

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY IN THE FIRST BOOK OF TIMOTHY – PART FOUR – NOTES ON CHAPTER THREE AND QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FOUR

The key to the Christian life and therefore spiritual leadership is to know the Truth concerning Jesus, rejecting ‘strange doctrine’,(chapter one) and then to become part of God’s team on earth by believing Him in prayer.(chapter two)

Chapter three is about choosing and training leaders who will be outstanding examples of the Truth in action. Should we be ambitious to be leaders? The answer is ‘yes’ if we have first understood Jesus’ revolutionary concept of the leader as the one with the greatest willingness to serve.(Lk.22:24-27) We also need to understand Paul’s name for a leader – overseer. In the present day we think of the overseer as being the boss who does not do any manual work himself but drives the staff to greater effort. In Jesus’ day the overseer was the watchman who stood on the city wall, day and night in all weathers, watching for danger and then warning the people of who or what was threatening.(Ezek.33:7-20) It was a lowly job not a prestigious one. It is the responsibility Paul urged Timothy in chapter one to take on of warning about ‘strange doctrine’, of having a sound world view, and recognising false alternatives. Being an overseer requires us to see the big picture rather than being preoccupied with insignificant detail.(3:1)

The first qualification is to be ‘above reproach’ which should immediately exclude all of us! This is not a standard to set for others, and therefore to write them off as unsuitable to lead. By setting an impossible standard for ourselves, we will remain humble like Paul in 1:15. We will be constantly reminded of our need of the cross of Christ, and His strength within. This is why a recent convert is not ready for leadership until he has discovered how he is and always will be ‘the chief of sinners’. The overseer’s marriage and home life need to work for him to be able to lead the family of God. Many leaders have felt disqualified to continue in leadership when their teenagers began to misbehave, but notice that Paul was not expecting the leader to have perfect children but simply to manage their difficult stages well. Much Christian leadership will be based in his home which is why ‘hospitable’ is a vital quality. Many necessary attributes have to do with how we are an outstanding example to people – ‘temperate, prudent, respectable’, and how we deal with disagreement with those who at least at first reject the gospel – ‘not pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable’. Paul was very much aware of how a love of alcohol or money would destroy effective leadership. Above all the overseer must be ‘able to teach’ because teaching the word, not sharing his opinion would be the secret of real growth in those he led. It is one thing to convince our fellow believers we are on the right track spiritually but the expectations of unbelievers are far tougher. When outsiders have to acknowledge our faith really works, we are beginning to make a difference.(3:2-7)

The role of ‘deacon’ is generally assumed to begin in Acts 6 when the apostles asked the whole congregation to choose seven men to undertake practical responsibility for the care of widows so that they themselves could concentrate on ‘prayer and the ministry of the word’. The word ‘deacon’ like the overseer was not an exalted one. It was one of the words for a servant. While the overseers served the spiritual food, the deacons would take care of the physical menu. Peter emphasised in Acts 6:3 that they were to be men of ‘good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.’ The same essential qualification is repeated by Paul that

they must be 'holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.' We are inclined in the church to put people into practical roles of service simply on the basis of the right practical skill. The same warnings are given as for overseers concerning their marriages and families, and again the destructive effect of being addicted to wine or money is repeated. Again they are to have proved their faithfulness before being given public responsibility. The requirement to be 'men of dignity, not double-tongued' reminds us that for practical service to glorify God, deacons need to be good with people. In Acts 6 first Stephen and later Philip become outstanding preachers showing that hands on ministry will often lead on to a speaking role and vice versa. Paul could still work with his own hands.( I Cor.4:12)

Verse 11 is controversial. Some translations read 'women' and others 'wives'. Which should it be? Both. Christian women who love the Lord are often outstanding practical servants of those in need. At the same time a deacon or an overseer needs a wife who is equally enthusiastic about their joint calling. The same people skills are needed in the women as the men because both are dealing with those who are struggling, needy and easily hurt, and often doing it in their home. An extra warning is thrown in about the women misusing their tongues, as the men have already been told not to be double-tongued. All of us in ministry can so easily open our mouths unwisely in gossip, judgement, exaggeration and even misplaced humour.(3:8-13)

Paul is well aware that even better than writing a letter is a personal visit but either way he is deeply concerned for the quality of Christian living of the whole church, which is how most people decide whether to take the gospel seriously. He concludes the chapter with what may have been a simple summary of their shared message, by which they reminded each other of what mattered. Godlikeness is the result of Jesus coming in bodily form, witnessed to in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, experiencing Jesus' resurrection which was acknowledged first by angels, proclaimed by Christians, believed by many others, and then He was taken back to heaven but will return. Always remember Timothy, our message is about Jesus!(3:14-16)

#### QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FOUR

1. What does Paul say is going on in the hearts of those who teach 'strange doctrines'? Why cannot someone be an honest wrong teacher? What two examples of wrong teaching does he give? How are we to deal with such teaching?(4:1-5)
2. Whom are we serving when we answer wrong teaching? How are we to protect ourselves against being drawn into the same false ideas? What two kinds of discipline does Paul describe? How are they similar and how are they different? What then is to be our priority in Christian ministry?(4:6-10)
3. What is the remedy for wrong teaching? How are we to respond to the way we are treated when we try to do this? What mistakes do we commonly make when we are criticised for teaching the Bible? What is to be the main thrust of our preaching? How do we know the Lord will use us at such times? To whom do we need first to apply our teaching?(4:11-16)