

# The scriptures that silence and slay us

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Date: 19 September 2010

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, please do turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 3, page 940, if you have one of our visitors' Bibles. And this passage from verses 1 to 20 of chapter 3 is a passage all about the Scriptures that silence us and slay us.

That Tuesday's Guardian newspaper carried a piece of classic ranting by Polly Toynbee, the president of the British Humanist Association.

It was full of invective against what she calls the supreme arrogance of the religious, who think themselves morally superior to those who don't believe in God.

Her article called Sex and Death Lie at the Poisoned Heart of Religion, a recent book of restraint there then. Her article was full also of arrogance of the moral superiority of the atheist.

Rather ironic. Nevertheless, it is precisely arrogant and proud religious superiority that the Apostle Paul has in his sights here in Romans chapter 2 and 3.

[ 1 : 1 8 ] But while Polly Toynbee's solution is to reject the Bible as the root of hypocrisy and pernicious religion, as she calls it, Paul's solution is exactly the opposite.

The problem, says Paul, is not what the Bible says. It is that what the Bible says has not been believed and obeyed by those who have the Bible and swear by it. And so last week, we began with a slap in the face to those who disapprove in a rather superior way of those who commit evil in a godless, pagan kind of way, the sort of things that Romans chapter 1 describes.

And this week, I'm afraid, is no different. Indeed, it is like a fist being driven into the solar plexus of all of those who profess to be God's people.

And that's us. First of all, collectively, confronting his visible church, his professing people, the Jews. And then, he relentlessly drives the verdict home to every individual member of those who claim to be God's chosen ones.

And each section, verses 1 to 8 and then 9 to 20, each section is a powerful encounter with what the Bible really says about what the great privilege of possessing God's truth means and requires in terms of the great responsibilities that that privilege confers.

[ 2 : 5 0 ] Those called to be God's covenant people have known the riches of God's kindness. He says that in chapter 2, verse 4. But the question is, do you presume upon that kindness?

Or, as chapter 2, verse 5 says, has it really led you to repentance? Well, I hope that any Polly Toynbees in the church this morning are listening.

And I hope that every one of us who calls ourselves a Christian this morning is listening. Listening to what God is saying to us. People often say today, we need to listen to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Well, that is nonsense. In the sense that God has very clearly said and written what he is saying to the church once and for all and always in the words that are written in Scripture.

So we don't need to try and discern what God's word might be to his church today. We just need to open our eyes and look right in front of us at what Paul is saying here. What he has written is for his people to read and mark and learn and inwardly digest and take deadly seriously.

[ 4 : 10 ] Look at verse 4 of chapter 3. As it is written. And verse 10. As it is written. In verse 19.

Whatever is written. Whatever the law says. It says to the people of God. And the clear message of the Scriptures to those who bear God's name is that they must absolutely not harbor any presumption.

And that they must absolutely show real repentance. Just like everybody else. That's what the Scriptures say.

And what they say, says verse 19 of chapter 3, they say to those who have the Scriptures. And they tell us that all of us, including us, especially us, who have the truth, we are helpless under the power of sin.

It's the Scriptures that silence us and slay us. So let's brace ourselves and look first at verses 1 to 8, where Paul is speaking to the professing people of God, the church of God as a whole.

[ 5 : 27 ] In this case, of course, to Israel, to the Jews. And his message is this. Those who bear God's name must harbor no presumption. God's righteousness and vindication is not dependent upon his people's righteousness.

God can do without us. That's what the Bible says. That's what is written. That's what Paul is saying. God is sovereign and God is holy.

And he can and he will judge his own people. He will inflict wrath upon them and he will be shown to be righteous when he does that. And that will never ever show God to have been untrue or unfaithful to his promise and his plan of salvation for the world, even if that is what he does.

Now, verse 1 of chapter 3 follows on immediately from Paul's devastating attack on Jewish identity in chapter 2. So, somebody says, well, if there's no difference before God's judgment seat for the Jew and the Gentile, if God shows no partiality as you claim Paul, then why did God have a chosen people in the first place?

