

Prayer

The beauty of Your world astounds me, Lord God, and the cruelty of humanity shocks me. Motivate me to live according to Your Word, the only means whereby truth may be upheld, honesty be valued, love be seen as strength, and care for others be the highest goal. As I pray, show me the truth about this world, Your Love, and my life. In this light, may I follow You always: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Weapons of War

Our world today is in many ways dominated by the military, and the arms trade is an offshoot of the military which is controversial. Pray today against the illegal use of guns.

On-going prayers

- Pray for casual workers in your country who have no fixed home
- Pray for India and the terrorist outrages in Mumbai (Bombay)
- Give thanks to God for the joys of Christian fellowship

Meditation

Start believing, not because you must,
but because Jesus Christ has saved you!

Start praying, not just when you need to,
but when the Lord prompts you!

Start listening, not because you ought to,
but because the Saviour loves you!

Start rejoicing, not just when you want to,
but when the Holy Spirit leads you!

Start living, not because you have no option,
but because your God frees you!

Start expecting, not just when you have a reason,
but all the time God gives you!

Bible Study - Titus 2:1-5

¹ But as for you, teach what is right according to sound doctrine; ² older men should be temperate, honourable, self-controlled, and sound in faith, love and perseverance. ³ In the same way, older women should behave reverently, and not be given to gossip or enslaved to drink. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ so that they may train the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, devoted to the home, kind, and obedient to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be maligned.

Review

In this passage, Paul moves on from instructing Titus about leadership and turns to some of the priorities for teaching. There are many passages like this in Paul's letters, and it may seem as if we could construct most of this from what he says elsewhere (in Timothy and

Ephesians, for example!). However, there are one or two distinctive features of this text which make it more interesting than we might think.

Firstly, Paul instructed Titus to 'teach what is right according to sound doctrine'. Paul's point is very succinctly put, and he speaks as if sound doctrine was clearly known and identifiable. Some have been tempted to regard 'sound doctrine' as no more or less than Paul's own understanding of the faith, but that is a fairly cynical view of things. The value of Paul's explanations of the faith lie in the fact that they can be studied in scripture, compared to the Old Testament, and checked for consistency. To this day, scholars turn out books on Paul's theology explaining its connections to the Old Testament, and having no difficulty in identifying Paul's characteristics within his letters. I point this out because the world of theological education, whilst capable of treating Paul in this way, has totally dropped the idea of 'Christian Doctrine'. You will hardly find a course or module with that name in any university or theological training College, certainly in my own country of England. It is as if no one still believes in a clear, concise explanation of Christian belief! Scholars regard the Christian faith as so fragmented that the common denominators between Christians of different persuasion have been lost! I say this with deep concern, because whatever the sins of the church and the understanding of the world and academia in general, I dare to believe that there is such a thing as 'right doctrine', along with Paul and countless others through the ages.

This is a difficult observation to make, but Paul's comment about 'sound doctrine' is profoundly challenging to the church today, and the issue will not go away. The Spirit will hound God's people until they return to Him and the Saviour He has sent them, and we should expect to be moved by the Spirit to find again what we once had but has now, in many places, been lost. How can God's people be taught the truth about the love of God if its ministers are not taught the rigours of 'right doctrine' whilst training?

The rest of this letter contains a fascinating contrast between the instructions Paul gave to Titus about teaching older men, and older women. This passage is best read and studied alongside other passages from Paul's letters which speak about men and women, such as Ephesians 5:21f., 1 Timothy 2:8f. so that we gain a balanced view of Paul's teaching about men and women. He does mention here in Titus that women should be obedient to their husbands (2:5), but there is little here to suggest that this necessarily reflects a domination of women by men. Rather, the passage reflects a positive and kindly attitude towards elderly men and women, as if Paul was telling Titus to foster in the older members of the church an attitude to life like that of 'grandparents' in the extended family!

Paul lists six characteristics of older men equating with sound doctrine (2:2), and he lists ten characteristics of older women. If we look at these, the following are shared between both male and female; temperance, sound faith, self control, and love (men) or kindness (women). These four are a worthy set of characteristics by any standard! However, the two exclusively male qualities are honour and perseverance; whilst Paul lists six distinctly female characteristics; reverence, no gossiping, assistance to younger women, purity, responsibility in the home, obedience to husbands. Some may feel this reflects a bias against women, but the list is only as negative as we make it, as is the list for men. Both, for example, are urged to be careful with drink and both are cautioned to keep to sound teaching. The two extra challenges to men are powerful challenges, because honour and perseverance are two qualities that older men are well placed to example, and these are much needed today! The six extra items mentioned for women urge on them restraint and modesty and a concern for the home. Whilst some might regard Paul's remarks as sexist, there is nothing wrong with urging restraint and modesty, as Paul says, so that the 'Word of God may not be maligned' (2:5). In addition, the household duties identified by Paul may be culturally conditioned, but this will be true of every generation and time, and in any

society, severe difficulties will arise unless the home is cared for properly either by the men or the women or by both.

Paul does not tell people what to do here, He advises Titus about what should be taught so that the church may maintain its witness in society unhindered by bad teaching or strife in the home. His advice is worth our close attention.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what you might consider to be 'sound doctrine'. Where can you find this today?
2. Discuss the four characteristics and qualities mentioned by Paul for both men and women. Why do you think Paul chose these as common to both?
3. What does this text imply about relationships in the home, if anything, and what can it teach us today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Personally, I feel that Paul's words were profoundly liberating for women of his day. His letter told them that their homely duties were clear and defined, but in this text, he placed no restrictions on women's involvement in social affairs or the life of the church. In Roman society many women had little life outside of the home, and the Gospel gave them access to a world of faith and fellowship which many others just did not have. Paul's request was always that women respect this privilege and act with modesty so that the benefits of the Gospel might not be compromised by the antagonism of men or husbands, who did not have as wide a vision of the freedoms of the Gospel as Paul.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If possible, go to your local Christian Bookshop, and identify any books which address the subject of 'Christian doctrine'. If you are able to purchase one, do so and see what you make of it in the light of what Paul says.*
- *Pray for the relationships between men and women in your church and in your society. Pray for those who find it hard to deal with the 'opposite sex' in our world today which appears to be so sexually 'liberal'.*

Final Prayer

Speak to me Lord Jesus, when for whatever reason, I do not know where to turn because of fear. Send Your Holy Spirit and fill me with Your love and peace, and in that security may I find my way to the heart of faith again, and hand all my problems over to You. Thank You Lord Jesus, my Saviour; AMEN