

To God Alone the Glory

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks. We confess before you that you are far more willing to speak to us than we are to listen. And we confess before you, Father, that you are far more willing to listen to us than we are to speak to you.

We ask, Father, that you grant us a hearty desire to pray and that you grant us a deep desire to listen deeply to all that you have to say. Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us as we look at your word.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. About seven or eight weeks ago, I asked you to pray for me because one of the ministries that we run during the school academic year for university is Church on Wednesday, which is a time where we sing God's praises and the Bible is opened and you preach from the Bible.

And then we're going through the book of Colossians. This is in a public place at the University of Ottawa. And the text talked about wives and slaves, amongst other things. And so I had the great privilege and honor to go and stand in public at the University of Ottawa and talk about this controversial topic.

And I know many of you prayed for me and God was very kind. And I think it went well. Anyway, I think it went well. Today, I'm going to talk about a controversial topic.

[1 : 2 7] And in some ways, I'm going to be talking not about wives and slaves, but in some ways, I'm going to talk about slaves. I'm also going to be talking about women. I'm going to be talking about the role of women in ministry. In my flesh, I didn't want to do this.

I still don't want to do this. I'm a Canadian, eh? And, you know, it's not a very popular topic in Canadian circles, which is why often there's a profound silence in churches.

But the reason I'm doing it is the same reason. When I talked at the University of Ottawa, and I said, why on earth would we talk about something that can be a bit controversial like that? And here's the reason.

Here's one of our commitments. One of the things which non-Christians say about Christians is that we pick and choose what we want to hear in the Bible. You know, there's been some best-selling books, a year of living biblically, the year of, you know, being a biblical woman, and they've been best-sellers.

And it's a very, very common complaint about Christians that we say, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, we love the Bible, we trust the Bible, but yeah, we only really like this part, and we sort of ignore this part and don't do this part.

[2 : 3 0] It's a very standard complaint about Christians. And unfortunately, it often hits the mark, if we're honest. And so one of the things that we're very committed to in this church is that we preach through books of the Bible.

And by preaching through books of the Bible in an attempt to declare the whole counsel of God, it means that the Bible is going to force us to talk about things that as Canadians we wouldn't want to normally talk about.

And so on one hand, we're doing this to try to, in fact, not be pick-and-choosing Christians, but to be Bible Christians, Gospel Christians.

And the other reason we're doing it is that one of the other complaints that non-Christians often have about Christians is that it's, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, God has a wonderful plan for your life, and oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, it's all great, etc., etc.

And then you get in, and it's like there's fine print in the contract that you didn't realize. You know, like you get, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, but get this cell phone contract. It's like no money.

[3 : 30] You know, it's all free, and then you get into it, and good grief, how do I get this huge bill, right? There's the fine print. And we don't want to be a church like that. We want, you know, we want to just, the Bible is a public revelation from God.

That's how he wrote it. It's not a secret revelation just for the Illuminati, the anointed. It's a public declaration of the truth. And, you know, I really urge, if you have not given your life to Jesus, that before this service ends today, that you will give your life to Jesus.

Because the gospel is the power of God to make you right with him. And we were created to be at one with our creator. And Jesus, in his death upon the cross, is God's provision for you, for him to make you right with himself.

And as his grace is poured into your life to give you freedom and self-possession, to live a self-effacing life to the glory of God, which is what you were designed for.

So I urge you to give your life to Jesus. And we're going to look at some of the fine print today. We're going to talk a little bit about women in ministry and ordination. I'm going to talk about it this week and next.

[4 : 43] And actually, I'll tell you now why I'm doing it. So I pray a lot, and I know others pray for me in terms of how we're going to go through books of the Bible and how the teaching is going to work.

And so, you know, I had made the decision under God that we would go through the Book of Romans. This is our last sermon in the Book of Romans. And then I'd been praying about what we would do during the summer, what would be a good series to go through during the summer that I could share with Daniel.

And I came up with it. It would be really good to go through the Book of Amos. It's good to hear an Old Testament preaching series every year. And I'm going to do 2 Corinthians in the fall. But I knew when I was looking at the weeks, I was going to have about three or four weeks, depending on whether there was a guest speaker, three weeks, as it turned out, between Romans and Amos.