Why did he create circumcision and all the privileges that go along with that? Is there no advantage for the Jew? Is there no real value in circumcision? No value in God having Israel as his chosen people?

[ 6 : 56 ] What did God call us for then right at the beginning? Aha, says Paul. That is exactly the key question. Get that answered right and you will see that there is indeed great value in every way for God calling a people for his name.

What is the privilege that Israel had by her calling? Well, verse 2, Paul says, first of all, it may well be that Paul began a list that he never got finished here.

Certainly in chapter 9 he comes back to many other advantages that Israel has where he deals very clearly with all of that. But here, he deals with the first thing, which is indeed the thing of overriding importance.

Look at verse 2. The Jews, he says, were entrusted with the oracles of God. What an enormous privilege that is.

We sang Psalm 147. He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt this way with any other nation, says the psalmist.

[ 8 : 06 ] They received what Stephen calls in Acts chapter 7, living oracles. The revelation of the covenant faith in God's own living words. Words that teach the way of salvation through God's gracious promises and God's sovereign commands.

Words as chapter 2 verse 19 tell us. The Jews themselves boasted were a guide to the blind. Light to those in darkness. And they received this life-giving divine revelation.

And therefore, says Paul, they had responsibility to respond to that great light. To believe from the heart God's great promises.

To obey from the heart God's gracious commands. To be God's faithful people. And not only to respond for themselves, but to radiate that light into the world as servants of God's saving light for the world.

And Moses himself says that right at the beginning of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy chapter 4, when he is expounding this covenant for life in the land.

[ 9 : 14 ] Live in obedience, he says, to God's revealed covenant word. And the people all round about you will say to themselves, what a great nation that is, that has God so near to them.

In other words, he's saying to them what Jesus said later on. They'll see your good works and they'll praise your Father in heaven. That's what the prophets reminded Israel again and again all through their history.

That they were called to be a light to the nations. To open eyes that were blind. That's your privileged calling, says Paul. God's words weren't yours just to possess, but to proclaim.

Not to hoard like a selfish child hoards their sweet-eating and keeps them all from themselves. That's what this word entrusted in verse 2 clearly means.

Everywhere Paul uses it, he uses it of his missionary task. I am entrusted, he says in 1 Corinthians 9, with the stewardship of preaching the gospel.

[ 10 : 16 ] I am entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, he says in Galatians 2. We have been put to the test, he says, and entrusted with the gospel, 1 Thessalonians 2.

Four times in the pastorals, he says the same to Timothy and to Titus. Calling them to be true to the same trust that God has given them. God, the good deposit entrusted to you.

And you see, the question is not about what privileges does being God's visible people on earth get for us, for ourselves, but rather, what does the privilege of receiving God's living word give us in terms of our responsibility for this world?

See, the one way of looking, it puts us and ourselves at the centre of the world and God there to serve us. But the other way, the proper way, is to put God and his plan at the centre of the world and see ourselves as serving him in that purpose and plan for the world.

But of course, that great exchange, putting God out of the centre and us into the centre, that is the very heart of sin. And God's people, says Paul, had broken that trust given to them.

[ 11 : 43 ] God's word had not led them to repentance, as chapter 2, verse 5 says. They had rather a hard and impenitent heart. They did not respond to the glorious light of God, and nor did they radiated, indeed, what we read last time in chapter 2, verse 24.

The very opposite. Instead of God's name being praised, it is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, says Paul. They have broken the covenant.

They have broken the law, says chapter 2, verse 25. And their circumcision, says Paul, has become uncircumcision. They were, as verse 3 of our chapter 3 says, they were unfaithful to their calling.

There's a word play there. They broke trust with what they were entrusted with. They broke God's law.

Now let's get clear about this terminology, because it's easy to get confused and to miss the real point of what Paul's saying. When Paul says that the Jews' problem was that they broke God's law, as opposed to keeping God's law, he is not just saying that they failed in their efforts to keep every single jot and tittle of every tiny command.

