I am a designed being and that I am made in the image of God.

Yet there's something. I can never leave that to save myself. And so it is despite all of my desires to justify myself, to appear righteous to myself, to appear completely and utterly controlled, despite all

of my desires, whether it's done through spiritual, not religious, whether it's done through religious ceremonies and rituals, whether it's done through science or the humanities or art or philosophy or political action or political institutions, I cannot save myself.

And unless God comes into space and time to do what I cannot do, then I will always remain and all of the people around me will remain bent and twisted. Our complicated relationship with the truth and our complicated relationship with lies reveals that we need a savior.

And that's the other thing about this text which is so completely and utterly powerful. Like, it not only reveals that the God who does exist, that the true and living God, self-revealed in the Bible, never, ever, ever lies, but it also reveals that he saves, that his desire is that we will begin to live a life with him under his care and authority that will go on for all eternity.

Like, look again at Titus 1. Look at verses 3 and 4 in Titus 1. Like, at the same time, just after in verse 2, it says, the God who never lies has promised before ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.

[16:06] To Titus, my true child, in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. That the text introduces us, you know, one of the reasons that we fear the truth is because many people use the truth towards us in a brutal way.

And if we are honest, sometimes we use truth in a brutal way. In a way to shame, to humiliate, to put down as a means for us to gain power and control.

And we often project and transfer what we do ourselves and what we are worried that we will do ourselves and what people do to us ourselves and we project that onto God.

And the same self-revelation of God that reveals that he only speaks the truth that he never, ever, ever lies reveals that he is Savior and that he has sent his Son into history, into space and time to save us.

If you could put up the next point, Rebecca, when I receive the Gospel, I receive grace-filled power from God which makes me right with him and leads me to start living right with him and all that he has created.

[17:17] it's important. In all of our understandings of the Christian faith, it's not just that I have this individual personal relationship with God that has no social consequences nor consequences in terms of how I relate to the created world and other people.

It's not just that the cross, as we put our faith and trust in what Jesus has done for us on the cross, that we are receiving a power that comes from God to make us right with him but that same power that comes from God that makes us right with him and all begins to work within us a desire to live right with him and God didn't just create me.

It's not a narcissistic world where there's just me and God. It means that I start to have a desire to live right with others. That that's what grace does when grace comes into our lives.

It's one of the signs that we have received grace from God. Not that we live perfect lives but often what should be characterizing Christians is not perfection but penitence.

Lord have mercy upon me. And that's what grace does when it comes into our lives. And that's one of the things that's, this is the introduction to the entire letter and Paul is going to be driving this home in terms of the fact that not only does he want the people in the Cretans, the people on Crete to come to a faith in Jesus but for them to understand that when they come to a faith in Jesus it's not a license for them to be arrogant.

[18:50] It's not a license for them to be violent. It's not a license to do whatever they want but that the same grace that's going to make them right with God will be to begin to put within them the ability and the hunger and the yearnings and the longings and the self-awareness and the delivery from self-deception so that we can actually start to try to live right with other people and with the created order.

If you could just put up the next point, another way to put this is that God calls us, that's the significance of the elect, it's an image of God calling us ordinary human beings.

Like, you know, if you come here today and you're not sure whether you're a person that's giving your life to Jesus, you're not even sure if you want to have anything to do with Jesus. What I can tell you right now is that God is calling you.

He's calling you as you sit there. He's calling you by name. He wants you to come to him. He wants you to hear his word. He wants you to hear about what Jesus has done for you on the cross, that you might respond with open-handed faith and receive from him the power that can only come from

him, that's filled with grace and mercy, that will make you right with him.

And God calls us so that we will come to saving faith, know the truth, live a godly life, and begin to live with him forever. That's what Paul is wanting the people in Crete to understand.

[20 : 22] Now, some of you are going to say, okay, George, you've spent a lot of time on this. Is this going to be one of those times where you're a little bit like a magician, you know, and you have the dancing girls and all that other stuff, and you're trying to do some little sleight-of-hand stuff so that we can forget this other sexist and prejudiced stuff.