So I went looking for texts, like Bible books that I could do in three weeks. And Titus jumped out. I hadn't preached on it in quite a long time. I don't think I'd ever really preached on it in a church context.

I've taught it in other contexts. And it's three chapters. It fits. And here's the thing. In Romans 16, you have some of the most important texts in arguing for women's full inclusion in ministry.

[6 : 02] And that's what we're going to look at today. And next Sunday, I'm going to preach on Titus 1. And Titus 1 is one of the most important texts that restricts women in ministry.

And I didn't do this on purpose. I'm not smart enough or clever enough. And it only struck me on Monday as to what I'd done. And so now I've maybe made a lot of you a bit anxious, some of you a bit curious.

So let's charge in and see what it is that the Bible has to say. Here's the thing we're going to say. Romans 16, verse 1. We should never be afraid of the Bible. The Bible will confront our hearts.

The Bible will confront the idols of our hearts. The Bible has different ways that it says exactly the sorts of things that Canadians long for. And the Bible has things to say that are exactly what Canadians fear.

But the Bible is God's word written. It's God's word to us because he loves us. It is an outline of sanity. And I encourage you, if you get nothing else out of this sermon, if, in fact, at the end of this sermon, well, don't read the Bible just so you can prove that George is wrong.

[7 : 13] George isn't always right. I know that. I'm not the Bible. But if you get nothing else, I hope that you get a deep desire to read the Bible every day, to read it cover to cover, and to read it deeply, that the Bible might form you, and the Bible might form me, and the Bible might form that, our church.

So it's a bit of a long introduction. Romans 16. I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Sencray, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many, and myself as well.

Now just sort of pause here for a second. And believe it or not, there's pages and pages and pages written around this simple word, servant, in academic commentaries.

You know, I notice here it says, I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Sencray. And depending on the Bible you have, you might have a little note there that says that the word servant might also be translated as deacon.

And so right off the bat, you can see why, especially if you're guests here from certain churches, whether they allow women to be deacons or not, this is potentially an explosive text for a lot of churches, or an encouraging text for a lot of churches, depending on how you sort it out.

[8 : 36] Now, I want to deal with a heart issue here first. I want to deal with a heart issue here first. And this is true of every church, but it's probably even more true of Anglican and Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

I mean, technically, I could introduce myself as the Reverend Canon George Sinclair, Rector of Church of the Messiah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We love titles.

Human beings love titles. You know, in The Office, isn't that so funny? You watch The Office, Dwight is always wanting to be like the assistant regional district manager, and it's an ongoing joke.

People love titles. One of the ways to demote somebody or get them out of trouble is you give them a grand-sounding title with no authority somewhere to get rid of him or her when they're problematic.

Isn't that true? So here, if you could wrap the first point, here's the hard issue. Human beings love titles. God loves right action. So whether or not, the fact of the matter is that you can't actually solve the issue as to whether we should call Phoebe a deacon or a servant.

[9 : 42] You know the important issue? She's dead things. Like, I'll be very honest with you. I would have loved to have been elected bishop. Why would I have loved being elected bishop?

Because, you know, it means I could boast that people liked me. Would I actually like to be a bishop? I would hate being a bishop. I would hate being away from my family half of the year.

I would hate it. I would loathe it. But I sure would have liked the title. Wouldn't want to do it. But I'd like the title. And I don't think I'm alone. And so, you know, the bottom line is, Phoebe here is an important person.

In the customs of the ancient day, Paul has just introduced the person who brought the letter of Romans to the Romans. He's saying, okay, you know the person who brought this letter?

Her name is Phoebe. She's a person of substance. She's a person of gravitas. She is a person who is not just a talker.

[10 : 42] She is a person who is a patron. That means she has put her economic acumen, her economic resources, her organizational resources, her property, she has put them at the use of the church.

And she has brought her resources to bear to the church for the church to flourish and accomplish what it has to accomplish. She is a trustworthy servant, a person of gravitas, importance, and authority.

