

## Prayer

Open our minds and our hearts, Lord Jesus, to what is happening in this world. Then, as we see the exploitation and injustices perpetrated within the world, may we turn to You for the inspiration, guidance and strength we need, to bring hope and love to all those who are oppressed. May Your Kingdom come, Lord Jesus, and may we all live in its light. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Fire Services

*Give thanks for those who risk their lives for others in the course of their daily work. Pray that the fire services of your country will be well understood and properly maintained.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for the country of Israel and all people who live there*
- *Give thanks to God for the life of each member of your family*
- *Pray for those suffering with cholera in southern Africa*

## Meditation

We try to do our best, Lord Jesus;

But often, we fail to do what's right:

May we never fail You so much  
That we ignore the extent of our sin,  
And refuse to repent of our wrongdoing:

May we never fail each other so much  
That we do not notice when we hurt others,  
And forget to turn to them with an apology:

May we never fail ourselves so much  
That we do not accept our shortcomings,  
And decline to ask for Your help to change.

And so, through humility and by Your Spirit,  
Lord Jesus, let us try again to do our best.

## Bible Study - Titus 3:8-11

<sup>8</sup> *This is a reliable word, and I want you to emphasise these things, so that those who have believed in God may be concerned to engage in doing what is good; these things are good and valuable for everyone.* <sup>9</sup> *But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, rivalry, and quarrelling about the law, for such things are harmful and futile.* <sup>10</sup> *Have nothing to do with someone who is divisive after a first and a second warning,* <sup>11</sup> *knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he condemns himself.*

## Review

Towards the end of his letter, Paul concludes his advice to Titus by appealing to him to promote the doing of good deeds within the church and to reject foolishness and divisiveness. Our passage reads easily, but the very first phrase, 'this is a reliable word' is

something of a mystery, because it is not clear whether it refers to what went before it or what comes after it! You may recall that the previous few verses read like a summary of the Gospel:

<sup>5</sup> *He rescued us, not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but according to His mercy, through the cleansing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit <sup>6</sup> that has been poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been put right with God by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

This, of course, is a wonderful passage, and some translators of the New Testament suggest that it is the 'reliable word' mentioned in verse 8. This sounds an attractive proposition, but as Paul continued to write he used generalisations, and I have taken the view that Paul intended his remark to refer to all the teaching in his letter to Titus, including this great summary. As he signed off, he wanted his readers to take everything he said seriously, for he had written it all for them with good reasons and for their encouragement.

**'Do what is good'** Paul's spiritual and practical advice was intended to help God's people in 'doing what is good' (3:8). Now, many people today might suggest that the purpose of Christian faith is not merely to do good things, but to believe in Christ so that people may be saved, and any emphasis on doing good deeds is capable of leading people away from the heart of faith, and salvation by faith alone. We should not be so contrary, however, for Paul's clear advice is that having been rescued from sin (see previous verses 5-7), we should live our lives in a demonstrably good way. This is exactly why Paul had written in the letter about the godly characteristics of a Christian leader (1:5f.), and about the duties and obligations of older men and women, younger men and women (2:1-8) and slaves (2:9f.). Paul's explanation of the grace and saving works of God (2:11-3:7) are not given merely for spiritual consumption, but so that people might demonstrate the Kingdom of God in their lives by doing good. Indeed, as we know, people are attracted to the church if they see good being done and people living in a friendly and disciplined manner.

**Be clear about faith** What this text tells us is that the church of God needs to be clear about its beliefs and practices, and willing to ask people to stand aside if their views do not accord with what is commonly regarded as right. Notice that Paul puts no barriers on doing what is good, saying that everyone can understand a 'good deed' and appreciate its value (3:8), however, 'foolish controversies, genealogies, rivalry and quarrelling' are more than an annoyance to the life of God's people. Apart from the study of genealogies (as if they were some kind of horoscope) all of these things are obvious follies, and those who do them are a danger. They should be confronted in a standard and clear manner; and after two warnings, they should not be allowed to disrupt the life of the church (3:10). Paul does not talk here about evicting people from the church, but he does say that the church should have nothing to do with those who persist in such things against advice.

**Deal with controversy within the church** Today, God's people find it hard to make such decisions, largely because they do not want to be accused of rejecting anyone; but the result is that churches often contain people who are highly divisive and also destructive of true faith. People hold on to their own beliefs and do not readily accept the disciplines of the church in understanding what Christ has done for us and for our salvation. However, we cannot have unity in Christ without discipline in faith! It is difficult, but one of the most important roles of leadership in the church is to identify people and attitudes that are divisive and harmful and challenge them, not just once, but at least twice, before taking action to protect the church as a whole from Satan's snares. A 'hale-come-hearty' approach to both faith and the life of the church can often lead to the unhappiness of indecision and uncertainty amongst the faithful, because when all people and all things are accepted, people cease to be sure about where they stand.

In every age, the church of God must stand firm on its principles. In our passage, Paul simply makes the case that this is essential so that the Gospel will be proclaimed and the testimony of God's people maintained.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what you believe Paul means by 'these things', as mentioned in verse 8.
2. What kind of foolishness, rivalries and quarrelling afflict the church today, and what can, or what should be done about it?
3. Is there ever any reason for evicting anyone from membership of God's church, and if so, what does this say about God's love?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*It is often assumed that if someone takes a firm line on what constitutes the Gospel, and insists that those who do not agree are unwelcome in the church, then they are extremist or narrow-minded. This can be the case, but is not necessarily so. The Gospel is simple enough to describe, but people have an amazing ability to make it complex and argue about the minutiae of meaning, without having the grace to accept that there is a spiritual unity which binds God's people together. We live at a time when many Christians are genuinely confused about what the churches they attend stand for because they seem to stand for little. We really do need to take Paul's words here seriously.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Have you observed quarrelling and dissent among God's people? What can you do about it? Pray first and then act, by speaking to people about matters of faith and appealing to our unity in Christ where there are divisions. There may well be something you can do to help.*
- *Pray for all who seek to clarify the Gospel and assist the church of today in uniting around its common calling. There is great resistance to unity of faith, so pray for God's people to be blessed by the Gospel salvation in which we all share.*

## Final Prayer

We hold on to You, O Lord, and join with ancient kings, the disciples, and all the holy people of God's Church in trusting You completely. May others say of us 'God is with them', and may we give glory to You within everything we do. Thank You, good Lord, for Your faithfulness and love. AMEN