No, I'm not doing that at all. And depending on how you look at it, what's going to come next is either greatly tragic or greatly incoherent. But it's really important for us to grasp this opening introduction before we see what it is that Paul is going to say and isn't saying in the rest of the book. So let's look at verse 5. Is Paul now going to be making some sexist statements? Is he propping up patriarchy at the expense of women?

Verse 5. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

And the word elder here, we'll just pause. In the Greek, it sounds like presbyter. And we're going to see in a moment that the presbyter position and the episcopus or the bishop's position, he's sort of treating them almost as synonymous.

[21 : 37] And so it's not the same word as is often used for pastor, which comes from a different word. There's a different text that come out of it. The word underlying the word that we use as pastor comes from the idea of shepherd.

But this word elder isn't describing somebody who's old. In this room, I don't know if there's some visiting clergy, but as in Anglican polity, I'm the only elder in the room.

I know I'm getting elderly as well, but I've been an elder since I was 28, when I was set aside to have this role of the presbyter in congregations.

And different denominations have different ways of ordering them and all that type of stuff. But there's this, most denominations, apart from Salvation Army and Brethren, have some sense of the elder who's set aside.

And so that's what's it. So I'll just say it again. Verse 5, this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order. That's his big task, and he has one other task, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

[22 : 43] If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, or literally, a one man woman. That's what it says literally in the Greek. A one man, sorry, a one woman man.

Yeah, yeah, I'm getting old. Not only will I have to be doing this very shortly with a walker like this, but my eventually goes so gag-a, you're going to have to take me away from here.

The cane will gently drag me aside, and I'll sit there happily singing hymns and praise songs. Anyway, sorry, hopefully in tune still.

It literally says a one woman man. That's literally what it says, a one woman man. His children are believers, continuing in verse 6, not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

For an overseer, that is the word that's usually often translated as bishop. Episcopus is the underlying Greek word. As God's steward, must be above reproach.

[23 : 45] He must not be arrogant or quick tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

And in the original language, verse 9 is emphasized. If we were using a more modern way to communicate the original language, it would be bolded. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine.

It also means healthy or wholesome doctrine, and also to rebuke those who contradict it. So, here's the first thing.

I'm going to go in a way that you're completely and utterly maybe going to surprise you, but it's a really important word to Canadians today. Brothers and sisters, those of you who are here are Christians, we are not Muslims.

We are not Hindus. We are not Buddhists. You can be a very, very, very devout Muslim and never go to the mosque once in your entire life. You can be a very devout Buddhist, very, very devout Hindu and never go to the temple once in your entire life.

[24 : 54] It's very interesting that Paul here, he's done a ministry of evangelism throughout the island. Many people have come to faith, and it's not now that he says, well, now that they're in faith,

just teach them to download Matt Chandler's latest sermon, because what it means to be a Christian is to just listen by yourself to sermons from really good speakers like Tim Keller or Matt Chandler, and that's the Christian life.

He doesn't say, just by the way, every once in a while you should come together a little bit like a crowd, and I'll just zap you with the Holy Spirit, and somebody will have a prophetic word, and then afterwards you just sort of disappear and you go back.

As I put it here, if you could put up the point, Rebecca, that would be great. God does not make happenstance crowds. Sorry, every once in a while I have to show you that I'm educated.

God does not make happenstance crowds. He forms communities on the move. It doesn't create static communities, but communities that are going to be on the move, because the rest of the letter is going to be about how to transmit the faith, movement, how to transmit the faith to new believers, how to share the gospel with people who are outside of the church, how to transmit the gospel to children, the new generations that keep arising.

God here calls, first of all, he calls you to a saving faith with himself, and then he calls you into community, and the community is going to have some type of structure.

[26 : 24] It's a very, very powerful word, because especially in 2016 in Ottawa, where you can have far better sermons than I can give, you can find online for free.

You can just spend your Sunday mornings going for a drive in the country, or, you know, hanging out at your favorite cafe or Tim Hortons. You can listen to Tim Keller or somebody like that, way better speaker than I am, way wiser than I am, and that can be your Christian life, and the Bible basically says that's not the Christian life.