Help her. That's who she is. That's what he's saying. And so it's important for us just to remember here, behind all of the things, and I'm not saying that the other debates aren't important, but it's really easy for us to get caught up in, you know, intellectual arguments without realizing that partially what motivates our intellectual arguments is a heart issue of our love for titles and our lack of interest in actually doing things.

Okay, maybe I'm the most sinful person here in the room, and it's only me who has this temptation, but I think it's a pretty common temptation. So that's the big heart issue. Let's continue to continue reading verses.

But you notice how this has a bit of an impact for some churches, where for some churches, women can't have any type of position of authority in the church. And yet here we have Paul.

[12 : 12] And listen, money is money always. And if somebody is a main financial giver, a main giver of property, a main giver of her business, we don't know if she was a business person or a person of independent means, but she had some financial resources and she was a smart cookie, she knew how to use it, and there's no way she didn't have authority.

I mean, that's just psychologically and humanly impossible. And this is like a bit of a blow to a lot of Christians. Let's continue reading. It actually gets more interesting with the very next two verses, next three verses, verses three and five.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life. In other words, literally, they came to a point where they, it wasn't clear whether they would die.

They intervened in a way that meant that they might die. But they did it to try to protect Paul. Who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the pagans give thanks as well.

Greet also the church in their house. And just sort of pause there. It's very significant that the woman is mentioned before the man, that the woman has a name of affection and intimacy, and Prisca and Aquila are actually quite well known in the New Testament.

[13 : 34] And one of the things which is significant about this is that one of the most important characters in the early church was a man by the name of Apollos. And he was an important teacher and evangelist in the church.

And who did he learn the Christian faith from? Prisca and Aquila. So she taught him in an important way.

And they are obviously leaders, and you have a woman teaching. So this is a very, very significant text. And it's a very, very significant text.

Now just before I read the rest of the list, and I'm only going to actually, I'm not going to read all of the next 26 people who are, next 24 people who are mentioned. It is interesting that the first two people mentioned are women.

But before I, I'm not going to read all of the rest of the thing. But what I want to tell you here, and I'm not going to go through every one, but almost a half of the rest of the list are slaves. In our day and age, if, well, we don't have slaves in Canada.

[14 : 43] Well, I mean, there's a problem with sex slaves, but as a general rule, it's illegal. But in the ancient world, there would be names that a citizen would have, and there would be names that an owner would give to a slave.

So for almost half of the names in the rest of the list, we don't know now whether they had been, had been slaves and were now freed men or freed women, or whether they were still slaves, but they were slaves.

And 10 of the women who are mentioned, the list of 20, 10 of the 26 people who are mentioned in the list are women. And, and then the language of the way they are talked about, these are all important leaders in the early church.

And so it's very, very interesting. In the list that we're about to see, we're going to have slaves. We're going to have rich people. Phoebe is rich. Erastus, which is mentioned later on, is very wealthy.

We have rich people. We have slaves. We have Jewish people. We have pagans. We have people who were Roman citizens. We have people who, there's a woman here who's from Persia, which is outside of the Roman Empire originally.

[15 : 46] She must have been captured in some way, or for whatever reason, she was captured as a slave. She's a slave woman, probably a freed slave woman. You have a very, very diverse picture.

You're going to have a picture of slave churches, which are completely and utterly equal to the other churches, which would have been mixed slave and free.

You know, it's very, very interesting for some people. When I said that I was going to be doing something controversial for most people, when we look at Romans 16, what's the big obstacle we have to it being in the Bible? Boring!

Right? Am I the only sinful person here in the room? Your eyes glaze over these names you can't even pronounce. But if you actually dig into them, it's a fascinating glimpse of the early church.

It's absolutely, and it's dynamite, as I'm going to talk about in a moment. It's a dynamite thing in terms of how it affects social movements and social structures and institutions and how we think about a whole range of roles.

[16 : 49] Like, just before we get into it, no, I'll save this point for a moment. Hopefully I'll remember it in a moment. But here, just before we go any further in the list, could you put up the second point, Rebecca?

And for any of these points, if you don't have time to write, if you want to write them down, if they're helpful to you, they're all going to be on the webpage on Monday, I think it is. There is only one gospel from the one true God to every person and people group.

That's one of the things that we see here from this text. It's very, very, very important for us to understand. There is only one gospel from the one true God to every person and people group.