[ 13 : 05 ] He is not saying, in other words, that they failed because they were imperfect. The law itself assumed that people were imperfect. It was given to sinners. God knew that every command would never be kept perfectly.

That's why God provided sacrifices, so that when people sinned, they were able to repent and bring sacrifices to God. But no, to break God's law, to break God's covenant, wasn't to be imperfect, but it was to be impenitent, unrepentant, hard-hearted, disobedient, rebellious, rejecting of God in the heart.

However, your lips might still profess God. These are the words that Paul uses all through this letter. And that is what, says Paul, God's people had repeatedly been. Just read the Old Testament.

Read it from the very beginning of the story of Israel. Again and again, instead of the obedience of faith, what you find persistently is the disobedience of unbelief. Under Moses, he says, they rebelled against God's command.

They did not trust in the Lord. Do you see? The disobedience of unbelief. Remember just recently our studies in the Kings. You look in 2 Kings chapter 18, where we're told about good King Hezekiah.

[ 14 : 30 ] We're told that he trusted in the Lord. He held fast to the Lord. He kept the commands of the Lord. And so the Lord is with him. But Israel, by contrast, was taken away into captivity.

Why? Because they did not obey the Lord. Because they transgressed his covenant. Because they neither listened nor obeyed. The prophets constantly continued that refrain.

They have transgressed the covenant. They have rebelled against my law, said Hosea. Hosea chapter 8, verse 1. You see, not imperfection, but willful impenitence.

Scorn for God himself. Like Adam, says Hosea, they have transgressed the covenant. They dealt faithlessly with me. Maybe the clearest summary of the whole thing is in Acts chapter 7, in Stephen's speech.

Listen to what he said at the climax of that sermon that got him killed. You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit.

[ 15 : 37 ] As your fathers did, so do you. You have betrayed and murdered the righteous one. You who, listen, received the law as delivered by angels, but did not keep it.

You see, to break God's law is far, far more serious than just failing to keep some commandment or other.

It is rebellion against the heart of God himself. It is against God's Holy Spirit. It's to turn away in your heart from seeking the glory and the immortality of God and to become self-seeking.

It's to obey unrighteousness, says Paul. It's to have an uncircumcised heart. It's to exhibit the disobedience of unbelief. And that, says Paul, is what Israel has done.

It has broken trust utterly with all that was entrusted to her. Well then, verse 3. If God entrusted his saving message to his people and his people have been unfaithful, doesn't that mean that God's plan and purpose must somehow fail?

[ 16 : 50 ] And doesn't God then turn out to be unfaithful to his word? Not at all, says Paul in verse 4. Even though everyone, not just some, but everyone of his people were a liar, a false witness, instead of a true witness to his covenant.

Even then, he says, God will still be true to his promises. Once again, we'll come to that much more when we get to Romans chapter 9. But surely God needs his people to fulfill his plan, to do what he wants to do.

Surely God has no hands but these hands, no feet but my feet, no lips but mine. as sometimes Christians sing. No, says Paul.

God's faithfulness does not depend upon his people. God can do without his people. That's what your own scriptures tell you, he says, as it is written, verse 4.

And he quotes from Psalm 51 that we sang the great penitential psalm of David, the king, where he confesses his sin, where he declares that God is absolutely right and justified to pour out his anger against him and to judge him for his sin and to cause to come upon him all the consequences of his conduct.

[ 18 : 17 ] By the way, that's when you know that somebody has really repented, isn't it? When there's no more excuses. There's no more saying, well, I know, Lord, I've done wrong, I know I've done wrong, but, but, and I've repented of that, but surely now, things can begin to get back to normal.

Things can be put right. No, real repentance says, no, Lord, you are right to be angry with me. You are right to make me face up to the consequences of my sin.

Help me to do that without bitterness. Help me to do that without anger. But the Bible teaches plainly here that God will judge his people.

Indeed, Peter tells us judgment begins with the house of God. But we're all so tempted by presumption, aren't we?

