

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY IN THE SECOND BOOK OF TIMOTHY – PART FIVE – NOTES ON CHAPTER FOUR AND FINAL ASSIGNMENT

In the light of the problem of false teaching and its devastating consequences on the one hand and the unshakeable certainty of the whole Bible and its life changing message on the other, Paul wants to focus Timothy on his central task – to preach the word. He encourages him to be totally committed to doing this whether the message is well received or not. He reminds Timothy of what the gospel will do in men's hearts – convince them of God's plan and what is wrong, and of how God will work throughout their lives, if they allow Him to. He urges him to persevere for a life-time in teaching truth.(4:1,2)

Paul had worked through a period when those he taught either gladly accepted his message or reacted violently against it. At least it was clear where his hearers stood. Sadly he foresees a time, which was already beginning in his life-time, in which those who professed to be Christians will be careful to find themselves preachers who will tell them only what they want to hear. They will look for entertaining and compelling personalities who will reassure them all is well between them and God and then introduce them to futile side-tracks. It is all too easy for us to be sucked into the same way of thinking or else to give up in disgust and walk away from the task. Paul pleads with Timothy to be clear minded, accept that persecution is inevitable, and not to be distracted from urging people to believe the gospel, to remain unswervingly committed to God's calling to him.(4:3-5)

Paul knows that his time is almost up. He compares his coming death to what is represented by the wine in the communion service, the pouring out of the blood of Christ to cleanse us from sin and to put His new life inside us.(Phil.2:17) The Lord will at times give those who trust Him a glimpse of what is going to happen. When He does it is not so that we can try to avoid the unpleasant but to allow us to be at peace in hard times. Hezekiah made the mistake of trying to change God's mind when Isaiah announced his coming death. God granted his prayer for the moment but with disastrous consequences for generations to come.(II Kgs.20) Paul has the wonderful comfort of knowing from God that he had fought and run well, like a boxer when the final bell goes or a marathon runner crossing the finishing line. His had been a journey not of his own doing but of faith. He can now only anticipate the prize giving or the medal ceremony after the Olympics.(I Cor.9:25; II Tim.2:5; James 1:12) But unlike the Olympic Games Paul knows he will stand on the podium with every true believer, including Timothy, who really loves the Lord and has therefore also been faithful to his calling.(4:6-8)

In the rest of the letter, as he so often does, Paul turns to the individuals he has known well, about whom he cares deeply, who illustrate by their faithfulness or unfaithfulness the message he has presented. First he hopes to see Timothy for the last time on earth. Letters, or today an e-mail, text or phone call, are good but nothing beats a real face to face meeting to say goodbye. By contrast Demas who had earlier been included among the believers with Paul in his first imprisonment,(Col.4:14; Philemon 24) had fallen away from the faith, loving the present world,(Matt.6:24) more than the Lord. We do not know why Crescens and Titus had gone elsewhere, presumably because the Lord led them.(4:9,10)

Luke alone of Paul's travelling team remains with Paul gathering all the understanding he can from Paul for his writing of his gospel and Acts but at the same time encouraging Paul with all he had come to know of Christ through his research into the scriptures, prayer and experience. The special request for Timothy to bring Mark to Rome is interesting. In Acts 15:37-39 Barnabas and Paul had had a sharp disagreement over Mark, Paul deciding that Mark's previous desertion of their mission in Acts 13:13 made him unsuitable for a further expedition. His opinion has now changed because, we assume, Mark had learned about 'strong grace' and would now be an asset not a liability. Tychicus was Paul's faithful courier who had delivered the letters to the Ephesians,(Eph.6:21) and the Colossians.(Col.4:7) He was not necessarily a teacher but he could be relied upon to report important news, but not gossip, accurately. He was going back to Ephesus possibly with another letter from Paul.(4:11,12)

This is the only time in all his letters where Paul makes a personal request other than that they should pray for him. Conditions in prison are tough and his cloak would help. Paul was human! The book and parchments may have been the Old Testament, his own letters or other books of reference. Paul still wanted to study and write with only a small time left to live. Alexander knew the truth and not only rejected it but wanted others to do the same. This is where ungodliness leads.(Rom.1:18) He may have been the same Alexander who led opposition in Ephesus,(Acts 19:33) or the one referred to in I Tim.1:19.(4:13-15)

Here is an important piece of the jigsaw puzzle of the later part of Paul's life. He was tried, presumably before the emperor, twice. In between it seems that he was freed and able to travel for the last time to places like Ephesus and Crete. His first trial after his two years of house arrest was a lonely occasion in which he had no support from his friends and perhaps for that reason a wonderful sense of the Lord's presence and power to keep him. It would be intriguing to know whether charges were dropped from a lack of evidence. He knows very well he could have been thrown to the lions in the Colosseum, as many Christians were. He knows like the missionary to Africa, David Livingstone, that he was immortal until his work on earth was done. Heaven would be his final destination. All he had accomplished would have been God's doing alone.(4:16-18)

Paul says his last farewells to some old friends some of whom we know and some we do not. Priscilla and Aquila had been his hosts in Corinth, and Aquila had been his boss in the tent making business.(Acts 18:2) They had come to Christ, left Corinth with Paul,(Acts 18:18,19) and been in various cities in each of which their home became a church.(Rom.16:3; I Cor.16:19) Onesiphorus had taken good care of Paul in Rome despite Paul's imprisonment.(II Tim.1:16) Erastus was the city treasurer of Corinth,(Rom.16:23) and had travelled with Paul.(Acts 19:22) Trophimus was from Ephesus, and had also been part of Paul's mobile Bible school all the way to his arrest in Jerusalem.(Acts 20:4; 21:19) He had been left by Paul in Miletus, the port for Ephesus, because of sickness indicating that even then sickness was not always cured miraculously. Once more he urges Timothy to come soon because he knows his time is running out. He passes greetings from some fellow believers who were with him in Rome.

Finally he reminds Timothy of the Lord's presence in him, the Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind,(II Tim.1:7) and therefore of the limitless resources of grace available to be drawn on.(4:19-22)

FINAL ASSIGNMENT ON SECOND TIMOTHY

Reviewing Paul's relationship with Timothy, what had been the key events and tasks they had shared? What were Paul's expectations of Timothy? How did he help him to achieve his God-given potential? Who has played such a role in your life? How have they done this? In whose life have you begun to be like Paul to them? How will this book help you to do so effectively?