There's a really, really good book. I don't know how to pronounce his name. It's a Muslim name. A Muslim who became a Christian. I think it's pronounced Tabidi. I can't remember his last name. It's an African Muslim name. And he, in his book about the gospel for Muslims, the very, very beginning is, he said there is no special gospel for Muslims.

There's only the gospel. If we want to go to China, you don't come up with a Chinese gospel. There's only the gospel. You want to go to Tunisia? There's no Tunisian gospel. There's only the gospel.

[17 : 58] You want to go to the transgendered community? There's not a transgendered gospel. There's only the gospel. And what we really need as Christians is to have a clarity about the gospel so that with a clarity about the gospel, when we're talking to somebody, we can try to figure out what images and analogies and metaphors will help them to understand the gospel.

But there's not a separate transgendered or Muslim or Chinese or atheist gospel. There's only one gospel. And we see this here because who has been affected by the one gospel?

Rich, poor, slaves, free, men, women, Jewish, pagan, Roman citizens, Persians, all hear from the one true and living God, the one gospel.

So, it's a very, very, very important thing. Could you put up Romans 1, 16 to 17? This will be the last chance we get to read it. I'm going to have you all read it with me out loud in a second.

Remember, some of you remember that I said that the way Romans is written in a very, very curious way by its literary structure, this basically summarizes the entire book. It's as if Paul wrote what we would now call an abstract at the beginning of the book that summarizes the entire message.

[19 : 15] And so, everything in the book is an unpacking of this. And if you could read it out loud with me, that would be very, very good. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. Two verses to memorize.

And what this is saying is that God saw human need. God saw that human beings could not reconcile themselves to God and that human beings were made to be in fellowship and harmony with God.

And God saw our great need. And so, He acted in a way which is right. That's what righteous means. And it also means He acted in a way which is right to make us right with Him.

He did it, not us. And so, when Jesus is dying upon the cross and He descends into the dead and He rises on the third day, and as I tell you about that, I am not just telling you a story.

[20 : 22] I am not just giving you metaphors. I am not just giving you examples. These are not just mere words. When I tell you that Jesus died upon the cross, that He rose again, this message is power from God to make you right with Him.

It doesn't matter if I raise my voice with Him, I'm excited, or if I speak very, very quietly, or if I'm very, very stuffed up. It has nothing to do with my charisma or lack of it, my eloquence or lack of it.

This is news that comes from God. It is news that God has acted with power to make you right with Himself by what His Son did on the cross for you and me.

And we receive it not by accomplishment, but by faith. In a sense, nothing in my hands I bring.

Lord, have mercy upon me. It humbles the rich. It humbles the victim. It humbles those who believe they're racially superior.

[21 : 27] It humbles those who believe they're intellectually or athletically or sexually superior. It humbles all human ideologies. Because all we can say is we cannot say, I have a PhD, I am rich and I am important.

All we can say is, Lord, only You can make me right with Yourself. Only You. Please receive me as Your own.

And the Bible says that God turns none away. There is none too bad, none too broken, none too unspiritual, none too irreligious, none too angry at God, none too broken or a failure in the eyes of the world, none too successful, none too brilliant or good-looking or powerful, that God will turn you away when you humbly ask Him to make you right with Himself through His Son's death upon the cross.

God rushes in with power to make you right. Let's get back to reading.

So, could you just go back and put the second point up again? Rebecca, back, sorry, okay. That's why there is only one gospel from the one true God to every person and every people group.

[22 : 48] Let's go back to reading verse 5. Greet also to the church, also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Eponidas, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

And pause here for a second. And you would not believe how many pages there are in commentaries over that one verse. Is it Junia or Junius? Overwhelmingly, it's a woman, not a guy.

And what does it mean about being amongst the apostles? So, this is another one of these dynamite texts here in the Bible. Here, Paul says that these two people could be brother and sister, or it's more likely to be a husband and wife.

Andronicus and Junia. By kinsmen, it means they're Jewish. They were early Christians. And they're apostles. Now, in the New Testament, there's basically two ways that the word apostle is used.