That while a devout Muslim or a Buddhist or a Hindu can be devout in all of those ways within their own context and never actually meet with others, Christians are designed, God has called us to walk together.

Could you put up the next one? Here's another way to put it. Some of you have been here before over the years. This is one of the little sayings that I've developed. We enter the Jesus way one by one, but we walk the Jesus way with Jesus and others.

We enter the Jesus way one by one. We have to come to a personal saving faith in Jesus. We don't inherit the Christian faith from our parents or our grandparents. We might be told it by them, but we have to receive it for ourselves personally.

[27 : 38] So we enter the Christian faith through the Jesus way one by one, but we walk the Jesus way. We're to walk it, not to sit it. And we walk it with Jesus and with others.

And that's the Jesus way. That's the Jesus way which is presented in the New Testament. And somebody might say, okay, George, whoa, whoa, look at that time. husband of one wife, a one woman man.

Well, let's look at verse six again. If anyone is above reproach, who can be an elder, who can be an episcopist? Anyone who is above reproach, the husband of one wife, a one woman man.

For many years, I was a supporter.

I don't know how to go into it. I'm just going to go into it. This might not be very polished or anything like that. Just a little bit of a personal history about me. For many of you, you know that for many, many, many, many decades, I was a firm supporter that women could be elders.

[28 : 49] This text was a problem to me. And the way that churches and many Christians, not necessarily saying you, the way that many churches deal with this, the very plain sense of the original language that's consistent with other texts in the New Testament, some churches deal with this by talking and understanding that the Bible is just a repository of symbols.

It's sort of like if you go to watch Daredevil on Netflix and the Punisher goes into a room and when he opens the door and in the room, there's a whole pile of different weapons.

And the Punisher can go and get a different weapon, whatever he feels like he needs. And some people say that they're being biblical because the Bible is like the Punisher's room of lots of weapons and explosives and ammunition.

And you can just sort of pick the bits and pieces of ammunition you need for the task that's at hand. But that really goes against the whole understanding that God never lies and that it's one word that he speaks.

It's that the call of the Christian is to have a consistent and coherent reading of God's word, even if that means you go against the culture. But that the goal is not just to always go against the culture,

not just to be what if the culture says yes, I'm going to say no.

[30 : 05] If the culture says no, I'm going to. It's not just to always be a pain in the butt to the culture. It's that mindful of the culture, mindful of what you're understanding, mindful of how they understand things at the same time that we want to ultimately read and know the Bible and have the Bible form us and the Bible speaks one consistent, coherent word and we need to seek it.

And, you know, there's others who basically say that, well, you know, you can never solve these problems of why it is that in Acts, in Romans 16, which we just looked at last week, and if you're curious about what I said about it, you can go online and listen to it.

And in Romans 16, it's very, very clear that Phoebe is a really important person. The church has lots of authority, that Prisca teaches Apollos, that Junia is an apostle and Junia is a woman's name, that they have significant ministries that they teach, that there's women who prophesy and pray in public gatherings with men and women.

If you read the New Testament, you read the book of Galatians and you read the book of Ephesians and you read other books, it's very, very clear that women, there's no distinction between whether or not women have the abilities to lead, whether they have the abilities to teach, whether they have the abilities to exercise different types of authority.

It's very, very clear if you read the New Testament that there's this fundamental equality in the receiving of different gifts. And so some people just say, well, you'll never figure out the difference, so we should just pick the nice Canadian option and say that women should be elders.

[31 : 33] In other words, we'll just ignore Titus. Another way that people deal with it is just say, well, that's just a cultural thing. Paul didn't know better. But the problem is that the very same texts in the rest of the Bible that help us to understand Paul's great desire and high value to women and all of their gifts are the very same ones that show that, in fact, Paul was quite willing to go completely and utterly against his culture.

And the other problem is, and it's the same one with the so-called trajectory argument, is that somehow or another the Bible is incomplete, but if you follow the Bible, you can see the trajectory and where it's going to go.

And this idea that there's texts like this are just Paul's cultural blindness, or that the Bible has some trajectory and there's the truth which it's pointing to, but it doesn't actually articulate, that I never held those positions when I was trying to understand Titus 1, because I understood that it's a blank check, a get-out-of-jail-free card to ultimately believe whatever you want.

