



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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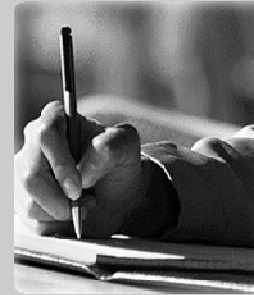


HG119: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season **SELF-CONTROL: Love's Victory**

Titus 2:1-8

Home Group Study Notes

28 February 2016 - Revd Dan Pierce



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

What of all the things you possess would you most struggle to give away and why? Or, who would you give it too?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG119: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season
SELF-CONTROL: Love's Victory

Titus 2:1-8

Home Group Sermon Notes

28 February 2016 - Revd Dan Pierce

Introducing Paul's Letter to Titus

When Paul wrote to him, Titus was working in Crete. In the opening remarks he says, "I left you in Crete" (Titus 1:5) indicating that Paul had been there himself. Their labours together were apparently only for a short while on the island but long enough that Paul witnessed the fragmented, ill-disciplined, disreputable life of the church there.

Paul's letter to Titus has the purpose of resourcing and validating Titus' authority within the church in Crete. From his few other appearances in scripture it is clear that Titus is well regarded by Paul as a young leader who possessed a strong personality; energetic, tactful, skilled and effective in conciliating people. As a father would write to a son Paul writes to encourage his "...loyal child in the faith we share"(1:4).

Titus is urged to insist that the people of God get there act together in sound doctrine, high levels of social order and moral conduct.

A Difficult Read!

In Paul's writings our 21st century sensibilities are regularly and understandably alarmed by his seemingly troubling attitude to women. Here in this letter it is no different, especially in verse 5 that to modern ears might sound like "Get back in the Kitchen" misogyny.

The people of that time would not have seen this however. There was an accepted order. Paul's letter is neither advocating nor defending the accepted order. He is seeking, within the context of that day, to promote good conduct. Whereas we may want to discuss the merits and misfortunes of the culture and custom, that is not what Paul is doing. He is speaking from within that accepted order and the question of whether or not it was right would be outside of experience to ask (although, as we will see, he does nudge the status quo slightly).

We hear similar maltreatment of women and minorities in books and television adaptations but we understand that it speaks *of its time* rather than *for it*. Both Dickens and Shakespeare have been called misogynists (they may well have been, I couldn't say) but we still value a representation of wisdom and beauty in what they write.

4: Can you think of an instance where another believers lack of self control has had a significant impact on the church or you personally? And what might be your self-controlled response to that crisis?

5: Can you think of an example where your self-control or lack of it might directly affect your relationships in your immediate family or in church family life?

6: Paul writes to Titus because he is unimpressed with what he has witnessed and what he is hearing of the church in Crete. If, like Paul, you perceived a lack of self-control amongst God's people, what might your appropriate response be?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: How do you think Titus would feel upon receiving Paul's letter?

2: If you were to write a letter of encouragement to the Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry, what would you say?

3: Do you think of self-control as a personal or corporate discipline? Read Proverbs 25:28. What does Solomon say a person who lacks self-control is like? What does this imagery imply?

When we read Hemingway, Graham Green or Enid Blyton we are similarly challenged by attitudes to women and ethnic minorities. However we also read with great appreciation holding in mind that they are writing from another time. They are writing *for us*, not necessarily *to us* and as readers we must sift through for what we can cherish.

To get entangled in arguments about gender roles is to miss the point of Paul's letter. It advocates the good treatment of slaves too (2:9) but we wouldn't advocate slavery *at all* today and neither should we use this passage to justify poor attitudes to women.

The job of any reader is always to discern where wisdom lies. We do it when we read fiction, or when we read news. We *must* do it when we read scripture. What is Paul getting at and how can we understand him today?

The Wisdom in Paul's letter to Titus

Paul's attitudes towards gender roles, while socially questionable by our modern standards were in fact a little challenging of the status quo. Although I am not about to pretend he was a pillar for woman's liberation in first century Palestine!

It is worth noting Paul doesn't take for granted the older men are being wise elders and he has a forceful word to challenge them first of all! "Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance" (2:2) As we have observed Titus is a younger man and the fact that he is being instructed to "tell" his elders to behave is quite something within that culture. Also, what is striking in this passage is the extent of instruction Paul then puts upon woman, matching the responsibility of the men "to teach what is good" (2:3).