[23 : 57] It's used for the twelve, and obviously, these two are not part of the twelve. But it's also used in another sense. It's used as a type of an authoritative taker and creator of new outreaches and new ministries and new missions.

I gave the example at the eight o'clock service. There's a fellow who goes to the eight o'clock service. His name is Carl. He's on our council. And he was very involved in one of the many ministries of Power to Change, a ministry that works with men.

And he, in a sense, was an apostle from them. He was granted an authority. They recognized a gifting in them. He was granted the authority and the commission to come to Ottawa and begin this ministry in the Ottawa region.

I think there's now fifteen men's groups. It's become so successful that after he had created several, God used him to create several. He stepped back, continued to be a volunteer, and they hired a staff person.

And in a sense, what he did there was an apostolic ministry. It's an authoritative commission to go and to create new Christian ministries or go into new areas that do not have Christian presences and be used by God for churches and ministries to come.

[25 : 17] And that's what apostle, that's the other meaning of apostle. And here it's saying that there's a woman who's among them. It's a very, very important text. It really is. Let's keep reading.

Verse 8. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachis.

I don't know how to pronounce that at all. Greet Apellas, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristopolis. And I'm going to stop here with the list of names to draw something out.

There's no little asterisk here beside the word family, but afterwards during coffee we can have a debate whether some of your Bibles say household, some say family. We can have a debate about which is the better term. Here's where I would say that household is the better term to translate it.

In the original language, what he's noticed, he's not saying that Aristopolis, and it's going to come up a second time with a different person, they're not Christians. So what he's doing is saying, greet the slaves, the Christian slaves, who are owned by this man.

[26 : 25] And in fact, what it's saying in the original language, in the ancient world, there's only one church in Rome, only one church in Rome, but the one church in Rome is made up of a series of what we would now call small churches.

And the implication is here in the next case that there's a church of slaves. But they're not second-class churches. It's not like it was in the worst parts of apartheid or the worst parts of the American South where black churches would be second-class churches, not equal with a white church.

You know, there's a very important movement in the States called Black Lives Matter. And in a sense, what Paul is just saying here in huge, bold print is slaves' lives matter.

Their church is just as equal as the other churches, the ones in people of means houses. Here's two big takeaways from this.

If you could put up the third point, that would be great. God desires to use every person gripped by the gospel to make a powerful difference in the world for his glory.

[27 : 45] God desires to use every person gripped by the gospel to make a powerful difference in the world for his glory. I put in here desires because, of course, some of us spend days, weeks, months, years resisting God.

God wants us to do something. We know God wants us to do something and we don't do it because it would make us look geeky. It would make us look foolish. It would make us look stupid.

It would make us look unpopular with the hip people or the cool people or, I don't know, we just don't. Maybe I'm the only sinful person here once again, but I have a suspicion that many of us who are maybe with tears would say, yeah, that's really described a lot of things in my life.

But here's the thing. This text is showing us. It's not saying, okay, well, here, it's really, really unfortunate that all you slaves became Christians because, like, you're slaves. Like, you have a pagan master.

He has no interest in letting you go free. He has no interest in letting you serve this stupid supposed God who died by crucifixion showing that he's unimportant to Rome.

[28 : 57] He's not one of the powerful Roman gods. Oh, it's really, it sucks so much that you're under him. Too bad you can't do anything. No. It's not, oh, too bad you're a woman and you're powerless.

Too bad you're single, a single woman or a single man. That's the spectacular thing about this list. There's Roman citizens, there's slaves, there's rich, there's poor, there's single, there's married.

All being used by God. And they're all being used by God because he knows them by name. That's a really important thing for us. Like, if you give your life to Jesus, you're not saying, oh, it's not as if, okay, God is looking for a transgendered person to become a Christian.

Oh, God's looking for an old white guy from Canada to become a Christian. It's not, he doesn't love classes. He loves you by name. He died for you by name.

He knows you by name. And maybe you have, you feel you have nothing you can do to offer. You come to Jesus, he can use you in powerful ways.

[30 : 01] I can't tell you, he will use you in powerful ways. Sometimes when I visit people who are shut-ins, you know, I know that being a shut-in can be a really, really, really, really, really, really hard thing.