By special pleading. But, but, but, but, but, but. And that's what verses 5 to 8 do. And Paul shows us just how absurd it is. Verse 5 says, look, okay, we're not perfect, but, but if our badness just shows up God's goodness all the more, well, surely God can overlook our sins.

[ 19 : 27 ] Surely if the end result is even better for God, then, well, it'd be unjust for God to judge us. We can think that, can't we? All right, I, I, I know I'm backsliding a bit, I'm living a bit fast and loose, but, but, you know, when I come to go through a keen phase again, I'll have a great testimony to God's forgiveness.

So God will turn a blind eye and in the right time we'll all be restored and everything will be fine. That's a very tempting thing to think, isn't it? It's a tempting thing for students to think when they get away from home for the first time and live on their own and want to sow their wild oats a bit.

I'll come back eventually, God will forgive me and it'll all be to his glory. Think again, says Paul in verse 6. By no means.

God is the impartial judge of all the world, remember. How can he turn a blind eye to you? But, but, but, but, makes the same absurd plea again in verses 7 and 8.

And he even adds the extreme presumption of saying, well, if God can even turn evil to his glory, well, maybe we should even do more evil so that good may result. And Paul just dismisses that as not even worthy of a reply.

[ 20 : 43 ] Their condemnation is just. They can even think that, he says. It is such utterly wrong thinking because it fails completely to see just how serious sin really is.

It is not just a bit of ignoring God's truth here and there. It is not just shaving out a doctrine over here, practicing a few immoral things over there.

It is, says God, a massive, huge breach of trust with God himself to think like that. It blasphemes him to the whole world when the people who bear his very name so abuse the oracles of salvation, so scorns the word that he is entrusted to that people to love and to cherish and to share to the world.

And his people have no excuse, says Paul, for their failure to love and live the oracles of God. There is no excuse for that terrible sin of chapter 2, verse 24, of God's name being blasphemed on account of his people.

And those who bear God's name can therefore have absolutely no presumption. God does not need his people so that they will escape his judgment.

[ 22 : 04 ] He will inflict wrath on them, says Paul, as it is written. And God's purposes will go on without that apostate people.

Because God's righteousness and God's vindication is not dependent on his people's righteousness. And so, as we have seen all the way through our studies of Acts, Israel in the main was abandoned.

The dust was shaken off on the feet of the synagogues and the gospel went to the Gentiles. Now friends, let me say that Paul's words to Old Testament Israel applied just as firmly and just as fearfully to God's New Testament church, to the people who bear his name today.

We must harbor, says Paul, absolutely no presumption. And yet how easy it is to presume on the kindness and the forbearance of God. That's so evident, isn't it, today in so many of the historic denominations in our Western world, not least our own.

I heard this very week people talking in exactly that way about the Church of Scotland. Oh, things aren't so bad. Oh, given time, things will get better.

[ 23 : 26 ] God will have to just get us through these great problems because it would be such a tragedy for Scotland if the Church of Scotland were to fall apart. After all, think of our heritage. Think of the 450 years of the Reformation.

Think of the oracles of God that we've had in our own language, freely available. We're the national church after all. We have a great tradition of the Bible. God, God needs us.

It's what we're seeing. So surely God will turn a blind eye in some of what's going on. Well, says Paul, what is written in the Bible is this.

God does not depend upon you. His plan and purpose will go on even if he pours out his wrath upon you and he will be shown to be utterly just in doing just that.

We really think that God needs our denomination or any denomination that causes his name to be blasphemed in the world? Remember John the Baptist's words to the National Church of Israel.

[ 24 : 36 ] Don't presume, he says, to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father, for I tell you, God is able from these very stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now, the axe is at the root of the tree.

Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Or what about Jesus' words that Paul is simply repeating here?

That servant, he said in the parable, that knew his master's will but did not act according to his will will receive a severe beating. Far worse than those servants who didn't know the master's will.

Everyone, says Jesus, to whom much was given, of him much will be required. And to him, to whom was entrusted much, will be demanded far more.

