

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

In chapter three Paul moves on from the question of why suffering happens to faithful servants of God to why those who persecute behave in the way they do. According to Acts 2:17 the last days began with the day of Pentecost. Paul had already used the phrase 'later times' in I Tim.4:1 to refer to a trend towards believers falling away rather than a particular date in history. He says it will get harder not easier. Living in a democratic and affluent country we may find this hard to accept until we look more carefully at what Paul is describing. The first four items all speak of selfishness. They are our modern philosophy – 'I must look after me', 'I deserve it'. The next two put down God and then parents – the logical next step when we have put ourselves first. The following four features are all negative, what is missing – gratitude, holiness(belonging to God), love, reconciliation – which will make such a difference to the way we relate in the family and society. He then goes on to list six ways in which we actively destroy each other – with words, being without restraint, with weapons, targeting anything good, not caring about loyalty, or consequences. Finally he returns to where he started – with a big view of ourselves, putting pleasure first because we do not care about God. The saddest part of the list is that all these attitudes are hidden behind an appearance of spirituality, but a religion with no power. Paul warns us not to be fooled and to keep well away from such teaching.(3:1-5)

He describes now how this false teaching will often work. The men responsible will infiltrate families targeting the women whose weakness will cause them to fall for it. This would be the typical pattern in the culture of his day. Today the roles might sometimes be reversed. He compares the troublemakers of his time to the magicians of Pharaoh who tried with their tricks to copy Moses' miracles but who were exposed as powerless.(Exod.7:11,22; 8:7,18; 9:11) Behind their techniques are twisted minds, the inevitable result of rejecting the truth.(3:6-9)

In striking contrast to the first list is a second one which begins with receiving Paul's kind of teaching. This produces a totally different kind of behaviour which is characterised by a clear God-given sense of direction, an all day long trust in God, and qualities of relaxed but determined love of the kind which only God can show through us. But remember, Timothy, said Paul, this way of living will lead to persecution as it did when we first met in Lystra. And you heard of what had already happened to me in Antioch and Iconium. The Lord kept me because He still had work for me to do. Do not be surprised that simply living in Christ's plan and strength will get you into trouble! Realise too that there will always be those who are committed to what is wrong. They are liars and cheats who will get worse not better as time goes on.(3:10-13)

The only way to make the choice between the godless, self-centred pretence of verses 2-4 and the Christ-inspired living of verses 10 and 11 is to decide to which message we will listen. We need not only to learn this message but to be deeply convinced in the heart. The ultimate test of truth is not where we read or heard an idea but who was our teacher at the time. John

reminds us that it should be 'His anointing' which teaches us.(I Jn.2:27) The word 'Christ' means 'the anointed one' so it should be Christ Himself who is our teacher. Jeremiah in Jer.31:33,34 anticipated this revolutionary change with the coming of Jesus. No longer are we meant to rely on the experts to tell us what is or is not true. We are still to appreciate faithful Bible teaching but the Lord in us will be the expert in whom alone we can be certain. The exciting result of this relationship is that the teaching we receive from Him will make us more and more like Him, not the preacher.(Lk.6:40) For those like Timothy who had a childhood background of Old Testament teaching the ground had already been well prepared for the message of salvation. It makes such a difference when we are explaining the gospel to adults for them to have had a solid knowledge of the word of God even as a child. We have something to build on and so usually their progress will be much faster. It was for this reason that Paul on his missionary journeys went first to the synagogue if there was one when he came to a new city. This should encourage all those who teach Bible stories to children, even if they do not see a response at the time.(3:14,15)

The final two verses of this chapter are well worth memorising. They are a powerful uncompromising statement about the source and value of the whole Bible. The entire Bible is 'God-breathed'. Around 40 writers over a period of 1500 years in several languages and vastly different circumstances and styles contributed to the scriptures but all of them were inspired by God. This in the end is all that matters. The entire Bible can be part of the process of giving us knowledge and understanding of God and ourselves. 'Reproof' is the same word as 'conviction'. We can be certain of the problem of our hearts, and clear about how change will happen. We can be equipped as mature men and women of God for absolutely everything the Lord has planned for our lives. Whatever our role in life, the Bible is the basic training textbook.(3:16,17)

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FOUR

1. How does Paul impress on Timothy the importance of his task? What is Timothy urged to do and how is he to do it? What obstacles will he be up against? In what ways do we face similar circumstances today?(4:1-5)
2. What is Paul expecting will happen to him on earth? What is he anticipating in heaven? In what way does God give us also a glimpse of what is to come? Why may He do this?(4:6-8)
3. Why does Paul want Timothy to come at this time? What have been the movements of the other believers in Paul's team? What has particularly disappointed Paul about one of them? How do such things happen today? What are Paul's personal needs at this point? Could this be the same Alexander as in Acts 19:33?(4:9-15)
4. What indication do we have of the outcome of Paul's first trial? How had Paul handled being largely on his own? How does the Lord also stand with us at such times? How does good sometimes come out of being humanly alone?(4:16-18)
5. What do we already know about the friends Paul mentions in closing? What is Paul's final reminder to Timothy? How does it sum up the message of the whole book?(4:19-22)