But it might be that God is calling you to do an unbelievable work of prayer. Or of writing encouraging notes or whatever.

And here's another thing as well. If you could put up the next point. The Bible read from the perspective of the biblical gospel is God's gift of an unendingly healthy virus for every society and people group.

I don't know if virus is the right word. It's a good word because people are afraid of the Bible. But it's actually Bible read from the perspective of the biblical gospel is God's gift of an unendingly healthy virus for every society and people group.

So, you know, if you think about it for a second, from a human being's love, I'm going to get in trouble. What the heck? I'm going to get in even more trouble in a couple of minutes. Here's the thing.

[31 : 21] And if you've had an abortion, I'm not picking on you. Jesus loves you. And the best thing you can do is to give your life to Jesus.

And he won't turn you away for anything you've done. But when you listen to abortion activists, a lot of their language is the same way that slaveholders and proponents of slavery talk about slaves.

It is a reintroduction of the rhetoric and narrative of slavery in Canada.

The way they talk about a woman's relationship to the baby in her womb is the language of slavery. And the Bible here acts as a constant check to sense that there are slaves who are making a profound difference for God.

To sense, and here in this text, to take this boring part of the Bible and realizing that the Bible is saying that slaves are used to the glory of God. That their church is just as equal as Prisca and Aquilus.

[32 : 32] That they're all, in fact, equally important ministers. This is powerful dynamite. And let's be honest about our society. We are not living in sexual and political nirvana.

It isn't as if people could say, good grief, it can't get any better than this. We're living in a perfect society. Everybody is sexually whole. Nobody is sexually tormented.

Everybody has an unbelievably wonderful relationship with money and with power and with themselves. There's no depression. There's no unhappiness. Well, that's not our society.

And here's the thing. Any, I'm not picking on feminism. Any, you know, whether it's feminism, whether it's types of different nationalism, whether it's different, you know, philosophies of money like capitalism and socialism, every ism and every philosophy and every ideology protects, presents itself as the final word that will be here forever and it's all wrong.

Talk to some of us old people who went to university in the 70s. And if you were a thinking Christian in the 70s, what did you feel?

[33 : 49] One of the things you had to deal with, you had to deal with behaviorism. You young people, you don't even know what that is. This was like big Marxism. Sort of, I know it's still a bit at universities in an odd form, but a whole pile of things which seemed here forever, the final word.

20, 30, 40 years later, you don't even know what it is. Like in the 50s when C.S. Lewis was writing, it would have been Freudianism. Who reads him anymore? And yet, it would be as if it was the final word.

All of these ideologies, they come and they go. Some of them are helpful, they're helpful in different ways, they're unhelpful in different ways. I'm not saying you shouldn't be aware of them, but the fact of the matter is that the Bible is God's word written and presents this constant, silent witness as an outline of sanity.

So now, some of you are wondering, George, having said all of these things, I have to keep in mind my time. It sounds, George, as if all those churches that don't allow women to be ministers have made a terrible, terrible, terrible mistake.

Now, as some of you know, and I'm going to talk about this a little bit more next week, I first came out, don't get worried, I first came out in 1973 in favor of the ordination of women and up until about seven years ago where I changed my position on it.

[35 : 17] And six or seven years ago. and you're going to see why, not why I changed it just specifically in a moment, but I became aware of the thing about more, like at first I supported it really because I didn't know the Bible very well, just to be honest.

Not that people who support it don't know the Bible very well, but I mean that, but at some point in time I started to become aware of the fact that there was contradictory texts in the New Testament. So here's why I'm talking about it because this is what we're going to look at next week and if you turn in your Bibles to Titus chapter 1 you're going to see the problem.

So Titus chapter 1 and we're going to look at verses 5 to 9. Now remember this is the same Paul writing. He's probably writing about eight years later.

He knows that Phoebe's a patron. He knows that she's a person of substance. He's best buddies with Prisca. He knows all these things. He's quite willing to shock society.

To talk about slaves and women and men in all sorts of ways which would have been very, very shocking. He follows somebody who was crucified which was a profound offense to all Roman society.

[36 : 32] And here he says this. This is why I left you in Crete so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders. The word is presbyter.

I'm a presbyter. Okay? In every town as I directed you if anyone is above reproach the husband of one wife. The husband of one wife.

And his children are believers not only to the charge of debauchery and insubordination. And then he uses the word that we get bishop from overseer. And he sort of puts them the two things together episcopus and overseer presbyter and an episcopus and an elder and a bishop.

He puts them sort of together. So they're also bound by verse five and six. By the way five and six and seven are a profound rebuke to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

If you hear from those churches I didn't mean to offend you. I'm just making you aware of the Bible. An overseer or bishop as God's steward must be above reproach.

[37 : 41] He must not be arrogant quick-tempered etc. etc. etc. So here's the thing. The Bible seems to contradict itself. Now next week I'm going to talk about this a little bit more.

And so what happened with me is there's a variety of ways to deal with one or the others of these. From my egalitarian perspective that's how it's called. But you know so basically the part of the way that people deal with it they try to talk about there's a trajectory in the biblical text.

They try to talk about that's just what they thought back then and we can dismiss it. They have other ways about saying you can't possibly know and there's a whole pile of ways to get around it and I basically knew that all of those ways to get around it were wrong.

And I don't mean to offend people here who hold that but I think they don't work at all. I don't think they fit with the Bible. And so I came to the position where I just had to say to myself the only two options that I knew was on one hand you had churches that basically didn't allow women to do anything.

On the other hand this other position of women could be bishops and priests. And I was uncomfortable. I didn't know how to put the Bible together.

[38 : 57] And so I came to the conclusion which is one of the reasons I haven't taught on Titus in the church for about a decade or more is that I don't ever believe that the Bible is filled with any contradictions.

I don't think there's any incoherence in the Bible. But I know that my mind doesn't always see the clarity of the Bible. The problem is in my mind not this.

That was my view. And I did something which is actually very Anglican in an old fashioned way and not very modern or post-modern. I was just prepared to live without knowing because I didn't know the solution.

And I'll talk about this more a bit next week but I actually believe that if you look at all of the texts in the New Testament and if you say that God calls some men and only a small number of men to the position of a presbyter or an episcopist who have an authoritative teaching role in the church and no women then all of the different contradictions in the Bible go away.

And our goal has to be to try to find a consistent coherent way to read the Bible. In other words what it's saying here is that both men and women they can be presidents. Men and women they can be generals. Men and women they can be race car drivers.

[40 : 26] Men and women they can own businesses. Men and women they can care for children. Men and women they can become athletes. Men and women they can write books. Men and women they can teach. Men and women they can perform miracles.

Men and women they can live lives of prayer. Men and women they can be used by God to perform healings. Men and women you can go on and on and on and on and on but the office of elder and overseer are limited only to men, but not all men.

This isn't patriarchy we're talking about. It isn't that a woman in the church has to listen to a man because he's a man, but that God calls only some men out of the majority of men to be a presbyter or a bishop.

And I think that if you have that insight, almost all of the apparent contradictions in the Bible vanish. So I've offended some of you, maybe, but the key to this is to read the Bible and search the scriptures.

I just want to know what the Bible teaches. That's all I want to know. I just want to do what the Bible teaches. And some of you might understand, I'm going to take a moment here, I'm running out of time to share my heart. That's why I believe, I've been praying for quite a while that God would use our church to plant churches not only in the eastern Ontario, but across the country.

[41 : 49] And we don't have the resources, it's impossible, but I believe that we can pray that God would raise up eight young men who would be married, who could come to our church, who could be equipped and loved and prayed over, and that they could build a team of men and women, no slaves or anything in our society, but men and women from all classes, and they can go and they can plant churches.

And I think it would be really wonderful if that was the thing that we as a church would pray for. And that we would also pray for a mighty move of church planning in all the urban centers of this country, and that God would use us in some small way to raise up 100 young men who are capable of being ordained, married, building a multi-generational, multi-gender team to reach the cities.

And I look forward to the day that we can wholeheartedly embrace this as a church and make it a matter of prayer and a commitment of resources.

I just want to finish this text. I've noticed my time. Here's one of the things about this, by the way. Actually, let's go back to Romans.

I want to go back to Romans. I want to just share something. If one of the real takeaways about this is to search the scriptures, search all of the scriptures, read them widely, read them deeply, seek to try to put them together to get the mind of Christ, just jump down to verse 17.

[43 : 20] I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive.

And some of you might think that that's just what I've just done. I actually struggled with this text all week. But you'll notice it's not that there's not division, but that it's by the very nature of false teaching to create obstacles and division.

And it's a call for us to have our minds formed by the pattern of biblical teaching, the whole Bible in its depths. And that will always cause problems with every society that we're in.

It'll be a different problem to different societies at different times. In a highly capitalistic society, the Christian teaching on the poor will be highly, highly offensive. In a culture like ours that wants to promote abortion on demand, thou shalt not take innocent human life is profoundly divisive.

But we have to be willing to have our minds formed by the mind of Christ. And I realize as well that it's very, very possible to be completely and utterly orthodox and serve your own appetites.

[44 : 44] The Bible here is calling us to search our motivation and to search the scriptures so that our motivation will be to bring glory to God for the good of the world and that we'd be willing to submit our minds to the mind of Christ.

In fact, you know, one of the interesting takeaways because I always pray, Lord, what is the word in this scripture text to me? You know the surprising thing? All week I've struggled to talk about this because I want to be a people pleaser.

And I know that in post-modern Canada of 2016, to say that there's anything that limits somebody is to be profoundly un-Canadian. And I didn't want to talk about it because I wanted people to like me.

In other words, it wasn't that I was avoiding the pattern of sound teaching, but you know what? I wanted to serve my appetite of being a people pleaser. This was God's word to me. And I know that many of you as well struggle with that desire to people please or other types of appetite.

So the text is that we'd be so gripped by the gospel that we know the truth and that we come to that point of humility where our desire is to bring God glory, to serve him.

[46 : 05] If you could put up the next point, God's grace grows in me, the self-possession to be self-effacing in serving to the glory of God.

That's the big takeaway of this text. God's grace grows in me, the self-possession to be self-effacing in serving to the glory of God.

What does self-effacing mean? Self-effacing is normal, a lot of Christian services.

This is our temptation. Applause, applause. No, no, no, no. This is what the gospel wants us to do.

Look at verses 25 and following. Now to him who is able to strengthen you and is able meaning that the word underneath that is dynamite.

[47 : 18] It's power. Okay? Now to him who is powerful to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, all people groups according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.

Amen. To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen. To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen. That's what the gospel as it grips us.

God's grace comes in to give us such freedom and self-possession that our profound addiction to want this and you wish you had two other arms because while you're doing this the other two arms could be asking for applause.

That we could come to the point where our goal is that we all with unveiled faces beholding the glory of the Lord. We're going to talk about that in 2 Corinthians. Could you put up the final prayer?

You know, my goal for all of these things is that we would pray the scriptures and this is in a sense a way to bring the book of Romans to it. And I'm going to ask you to stand. I'm going to ask you if you would pray this prayer with me. If this prayer is at all meaningful to you it will be on the webpage.

[48 : 39] You can copy it down later if you want. You can sort of look at it as I talk but you know as we're gripped by the gospel he wants us to read his word from the perspective of being gripped by the gospel.

He wants our minds to conform to the pattern of sound teaching but it's not just so we can be have some unbelievably elaborate false system we can go around saying aha you're wrong aha you're wrong aha you're wrong.

That's not why he wants us to read the Bible. He wants us to read the Bible and be gripped by the gospel so we're willing to do this for his glory.

and not like they do in a lot of churches you know where the praise band says let's all give a hand to God but it's really to the praise band we all know that right? It's really to God so if God has touched your heart in two ways first of all if you have not given your life to Jesus there is no better time than to say God as I pray this prayer may this be my conversion prayer I want to be your child make me your own forever and for all of us who need it if you would join me in praying this prayer Heavenly Father please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who so reads your word written that my mind conforms to your pattern of sound teaching and serve you self-facing joy in the power of the Holy Spirit to make a difference in the world for your glory in Jesus' name Amen Father pour out your Holy Spirit upon us that we might be disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel living for your glory and we ask this in the name of Jesus

Amen