Yes, indeed, you see, in Scotland we have a rich heritage. We have been entrusted with the very oracles of God for centuries just like the Jews. But, says Paul, when that trust is broken, when God's gospel truth is scorned and denied and rejected by those who bear his name, do not presume, dare not presume.

[ 25 : 58 ] Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath upon us? Verse 5, by no means. For he will judge all who profane his name. Those who do so, having had such privileges, says Jesus, will be beaten with many blows.

Whether it's a denomination that wears its historic badge proudly or whether it's a congregation that bears its evangelical heritage just as proudly.

God can do without us. That's Paul's message. That's what is written. That's what the Bible says. But we can't do without him.

What about individuals then, Paul asks in verse 9, we Jews, we who have the scriptures, aren't we better off for having the Bible? Won't that help us at the judgment? No, no, says Paul, you still haven't got it, have you?

You haven't heard what I've been saying. Listen again, he says in verses 9 to 20. Those who bear God's word can harbor no presumption. Moreover, he says here, for those who bear God's name, there absolutely must be real repentance.

[ 27 : 18 ] God's righteousness and vindication will never depend upon his people's righteousness, but his people's righteousness and vindication is utterly dependent upon God's righteousness.

righteousness. We cannot do without him. That's what the Bible says. That's what is written in Scripture again and again and again, says Paul. Because we are utterly helpless, he says.

We can't do anything to liberate ourselves from our sin, to avoid God's wrath. Haven't you heard me, he says in verse 9? I've already charged, he says. I've already charged that all Jews as well as Gentiles are under sin, as it is written.

I'm only telling you, he says, what your own Bible has always been telling you. You're Bible people, but you, you, verse 9, are under the power of sin.

That's how the NIV paraphrases what our Bible says, just under sin, but it does so correctly. Because Paul doesn't think of sin as just something that we do, but as a powerful master that controls us, that imprisons us.

[ 28 : 29 ] when you're under somebody, you're under their authority and power. If you're a great artist or musician, you say, well, were they trained under so-and-so, famous person?

If you work under somebody, under your boss, then you're under their command and their control. But to be under sin, according to Paul, is a desperate plight. It's like that poor Austrian girl, Natasha Kampusch, whose book is just out, who was under the power of her fiendish captor for all of those years.

And the Bible says, Paul, our Bible, the scriptures we have, tell us that by nature, we are under the power of sin. But, that's an outrage, that's an insult.

We are God's people. We love the Bible. We listen to the Bible. We study the Bible. We come to St. George's Tron every week and study the Bible. No, says Paul, that might all be true.

But then you of all people should know that you are a helpless slave to sin. And that God is right to be filled with anger about you. Let's open the Bible, says Paul.

[ 29 : 46 ] Let's open the Bible together and see what it says. We don't need to go very far. Just sing a few psalms together. And we'll soon see that we are all alike as Bible people as well, utterly condemned in our thoughts and our words and our deeds.

What does the Bible say, says Paul? What is written, verses 10 to 12? It says to us, he says, that our hearts are universally perverse. We don't seek glory and immortality.

We seek self. We're turned away from God, he says, just as the pagans have done. None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands.

No one seeks for God. All have turned aside away from God. Together they've become worthless. No one does good, not even one. And verses 13 and 14, just as Jesus said, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks, the truth can't be hidden.

And that's what the Bible tells us about ourselves. We who sing these very psalms, our tongues, he says, are ugly and poisonous. Their throat is an open grave.

- [ 30 : 56 ] They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Bible people twist the truth and deceive and poison relationships and speak festering words to one another, full of bitterness.

And where the heart leads to tongues that verbalize evil, it's inevitable that likewise our feet will be engaged in action that is utterly pernicious too.

Verse 15, their feet are swift to shed blood. In their path lies ruin and misery, the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

It's a picture, isn't it, of strife and division and relationship breakdown and disharmony. The very opposite of the way of peace. No fear of God before their eyes.

That is your eyes, says Paul. You who boast in having Bibles, big Bibles, extremely sound versions of the Bible. Verse 19, whatever the law says, whatever the scripture says, it says to those under the law, it says to the people of the book, so that every mouth may be sought.

