

Prayer

Glorious Lord, You have shown Yourself to millions of people throughout the world and throughout history; reveal Yourself to us today. Give us eyes to see where You are, ears to listen to Your Word, mouths to speak to You, and hearts to accept Your presence and the consequences of Your will. Glorious Lord, change and transform our lives daily through the power of Your love: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Faithfulness

Pray that God's people will remain faithful to the task of mission they have been given by God, and seek to go to where they are needed most in our turbulent world today.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for India and the terrorist outrages in Mumbai (Bombay)*
- *Give thanks to God for the joys of Christian fellowship*
- *Pray for the people of Afghanistan and the war still raging there*

Meditation

(a carol © Paul H Ashby 2008)

The rider in the heavens, has raised his mighty voice,
Listen now to hear the news and in God's name rejoice.
See the glorious majesty of the coming of our Lord
He comes in power amongst us now according to His word.

Glory to the Lord in the highest heaven

Glory to the King above all kings

Glory to the Father for the gift of His son

Glory to the Lord, glory to the Lord, glory to the Lord for evermore.

Immanuel has come to earth as ancient prophets said
Turn to see the place he lay where sheep and cattle fed
Join with kings and shepherds in true homage to the King
And make this celebration now a chance for all to sing

The babe was born in Bethlehem according to God's plan
For He made our great Redeemer before the world began
He's come to break the power of sin for all the human race
And those who have received Him know the amazing gift of grace

Bible Study - Titus 10-16

¹⁰ *There are many who are rebellious, deceivers with nothing to say, especially those of the circumcision;* ¹¹ *they must be silenced, as they are upsetting whole families by teaching for dishonest gain such things as are not necessary.* ¹² *One of them said, one of their very own prophets, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and idle gluttons.'* ¹³ *This testimony is true; so rebuke them sharply, so that they may be put right in the faith,* ¹⁴ *paying no attention to Jewish myths or the commands of those who reject the truth.* ¹⁵ *All things are*

pure to the innocent, but nothing is pure to those who are corrupted and cease to believe; both their minds and consciences are corrupted. ¹⁶ *They profess to know God, but deny him in what they do. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.*

Review

Titus had been left on the island of Crete with the express instruction of Paul to establish a sound leadership structure for the church. This was necessary for the very reason we now read about in our passage today; the church was at the mercy of people who had no real knowledge of the Gospel but had a vested interest in promoting their own ministries and spreading various deviant versions of faith, including those based on 'Jewish myths' (1:13). This passage sounds highly judgemental, but it is in scripture as an example of the need for sound judgement, and Paul certainly believed that Titus was wise enough to exercise such judgement under the inspiration of God's Spirit, for the good of all.

We should remember that before this passage, Paul gave clear instructions about those to be chosen for leadership (1:5-9). It would have been useless him complaining about the state of the church or people's beliefs if he was to do nothing about it. However, as we often find in Paul's letters, his harsh words are often backed up by action, emissaries to the bring word of truth, letters to instruct, affirmation of individuals to be trusted and the identification of those who were leading people astray. We often read selected sections of Paul's letters without reading them in the context of the people and circumstances specifically mentioned at the beginnings and the ends of the letters, which enable us to understand how Paul was helping the churches, as well as what he was teaching.

Paul began by identifying those who were 'rebellious' and 'deceivers' who had 'nothing to say' (1:10) as dangerous to the church, and in this, he included Jews, 'those of the circumcision'. This is an interesting analysis of the state of the church on Crete, and it speaks quite strongly to us today. Instead of pointing the finger at individuals, Paul was able to identify those who 'upset whole families' by what they said, and he branded them according to their characteristics, as 'rebellious' and 'deceptive ...'. This is interesting, because scripture identifies rebellion as a serious disorder of the soul. Today, rebellion is virtually institutionalised by the way some leading Christians quickly reject what they dislike about the worship or the mission of the church, turning away from what they think of as either old or culturally irrelevant. Such immaturity in matters of faith is extraordinary; rebellion has always been a part of the human experience, and most know full well that it is a part of 'growing up' and not a characteristic of maturity. Rebellion against God is sin, and as a way of living, rebellion can never be a good principle upon which to build the life of the church; as if God's people need to be constantly looking for something better to do and say, when Jesus has already died for us and the sins of the whole world!

By comparison with the truths of the powerful Gospel, Paul said that those with rebellious and devious minds had nothing of substance to say. Paul's next comment has aroused a considerable amount of interest, because he quoted something that must have been general gossip about the lazy and evil nature of Cretan society (1:12). It is unfortunate if we think that this quote in Titus justifies the characterisation of Cretan people as any more 'lazy' than others; this is plainly rubbish, and the comment is generally true of many throughout the world. Paul's point is this, if people know what the problem is, then they should do something about it! He urges the church to pick up this popular perception and use it as a reason to expound the truth of the Gospel (1:13). Every fault, every failing and every threat to the church was in Paul's mind an opportunity to be ever clearer about the truths of the Gospel.

Paul was also keen to drive home the difference between the Jewish faith as it was developing in the years after Christ, and the life of the church (1:10,13). Whilst many Christians were Jews, the formal Jewish faith was increasingly either distancing itself from the church or attempting to persuade its members to 'come back' to Judaism. Titus would have been well aware of Paul's views on this, and the very mention of the problem was probably sufficient to warn Titus to be on his guard.

As always, Paul was constantly vigilant for the purity of the Gospel. He warned Titus that all distractions, complications, rebellions and challenges from the world of the day were intolerable, and it was Titus' job to make sure that leaders of the church were found who would not only have the qualities to lead properly, but to understand this well. The church needed the right people at its head, not those of a rebellious nature or with subversive agendas, or those afflicted by the same sins as the society in which they worked. By the end of this first chapter, Titus knew what Paul was looking for in leaders of the church!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What can you find within this passage of scripture that reflects the society in which you live, or the life of your church?
2. How easy is it to identify problems in the life of the church today and do something about it? Why is this often very difficult?
3. How would you characterise the society in which you live, and what can the church do to preach the Gospel to it?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have to say that I find the rebellious nature of some in church as extraordinary. As a small example, some are firmly set against 'prayers' if they are read from a script saying that unless they are extempore, they are not 'of the Spirit'. Now, I like extempore prayers and usually pray extempore, but such an attitude is profoundly ignorant and rebellious against the tremendous traditions of the church (and the Spirit!) which have helped people know God through 'set' prayers for centuries. Great prayers of the church are now long forgotten in the mind of society because the church has largely ditched them! What does this say about our mission?

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Are you aware of anyone in your church who is upset by the some of its teaching, either by its leaders or by other individuals who feel they have something to say and make their voices heard? Pray, and ask the Lord to guide you to tackle some of these issues for the good of the whole church.*
- *Where do you get your 'teaching' from in your church? Talk to those who teach and encourage them as you are able, and ask them about what you do not understand or you suspect may be questionable.*

Final Prayer

You, O Lord God, know the secrets of the Universe; its origins, its workings and its future. Show me my place within Your eternal purposes and give me inner peace. So, may I live my life with confidence in You as my maker and my Redeemer, to the praise and glory of Your Name. AMEN