

Prayer

We can never tell what marvellously things You will do for us each day, Lord God, but Your faithfulness sustains us in body, soul and spirit.

Challenge us to do what is right each moment,
Invigorate us with the blessing of Your presence
and speak Your blessing into our hearts each day.

We pray this in the name of Christ our Saviour, who has opened our hearts and minds to the glories of Your Kingdom. Thank You, Lord God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Seasons

Give thanks to God for the Christian festivals attached to each of the seasons, especially the coming season of Christmas. Pray that God will come into our world in Christ, again.

On-going prayers

- *Give thanks to God for safety whilst you travel*
- *Pray for people in Tibet and the political problems there*
- *Pray for those suffering from the cholera epidemic in Africa*

Meditation

What are the routines and habits by which you live your life?

What desires and which people influence your decisions?

Is it food or drink? Meals, at home or 'out'? The pub?

Is it family needs? Children? Parents? Spouse?

Is it work or the need to earn more money to pay bills?

Is it church? The work of holding office, or worshipping?

Is it the television; catching programmes you cannot miss?

Is it pastimes, such as holidays, the garden, sport or reading?

And how does Christ mould your life amidst its realities?

And what happens when 'life' and 'faith' clash; which wins?

Remember, the Lord knows your future as well as your present

By His challenges He guide us; He loves us, and He knows what's best.

Bible Study - Titus 3:1-3

¹ *Remind them to accept the authority of rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to be a person of peace, to be gentle, and to show true courtesy to everyone. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, rebellious, easily led astray, slaves to various desires and passions, living in malice and envy, hated, and despising one another.*

Review

Paul's letter to Titus is only short, but Paul packs in the same elements of teaching found in so many of his letters. It is quite fascinating to watch how familiar lists and advice flow from

his pen, and note both what is common to his writing in general and also the subtle differences which characterise each letter. Here, Paul speaks about the spiritual and practical responsibilities of those who follow Christ (3:1,2), and follows this with an appeal for people to understand the logic of what he says. He explains that the new life in Christ is radically different from the old life of 'self' not just in abstaining from various things which are bad, such as rebellion and hatred; but by taking on good attitudes and habits which are honouring to God, such as the acceptance of authority and being a person of peace.

Some positive characteristics to take on board This passage is a brief one beginning with some positive advice typical of Paul's writing. The phrases we may well remember from what he has said elsewhere are accepting 'the authority of rulers and authorities' (see Romans 13), obedience (Rom 6:16, 2 Cor 10:6), and gentleness (a characteristic found in the 'Fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5:23f.)). We will not spend time on these issues here because much more is said about them elsewhere.

What is more interesting for us are the phrases and words not commonly found elsewhere. Firstly, Paul says 'speak evil of no one.' This does not mean that we should not speak our mind if we believe that issues of truth are at stake, but it does mean that we should refrain from speaking maliciously about people, and in our hearts we know the difference between mere plain speaking and stirring up trouble that the devil can use. We can certainly be mistaken whilst intending to be merely truthful, and find that we have offended and created trouble. However, this is something for which we know we must apologise and seek to put right. Speaking evil about others when we know it will make trouble for them, because we have a personal agenda against them or a vengeful heart, is not something that sits properly inside a Christian heart. We know when this happens and must avoid it; it will create trouble for all, and eventually ourselves.

Secondly, Paul talks about being a 'person of peace'; this is a characteristic related to what we have just discussed. Someone of peace is one who is an active peacemaker; always working actively to promote good relationships amongst people. Being 'peaceful' is sometimes thought to be a secretive characteristic, because those who have it are hardly ever seen or heard! At its best, however, it is a highly pro-active. This is also true of the third characteristic mentioned by Paul, that of showing 'true courtesy to everyone'. Sometimes, people can misunderstand true courtesy, because when we show courtesy to people with whom we disagree, there will be those who feel that we should confront or attack our opponents, perhaps even put them down. Paul says, 'No'. Courtesy should always be shown, especially in the difficult things of life, so that issues are dealt with properly and Christian fellowship is shown wherever possible.

Some characteristics to avoid In complete contrast to these, Paul mentions a list of evils to be avoided in verse 3. As before, many of the items mentioned are to be found in other lists of evils written by Paul. Certainly, we will be familiar with 'foolishness' (1 Cor 1:21f. Gal 3:1), and 'slaves to various desires and passions' (Rom 7:5, Gal 5:24). Strangely, this is one of only a few places where Paul identifies rebellion as a characteristic to be avoided. In the Old Testament, rebellion lies at the heart of the problems of the people of Israel, because the manner in which the Israelites turned away from their God made it necessary for Him to work through His Messiah to bring salvation to the world. Clearly, Paul advised that a rebellious heart would not be acceptable to one who claimed to be part of the 'new covenant' of God's grace.

Other phrases used by Paul in this list are 'easily led astray', and 'living in malice and envy ...'. It is easy to nod one's head in agreement with Paul and say that these characteristics should be avoided, but in our hearts, we know that there are certain occasions and certain subjects on which we can be led astray because of our personal weaknesses. For example, if we are sick, then we can be susceptible to considering all kinds of alternative

medical treatments even if they involve belief systems (whether ancient or more modern) which are at complete odds with our faith in Christ Jesus. People claim or say 'it works, so it must be OK!' But we can be tragically wrong; too many become addicted to various alternative medical remedies, giving thanks to them for their health rather than the God who made them. This is a difficult example, but it needs to be spoken about.

Paul speaks about malice and envy, hating and displeasing one another. All of these things obviously work against the command of our Lord Jesus to love one another, especially when intended. We have a clear duty to work actively against all the evils which seek to subvert the power of the Gospel in our lives and the life of the church. This is what Paul says, and we should all take his advice with active concern.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What characteristics do you regard to be particularly important to the life of God's people today, within our society.
2. What good characteristics should God's people pay particular attention to today, and why?
3. How do we find guidance about doing 'the right thing' in our complex world of changing ethics and cultures?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Each list of Paul's has its characteristics. It is quite easy for us to gloss over those characteristics we have come across before, or pay little attention to things we do not believe have anything to do with us. However, if we are willing to have good look at what scripture says, especially those parts we make assumptions about, the Lord will often reveal to us some useful personal advice, if we will let Him. As with all Bible study, the 'Word of God' becomes lacklustre to us if we allow ourselves to be fed by our own unspoken prejudices; but liberated by the Spirit, we can find strength from the most surprising of places.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *As an exercise, make a list of the 'good' qualities listed by Paul in some of his great lists, and also the 'evil' qualities (see Galatians 5:19-24, 1 Timothy 3:13,14 etc.). Assess what is said frequently, and what is said occasionally. How can these great 'lists of advice' be best used today?*
- *Pray for those who know that they need to change but find it very hard to face the reality of doing what they know to be right. Ask the Lord both to help you on your own personal journey of faith, but also to enable you to be someone who helps others in their spiritual journey.*

Final Prayer

Your protection, Lord God, is all around us. We cannot always hear it, see it or feel it, but it is there. Thank You for the times when You have indeed protected us, whether we know it or not, and help us recognise the spiritual signs which give us confidence that You are indeed, watching over us; AMEN