Now, it could justify apartheid. It could justify any moral thing that our culture wants that the Bible says, no, we can always just say, well, it's just a cultural thing.

We can always make up some trajectory. So for many, many, many years, had lots of other things that was on my mind. I just said, Titus 1 exists, 1 Timothy 3 exists, Romans 16 exists.

[33 : 03] I have no idea how there's a consistent message here, but the problem isn't in the Bible, the problem's in me. The problem's in me. And then about six or seven years ago, I was reading something and there was a footnote, and I'm one of these really weird people who reads footnotes.

You know who you are. We're a very, very tiny club, footnote readers. I'm coming out of the closet. I'm a footnote reader, and I love footnotes.

I always look at them. People see some of the books. I have two page markers, one for where I'm reading and one so I can find the current page and the footnotes at the back of the book so I can keep going back and forward and looking at them.

And anyway, what I now believe is this. I think there is a very consistent, coherent way to read the New Testament, where virtually Acts 16 and Titus 1 fit together very clearly.

Phoebe wasn't an elder or an episcopist. Prisca wasn't an elder or an episcopist. Junia wasn't an elder or an episcopist. Philip's daughters who prophesied in churches, they weren't an elder or an episcopist.

[34 : 16] that what the Bible is saying here is not supporting patriarchy and it's not denigrating women because the New Testament very clearly teaches that women can teach and they can lead.

What the Bible here is saying is that not that all men are elders and women are non-elders, but that God sets aside a very, very, very small group to have the role of elder in a community on the move. And only men are called to that particular position. And what it means, not that all men are, but just a very, very small number of men are. And once you see that distinction between that authoritative type of teaching and role of an elder and all the other things, I think you can have a completely and

consistently consistent reading of the word of God.

And it's a very, very, and what it means is that those more traditionalist readings of the Bible that want to try to make it look as if that men are somehow superior, that men are giving these roles because we're not controlled by emotion or we have better abilities to speak or lead, all those traditional and patriarchal assumptions are completely and utterly rejected by the New Testament, I believe.

And in fact, actually, if you go back and you read 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, if you read all of the Pentateuch, when you see about why it is that God chose Israel, what is it that God consistently says to the nation of Israel?

[35 : 48] I didn't pick you because you were the best. I picked you because you were the least, because I wanted to show my glory. And in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, he describes Christians as not being the wise and the powerful of the world, but the weak and the foolish.

That God uses the weak and the foolish to shame the wise. And so I know I'm an elder. And I'm not saying that God has chosen me to be an elder because I'm smarter than you folks, holier than you folks.

In heaven, when God reveals the meaning of our lives to us, I'll turn red. Not because he sings my praises, but because of all the things about me that are weak, that led him to choose.

Any elder. I really believe that. And so what this text is saying is that a man or a woman can be the president of the United States.

A man or a woman could be an astronaut, a race car driver. They can care for the kids. They can run businesses. They can sing songs. They can play classical musical instruments. They can be deputy ministers.

[36 : 53] They can do all of those types of things. A man or a woman can do all of those types of things. If that's what they want to do, if that's the gifting, if that's the vocation, God calls different people to do all of those different things without any type of distinction whatsoever.

But he just calls a very, very tiny number of men and only men to be the elder or the Episcopal in the church. And I think that's a consistent way to read the New Testament and the Old Testament. And it's profoundly countercultural. I resisted very deeply wanting to come to that conclusion. It is very un-Canadian in 2016.

But at the end of the day, I believe that the true and living God, self-revealed in the Bible, never, ever, ever lies. And that he saves us as he tells the truth.

It's all for our good. I've lost my... There we go, in the notes. Now, some of you are going to say, well, George, I don't know what I'm going to think about.

[37 : 58] Here's what I want to say about what I just said. If there's one takeaway that you get from this, be... I'm going to make a bit of a Bible reference here. Be a Berean.

I can't remember where it is in the book of Acts right now. And I can't find my place in my... I spot in the notes. But one of the things... It says that when Paul went to Berea, the people there were more noble than others.