- [ 32 : 15 ] That means yours to silence officially by the judge who says, do you see? You're condemned by your own testimony.

The whole world, including you who know the truth, that's what every page of your Bible tells you about yourself. That no one, no flesh, literally, verse 20, can justify themselves in God's sight or will be justified in God's sight.

Every one of these quotes from the scriptures here, Psalm 14 and 5 and 10 and 140 and Isaiah 59 and Psalm 36, every one of these places where you read the whole passage, you'll see that it speaks not of the sins in the outside world, but within the professing people of God and within the psalmist's own heart and own life.

And every one of them acknowledges that the only hope, the only hope, is in God's great mercy, in appealing empty-handed in faith and trust in his faithfulness, not their own, in his righteousness, not their own.

That's what your scriptures tell you, says Paul, that's what's written. No matter who you are or what you are, the works of the law will never justify you in God's sight. What are the works of the law?

- [ 33 : 46 ] Well, again, as all through this letter, it is the very opposite of the obedience of faith. It's obeying unrighteousness and not obeying the truth in the language of chapter 2, verse 8.

It's disobedience and unbelief in the gospel, not obedience to the gospel in the language of chapter 10. It's the religious expression that comes out of a heart full of pride and presumption.

It's the very opposite of what issues from a humble, empty-handed seeking of God's mercy. In Jewish terms, it was doing what the prophet Jeremiah decried in chapter 7 of his prophecy, trusting in their mantra, we have the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, multiplying their offerings and their sacrifices and yet deaf to God's commands, ignoring his truth, scorning his ways.

Very, very religious. But as Jeremiah says, walking in their own counsels, in the stubbornness of their evil hearts, going backward and not forward.

A spirituality that's back to front and utterly upside down, that keeps your religion in your own hands to control and to save yourself. It's self-seeking, not seeking the glory and the honour of the immortal God.

- [ 35 : 07 ] It's making God your servant and it's making you God-like. It's anti-worship. It's putting God at the periphery of your life and putting yourself at the centre to make you king and lord of everything that you do and are.



And it's possible to do all of that, to have no real fear of God before your eyes, no seeking of God truly in your heart and yet, says Paul, to dress it all up in a cloak of pious respectability and religiosity that fools everybody and even fools yourself into thinking that you're doing what God actually wants.

Even though your heart is far, far away in rebellion against his call of grace, unrepentant. It's what King Saul did, remember, when he disregarded God's words to take religion into his own hands to make the sacrifices his way.

And God said to him through Samuel, Has the Lord a greater delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices or in obeying the voice of the Lord? Presumption, he said, is iniquity and idolatry because you have rejected the word of the Lord.

He also has rejected you from being king. By the works of the Lord, you see, no flesh, not even kings, will be justified. And even King David, the anointed one, after God's own heart, he knew that.

[ 36 : 44 ] These are his words in verse 20. They're taken from Psalm 143. I know, he says, no one is righteous, no one is justified in your sight. That's why if you read that psalm, it begins with these words, have mercy, I have no righteousness.

And he cries out, in your righteousness, bring my soul out of trouble. In your covenant love alone, he says, will there be destruction for the adversaries of my soul.

That's what's written in your Bible, says Paul, to God's people. What the law gives you, what your scriptures hammer home again and again, is the knowledge of your sin.

It's the scriptures that silence us, stops every last presumptuous plea that we can make for ourselves.

And it's the scriptures that slay us, that leave us in the dust, speechless with shame, and powerless in our own plight. So let me ask you this morning, do you understand your own Bible?

[ 38 : 01 ] What is written? Not read it or know it well, but do you hear what it says to you? Do we hear what it says to us as a church here who have an open Bible?

Every time I open this, says Paul, it tells me all about my sins. It shames me. It silences me. It slays me.

And it slays you. It makes me cry out, Lord, have mercy. I have nothing to plead, nothing. But for your name's sake, for your righteousness' sake, answer me.

