

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE
LETTER OF PAUL TO TITUS
PART FOUR – CHAPTER THREE

Having described the desirable qualities of the elders/overseers who would lead the church in Crete in chapter one, and the different objectives in the various groups, older men, older women, young women, young men and bondslaves who would make up the church in chapter two, Paul goes on in chapter three to discuss the message which would bring them all towards maturity.

First he says ‘remind them’. Paul did not mind how many times he repeated himself on basic questions. He lists five goals. They are to:

- be subject to rulers and authorities, - ‘rulers’ always refers to governments, or religious leaders such as those who crucified Jesus, or to Satan, but never to Christian leaders. ‘Rule’ has the sense of ‘lord it over’ as in Mk.10:42. ‘Elders who rule well’ in I Tim.5:17 uses a totally different word meaning ‘to stand before’. Our authority we are told is to preach the word. ‘Be subject’ is the same word used in Eph.5:21 to describe the respect which should be the basis of every relationship.
- be obedient, - is literally ‘to be persuaded by a ruler’ and is only used of our attitude to God, the government or a horse’s mouth.(James 3:3) It is not used of our relationship with elders.
- be ready for every good deed – is the theme to which Paul frequently returns in this letter to emphasise that a Christian faith should be practical.
- malign no-one – ‘malign’ is the word for blaspheme, slander or speak against.
- peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men – ‘gentle’ means yielding. ‘Consideration’ is another word for gentleness.(3:1,2)

To make it clear that he is not picking on the Cretans he acknowledges how he had been before he met Jesus Christ:

- foolish – means ‘without understanding’
- disobedient – is ‘not persuaded’ which explains how we came to be foolish
- deceived – means ‘caused to wander’ which describes the gradual drifting away from truth that happens when we refuse to be persuaded by the gospel.
- enslaved to various lusts and pleasures – ‘enslaved’ speaks of being owned by someone or something instead of being free to live as we should. ‘Lust’ is passionate longing for any kind of pleasure at any cost.
- spending life in malice and envy – ‘spending’ is literally ‘passing over’ and therefore wasting. ‘Malice’ means ‘bad’ and envy wants what someone else has.
- hateful and hating one another – these are two different words for wanting the worst for others. This list explains what made Saul of Tarsus the monster he acknowledges in Acts 22:3-5; 26:9-11 he was.(3:3)

He recalls what changed him:

THE NATURE OF GOD

- the kindness of God our Saviour
- His love for mankind – how different God was from Saul!

THE WORK OF GOD

- He saved us, based not on our deeds of righteousness but His mercy
- by washing of regeneration – ‘washing’ means having a bath, ‘regeneration’ is literally new birth
- renewing by the Holy Spirit

THE GIFT OF GOD

- poured out richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour
- leading to justification by His grace – ‘justification’ is having Christ’s record before God not our own
- heirs according to hope of eternal life.(3:4-7)

He has a strong confidence that this message when believed will result in people who

- will be careful to engage in good deeds, one of his key themes throughout this letter.(2:7; 3:1,5,8,14) Good deeds are not a means of salvation but the result. This message works for everyone!(3:8)

He warns of some traps those in ministry can easily fall into:

- foolish controversies and genealogies – this time ‘foolish’, in Greek, ‘moros’, means dull or stupid. The record of so much of church history demonstrates this.
- strife and disputes about the law – fighting each other instead of fighting for the souls of others. Yet we are to ‘contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.’(Jude 3)
- things which are unprofitable and worthless - what a tragedy to waste our lives arguing about useless trivia!

and about the people who by doing this will divide. Those who do this are to be warned a couple of times and then rejected from the fellowship if they persist, because they are:

- perverted and sinning – ‘pervert’ means ‘to turn inside out’
- self condemned – not by the accusations of others but their own damaging words.(3:9-11)

Paul closes with some personal news of the movements of some of his fellow workers. Titus is to join him in Nicopolis, a city of Dalmatia.(II Tim.4:10) His work in Crete would be done. He gives a final reminder of Christian faith expressed as ‘deeds for needs’, and of grace as the overflowing gift of God to us and through us.(3:12-15)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How would Paul’s five objectives of Christian teaching fit each of the five groups described in chapter two? Apply these objectives one by one to older men and so on.
2. How do verses 3-7 explain Paul’s life before and after he met Jesus Christ? How did this transformation happen for us?
3. What trap does Paul describe that those in Christian ministry can so easily fall into? Give examples from your own experience of how people make these mistakes and with what consequences. Isn’t it unchristian to reject some people?

4. What insight do these last few verses give into the value of teamwork in God's service?