Because as he spoke day by day, they searched the scriptures to see if that was true. And that's what I want you folks to do. Search the scriptures. Read the Bible from cover to cover.

Read quietly. Read deeply. Read to note the things that are similar and the things that are different. Read to know for yourself. Read the Bible.

Be a people of the Bible who soak your mind and your hearts in the scriptures. And know that God who speaks in the Bible doesn't lie.

[38 : 56] He wants you to know the truth and he wants to save you. And that no Christian should be like I was in the early years of my Christian life, afraid to read parts of the Bible because I thought it would make me sexist or make me prejudiced.

Nobody should fear God's word. Know there's a type of godly fear which is based on the idea that God is God and that I am not. That God is God and that comes into conflict with my God project. And that's that there's a type of godly fear. But God doesn't want anybody to fear his word. He wants them to search the scriptures. That's what I urge you. Search the scriptures and share with me how you read the Bible.

I just want to know and read the Bible in a consistent, coherent way that brings God glory. Please pray for me that that's what I can do. I'm almost out of time.

What about the, that sexist stuff, George? Actually, before we go to that, could you put up the next point, Andrew? You'll notice here where it goes back, you can pray for me in terms of an elder about all the different things about elders.

[40 : 04] They shouldn't be, they shouldn't be arrogant or quick tempered or violent or greedy for gain. Here's the other thing about the Bible and knowing the truth. One of the reasons that people are uneasy about knowing the Bible is that many of us have met Christians who read the Bible because they like weapons.

They like to justify their anger, their intolerance, their brutal treating of people, their brutal put-downs, their superiority. Many people that we have come across, I remember being the chaplain in a college for a while and there's this one student and all he ever wanted to do was show his superior knowledge.

He had this unbelievably complicated, arcane, reformed, systematic theology. He would ask me questions about whether I was this or that. I didn't even know what the word meant. And he did it to mock me, to show that he knew more than I did.

And we've all come across people like that. And here's the thing, if you read Titus 1, knowing true doctrine never gives anyone permission to be arrogant, quick-tempered, brutal, aggressive, and I would add anger-driven.

No, you're not understanding true doctrine if it leads you to be brutal and cruel.

[41 : 22] It doesn't matter how technically correct it is. You have missed the point. God's word humbles us, always humbles us. It touches our heart to humble us.

And that's sort of what the lead-in is to this part that's apparently prejudiced. Verse 10. Let's look at that part. If you didn't hear it before, you're going to hear it now.

The thing that, I don't know how many times I read Titus before, it shocked me. For there are many here who are insubordinate, for there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

[42 : 26] To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure. But both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.

They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Now that's a pretty shocking statement. Now here's the problem. Here's one of the things that you understand that you have prejudice.

If I'm driving along the road, and somebody's driving really poorly, and I eventually get by them, and I say to myself, Ah, woman. That's a woman.

I'm prejudiced. Now you fill in the blank. A man, a black, a white. Ah, a guy who drives an Audi. Ah. You know, one percenters.

Okay? If you pass another person, you say, Oh wow, they're not driving very well. But you pass another person, and you say, A woman. You have a prejudice problem.

[43 : 29] If people here think they don't have any prejudice issues, it just shows your lack of self-awareness. Just shows your lack of self-awareness. It's a human problem.

It's not a problem for men, or a problem for women, or a problem for whites, or blacks, or Asians. It's a human problem. This categorizing, and dismissing, of people.

So is that what Paul is doing here? You know what Paul is doing here? He's setting the hook. You see, all of Paul's readers who weren't from Crete would have agreed with this.

In the ancient world, there's actually a word coming from Crete that if you call somebody to Cretanize, or that they're Crete, you're telling them, you're describing the person. If you were to say to somebody, Oh, he's like a, he's a Crete.

I don't know how to say it exactly in Greek. What you're saying is that they lie and are untrustworthy. It's actually in Greek. And it goes back to the fact that in the Greek, Crete religion, they believe that Zeus, the head of the gods, was born in Crete, but also that he died in Crete and was buried in Crete.