Do we listen to what's written? can we really accept what verses 10 to 18 claim? Look at them again, that my thought life is universally perverse.

Well, I can believe that of some people, but I'm not Stalin, I'm not Hitler, I'm not a pedophile, I'm not a pornographer. Can I accept that my words, that my tongue is ugly and poisonous like that?

[ 39 : 14 ] Can I accept that my actions are pernicious like that? I'm not that bad, I'm not nearly as bad as many people. But God says, silence, stop, just look at the evidence.

Just take in your church this morning one narrow little area of your own church life, that's all, that's all we need, says God. That'll suffice, just each of you this morning, think about thoughts that you have had about other people in this congregation.

Angry thoughts about others, what they've done or not done, resentful thoughts, bitter thoughts about things you haven't liked, or slights about things you've received, contemptuous thoughts you've thought about people who you think have far too much influence, more than you do, a thousand other thoughts that you've had.

Or think about your words to others, or words just to yourself about others, harsh words of censure, angry words of poison to belittle or to hurt somebody, cursing words that reveal hateful thoughts in your heart about others that have angered you.

Or just think about the deeds that those things have sometimes overflowed into, that have led, as verse 16 says, to a path of ruin and misery in relationships within this very congregation over time.

[ 40 : 47 ] At times causing the destruction of the peace of the congregation. What if I took out a list of things that I jotted down, of just some of the things that I have heard said and seen done, that represent many far worse things that have been thought and ruminated on by hearts filled with all kind of thinking?

What if I did that just over the last few years that I've been here and named names this morning? What if I could go back 50 years like some of you can and could do the same?

If I did that, there would be shame, wouldn't there? Abject shame, collectively and individually. I know that, because no one's shame would be greater than my own.

I know things that I have thought about many of you. I know things that I've said to some of you. As it is written.

Does the Bible lie? Doesn't this awful litany of verses apply to us right here in St. George's Tron this morning? And to your heart and to my heart?

[ 42 : 03 ] Yes, it's well. It speaks to us also. It speaks to us especially to our church life and to our personal life. What if we were to put on the screens here and up here just some of the things that some people in this congregation know about the secrets of other people in this congregation?

About their private lives, about their secrets, about their reputation that they have at work, about their marriages, about their affairs, about their addictions, about what their internet would tell us about them?

Could many of us show our faces to one another again after that? I'll go the hallway and just imagine that these screens this morning were filled in full view of everybody here broadcasting the things that each one of us most wants to keep hidden from anybody else in the whole world and even doesn't like to think about ourselves.

Imagine the abject shame. And then go back and look at chapter 2 verse 16 which tells us that one day something far, far, far worse than that will certainly happen.

That God will judge the secrets of men's hearts by Christ Jesus and that on that day there will be no hiding from the whole universe of the truth about us because even now, friends, there is no hiding our hearts from the one before whom no flesh is righteous, from the one whose wrath is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

[ 43 : 56 ] Yes, including us. And who but for his mercy, but for his grace, and but for his righteousness, which is by faith alone from first to last, but for that, we, every one of us in this place this morning, would be utterly condemned, utterly, utterly undone before him forever, as it is written.

According to Paul, a church that cherishes the scriptures, a church that is devoted to what is written, will be a church where all presumption is silence, where all pride is utterly slain, a church full of people who know that for those who bear God's name, there must be real penitence, deep, daily, deliberate, crying out for the saving righteousness of God in Jesus Christ alone.

Only that church can be a united church, and only that church can be a missionary church. You can't look down on others when you yourself are down in the dust.

You can only look up to a God whose mercy lifts you and saves you, and look out to a world that needs that same mercy more than it needs anything else in this whole universe.

What the scripture says, it says to those who have the scriptures, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world held accountable to God.

[ 46 : 14 ] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church. Let's pray. Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Bible man, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get, but the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, says the Lord Jesus Christ, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Lord our God, humble us, we pray, under your mighty hand, that we might look to your grace and to your grace alone for our salvation.

[ 47 : 42 ] In Jesus' name, Amen.