

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

Titus had done a remarkable job of assisting Paul to deal with the extensive range of problems which had arisen in Corinth. Paul had reminded the Corinthians of the grace of God, the solution in the end to every problem in our Christian lives. This message had, by the time of the writing of II Corinthians, turned their lives around. Titus had shown an impressive blend of grace, joy, love, courage, patience, and motivation to serve without personal benefit. When Paul had tasted the challenge of Crete with their culturally difficult behaviour,(1:12) the obvious person to leave behind to help them was Titus. This letter was written shortly after Paul left and before his re-arrest and second trial. Others would come to support Titus, who was not expected to stay long in Crete.(3:12,13) Titus therefore needed to know how quickly to lay a solid foundation for the future of the church in Crete. This letter sums up these principles brilliantly.

Paul came straight to the point. He belonged willingly to God and had been given a very special message about Jesus Christ. He knew the power of this message. If the knowledge of Jesus was mixed with faith in Jesus, the result would be a life changing progressively to be more like Jesus. This was God's plan for those He had chosen and He had chosen all those who would hear and receive this message. The knowledge Paul spoke of was not an academic 'may be' but based on the hope of eternal life, the rock solid certainty of the life of heaven available for us to draw on now and for ever. The Old Testament had foreshadowed this message but in the New Testament we are commanded to declare it openly and confidently.(1:1-3)

It is apparent that Paul either led Titus to Christ or was largely responsible for his early development as a Christian. Most likely it was both. At the same time Paul recognizes that they had a 'common faith'; they both had faith in the same God. Paul the teacher had no more spirituality than Titus the student. The essential elements in that faith were grace, all the undeserved favour that God had lavished upon them because of Jesus, and peace, their wars with God had been settled so they could help others still fighting God and each other.(1:4)

Just as the living body needs order, muscles, bones, joints, nerves and arteries to link every part to the head, so the Christian church needs structure to bring every part of the body under the direction of Christ. The key to this happening is leadership for which Paul here uses two titles, elder and overseer. The word 'elder', simply meant a old man. How old? The Bible never tells us. The word 'overseer' described the watchman, the security guard whose job it was to watch day and night for trouble inside the city or an enemy outside, and then to warn the people.(Ezek.33:2) One English translation of overseer is 'bishop' which gives a very different impression from the humble role of the watchman. The two words indicate the importance of wisdom from experience and the ability to see the big picture of the threats to the Christian church.

The elder was to be 'above reproach', which means 'blameless', firstly as a husband and father, and secondly as a steward of God. But only Jesus is blameless so what does Paul mean? Simply that as elders we should set an impossible standard for ourselves, knowing we will fall short. We can then be gentle with the failings of others.

He then goes on to list 7 features which must not be true of the elder/overseer. He is not to be –

- accused of dissipation, which literally means 'unsavedness' and so wasteful
- accused of rebellion, meaning 'not subject to rule'
- self-willed, which is 'self-pleasing'
- quick-tempered, meaning 'inclined to anger'
- addicted to wine, literally 'beside wine'
- pugnacious, which means 'a striker'
- fond of sordid gain, which in Greek was all one word and meant 'disgraceful, ashamed'

On the other hand there are 7 positive characteristics which are essential for effective leadership. He is to be

- hospitable, which means 'loving strangers', which is much harder than loving friends and family
- loving what is good, which speaks for itself
- sensible, literally of sound mind, self-controlled and therefore temperate. The same word is used repeatedly in chapter 2:2,5,6. We cannot teach what we have not proved for ourselves.
- just, which means we will treat people fairly
- devout, from the word for holy or a saint, the idea of being set apart for God's exclusive use.
- self-controlled, which means 'master of' our own self, not out of control
- holding fast the faithful word according to the teaching so that he can exhort, literally 'called alongside to strengthen' and to refute 'convict, expose' those who contradict. His central activity is teaching.(1:5-9)

The last few verses of the chapter describe the challenge for the elder. There is a well-organised, articulate opposition, the core of whom were Jewish. They were rebels against God, who talked but had nothing to say but lies. They destroyed families and were motivated by money. They fitted a traditional description of Cretans as 'liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons.' They needed to be answered by sound teaching. 'Reprove' is the same word as 'refute' in verse 9. These false teachers loved legend and law, and were by their teaching defiled, literally 'stained'. They are easy to recognize because their mouths say one thing and their lives the opposite.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Describe in your own words the characteristics of a suitable church leader. Do you know anyone who fits this description? Do you?
2. What were Cretans said to be like? How had they come to be this way? Wasn't Paul being racist? How had the false teachers made the problem worse?
3. What is the simple secret of changing such a group of people? How did Paul anticipate that this could happen in a relatively short time? Would this approach work today?