[44 : 36] And so for the rest of the ancient world, how could the supreme God be buried in Crete? They're obviously liars and untrustworthy. But if Paul just said this, there'd be a problem.

Just look across at chapter 3, verse 3. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Those Cretes, those Cretes, they're liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. Verse 3.

For we are, after he's done all the other stuff that we'll look at, you know, next week. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our day in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

Dang it. I'm a Crete. In the Old Testament, if you go back, there's this very powerful story where David had slept with another man's wife and then he makes her pregnant and he calls her husband back from the front and he gets him drunk twice to try to get him to sleep with his wife and then when he fails to do it, he has Uriah killed in battle.

And then Nathan the prophet comes to speak to David and Nathan tells a parable about there was a very rich man who had huge flocks and he had a guest who came but rather than taking one of the lambs from his own flock, he went to this really poor guy who only had one lamb and he treated it like it was his favorite pet, almost like his son or his daughter and the rich man took that little lamb from the poor man and killed the poor man's lamb so he could feed it to the guest and David gets irate and says, that man deserves to die and then Nathan says, you are the man.

[46 : 15] You are the man. And what Paul is doing in Titus 1 is making us realize by the time we get to Titus 3 if we're listening carefully, you are the man.

You are the man or the woman. I point at somebody, I have three fingers pointing back. Every human being does unless you are missing those three fingers but then the story doesn't work. But you are fundamentally three fingers pointing back and he is setting the hook. See, here is the problem. The problem is that you might say it is insubordination.

I call it cutting edge creative thinking. You might call it insubordination but I call it that you are just insecure in your leadership. You might call it insubordination but I call it the fact that I am actually theologically trained to know the Bible better than you do.

You might call it empty talking and deception. I call it superior verbal skills and confidence. You might call it empty talking and deception. I call it that I am better educated than you are. You might call it shameful gain.

[47 : 30] I call it being practical with money. You might call it circumcision party. I call it appropriating the best of our traditions. You might call it empty myths and stories.

I call it I just know more things than you do. You might call our minds and consciences defiled. I call it that I am liberated and progressive and I am gripped by the gospel. You might call it detestable. I call it appropriately contextualized in our culture. In other words we read Titus 1 verses 10 to the end and all we do is think boy I wish that that church knew about that text.

Boy I wish my dad heard that. Boy I wish the young people knew that. Boy I wish the men knew that. The women knew that. The bishops knew that. The priests knew that. And we don't see the three fingers pointing back at ourselves.

See that's the context within the word which the word of God comes to us is that in the words of the psalm we flatter ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin.

[48 : 35] Could you put up the final point and I invite you all to stand? And the final point is a prayer and you know all of this stuff about flattering ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin it just shows that we need a savior.

It just shows that we need a savior. that we need God to exercise power to make us right with him and we need to not only be gripped by how he's made us right with him but gripped in such a way that it starts to change our lives that we can be so in a sense comforted by the security that it's not it's no longer me justifying myself me making myself righteous me making myself looking superior me trying to manage my appearance so people don't see the sin or the emptiness or the hollowness that's in the depth of who I am that it's me managing my image that at the end of the day the gospel is this profound message that God and only God can make us right with himself that there's not a hollowness that would devour us at the center of us that God saw our need and loved us so much that he sent his son to die upon the cross for us that only as the gospel grips us can we actually begin to have the security to look at our own self-deception and self-flattery to consider without unmaking us that every time

I point at another person I'm pointing three fingers back at myself so for some of us maybe this is a way to begin to enter the Christian faith it's a conversion prayer for others of us who are followers of Jesus I suggest that Titus 1 leads us to desperately need to pray a prayer like this so if those who are led if you would like to say it out loud with me that would be great dear Lord please help me I flatter myself too much to detect or hate my own sin please bring your word to bear on my heart that I might repent and amend my life please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel living for your glory Father pour out your Holy Spirit upon us deliver us from a fear of your word make us people who search the scriptures to know the truth thank you Father that you are a God who never lies never ever ever lies and that you love us and you sent your son to die upon the cross for us Father we praise you and all this we ask and thank in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen