

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

Many have turned away from Paul presumably because of the danger of associating with a prisoner of the Emperor but Paul is confident Timothy will not follow them. The secret would be to be strong, not in himself, but in the grace which comes when we are in Christ. Strong grace in the life of Jesus stunned even His enemies. (Lk.4:22,32,36) Some people are strong characters but they tend to bully. Others are gracious but all too often weak under pressure. It takes Jesus, and Jesus in us, to be both at the same time. The chief concern of the gracious strong is to pass the secret on to others. But the key is to find those who will consistently respond with faith to teaching because they in turn will pass the word to others. This strategy can take the gospel to the whole world in a remarkably short time. (2:1,2)

Paul now uses three everyday images to explain the positive effect of suffering. The first is the soldier who needs to be disciplined, and single-minded if he is to be ready for the enemy and please his commanding officer. The second is the top level athlete who will have no hope of an Olympic medal unless he puts a huge commitment into training with a clear understanding of the rules of his particular event. Again he must be totally preoccupied with training at the expense of his other interests if he is to be in contention. Modern machinery has made farming a little easier but even today a successful farmer needs to understand the needs of his animals or crops and be single-minded in putting them first. The huge satisfaction which comes from victory in battle, winning a top level event or harvesting a bumper crop far exceeds any fading memory of the suffering of hard work. (2:3-7)

The tougher life was in prison the more Paul's mind is brought back to the heart of his message, Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered but He is alive from the dead. Paul may be in prison but the word of God is definitely not. The pain is worth it for the gain to those God has chosen to receive salvation and to show His glory, His character shining out of their lives. If suffering leads to death we can be certain we will live again. Endurance leads to sharing His reign in the world to come. If on the other hand we deny Him, we are on our own, but even if we do, He will never give up on us. (2:8-13)

It seems that in Ephesus strong gracious teaching had often been replaced by arguing about words. Talk for its own sake was considered to be witnessing. The content was no different from the gossip and speculation of the world without Christ. It was damaging God's people. It spread like an epidemic. Most importantly it did not do anything to produce Christ's character in those who were taken in by it. Paul compares the challenge for a Christian teacher as being like that of a craftsman learning to be skilled in the use of his tools. The right use of the Bible is the only protection against being lured into nonsense teaching. Hymenaeus and Philetus were sadly notable examples of this disease. Their particular brand of wrong teaching was that the resurrection had already taken place. But Paul had made it clear that this would not happen until Christ's return. (I Cor. 15:23) People were confused. Confused teaching undermines Christian growth and certainly does not produce strong grace. Sometimes the sheer volume of confused teaching leaves us wondering what God is doing.

Paul reassures us. The building may have suffered damage but the foundation of a certain salvation remains.(I Cor.3:10,11) If our understanding of our faith has been shaken we may just have to start building on it again. And this time be careful about to whom we listen!(2:14-19)

Every home has a variety of containers whether in the kitchen, the bathroom or the workshed. They come in all sorts of shapes, sizes and condition. Some are highly prized wedding presents which have been kept on show but hardly ever put to use. Others are cracked old pots which are chipped and battered from long service. What matters is whether they are ready for service again and in particular whether they are clean. It does not matter what purpose they fulfilled last time – they could have held garbage – as long as they are clean now, and ready for a new purpose. So often we emphasise the outside of the pot but what matters is the contents. Paul talks of having this treasure, Christ, in earthen vessels.(II Cor.4:7) We tend to value people by the impressiveness of the outside,(Rom.9:21) but God sees the heart. What matters is Whom we contain. If treasure is growing in the heart, this will show on the outside as righteousness, faith, love and peace. So Paul says be committed to teaching Christ-honouring truth. It will not be easy. We will be challenged by wrong teaching which needs to be answered in the hope of restoring the false teachers to the truth. Help them escape the Devil's grip!(20-26)

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER THREE

1. What will be the characteristics of people in the last days? What is the underlying attitude to life that they express? What have they lost sight of? How much do they describe the modern world we live in? What is the spiritual problem which explains such behaviour?(3:1-5)
2. What does Paul describe as the separate mistakes of men and women in creating this situation? What strategy will some men use? Give modern examples. What makes some women vulnerable to being misled? Again give modern examples of how these things happen. How did the magicians of Egypt compete with Moses' message to Pharaoh?(Exod.7,8,9) How did God show through Moses His superiority to the wise men of Egypt? How will this also work today?(3:6-9)
3. List all the ways Timothy had followed Paul's example. What trouble had Paul's Christian path got him into in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra?(Acts 13,14) How had God looked after Paul as He had Moses? How can we avoid persecution? Are conditions going to become any easier for Christians in the future?(3:10-13)
4. What is the secret of coping with persecution and continuing with God's calling to us? What indication does Paul give as to Timothy's upbringing? How should this encourage us as Christian parents? What is the nature of the Bible? What can we expect will be the effects of Bible study? And what should be its end result? How are verses 15-17 the answer to the 'men of depraved mind' of whom Paul warns?(3:14-17)