This gives us insight to Paul's major concern in writing to Titus. He is trying to remedy the need in the Cretan church community for sound order. As mentioned, he had witnessed the fragmented, ill-disciplined, disreputable life of the church there and he means to put it right. Why? Because these Christ followers are not loving each other as they should and their poor behaviour is reflecting poorly on the gospel preached to them. Paul has a concern for the public integrity of the church "so that the word of God may not be discredited" (2:5)

Damage is done when we don't treat each other well as Christians. Just as "...everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35) if we fail to love each other the credibility of our message can be called into question.

Get It Together! Get It Together!

At least four times in this short letter Titus is asked by Paul to insist upon self-control amongst God's people (1:8, 2:5, 2:6, 2:12). We hear the words self-control today and we probably think of keeping *ourselves* in check; "**I** must make sure not to over indulge!" However, Paul is not commending self-control to an individualistic audience. For those to whom Paul writes, their identity was a deeply corporate affair. The behavior of one very much impacted all within the Christian community (as it still does whether we like it or not).

Paul writes for men and women, young and old to advise good structures for living, *together*.

Paul is always stressing the corporate nature of faith (1 Corinthians 12:27, Romans 12:5, Ephesians 5:30, Colossians 1:24). He is at pains to stress how love works within the community and family life. His plea is not so much for individuals to “get it together!” as it is for the whole Christian community to “get it, together!”. We don’t work out love and salvation on our own.

The letter to Titus describes (in Paul’s view) the well-ordered household within the patriarchal society of its day. The lives of his readers are enmeshed and he is offering structure for mutuality and love to reign in that context.

For instance, if the man of the house is irritable, irrational, gluttonous and explosive it sets a tone and likewise if the woman of the house is drunk and disorderly; that environment is a breeding ground (quite literally) for “rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers ... liars, vicious brutes” (1:10-12). The order that Paul is declaring is not for the repression of anyone but for the liberation of love in family life.

Paul’s emphasis of self-control is not for the sole benefit of the individual but for the betterment of family and society. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and fruit doesn’t grow on it’s own. Good fruit grows on good trees with other good fruit. We can take something from this as a church today. Paul’s insistence upon the fruit of self-control is a message for us as congregations, not simply for us as individuals.

Self-Control: The Battleground For Love

Throughout the letter Paul’s manner is as ever robust, acknowledging that within any household there is a battle going on for which God’s people need to be robustly equipped.

The battle is a battle between self-interest that leads to division (3:10-11) and self-control that leads to love. Paul says it is a battle we all must face and that indeed he has faced, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another” (3:3).

The battleground is laid and the Christians are urged to exercise self-control to ensure loves victory. If you cannot discipline yourself then neglect in the community becomes more likely. If you can’t exercise self-control and bring yourself under the rule of love then you might well struggle to love others, as is our charge. “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:39)

In day-to-day life we might tend to do things because of how it effect’s us as individuals. However, Paul would urge us to be self-controlled because of how it impacts others too.

We might say, “not too much food thanks, I’m watching my weight”, “No more wine thanks, I’ve got work in the morning” but Paul says our standard must be more than what is right or wrong for ourselves.

In his letter to the Romans Paul explores a similar theme in chapter 14. ‘One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables (14:2) ... One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike.’ And in all these contentious matters Paul is less concerned about getting on the “right” side of the argument and more concerned about how love is expressed for one another despite differences of opinion, ‘...resolve instead never to put a stumbling-block or hindrance in the way of another.’

We often hear it said now, “Do what’s right for you” which may sound like a nice motto but it can so easily be distorted. For instance, *doing what’s right for me* can inoculate me to the needs of others. Doing what’s right for me fails to acknowledge that the impact of my behaviour is not just upon me. The impact of my behaviour is upon the entire community. If I decide to be a drunkard and a scoundrel it reflects poorly upon this church and upon the well-being of my wife and children. There is no getting away from it, we live and die, all our failures and successes, together as one body.

Self-Control: Love’s Victory!

In the book of Numbers Moses says “be sure your sin will find you out.” (32:23) He is not saying this to an individual although that is often the context we hear that phrase used today. Moses said this to a body of people in the context of war. The church is always somewhere on the battleground between the stale rot of self-interest and the abundant fruit of self-control. For the church in Crete their sins have been found out! Paul, with typical laser precision, has identified the offending behavior – and it is lack of self-control. He comes down on it hard because, like his master Jesus, he disciplines those he loves. (Hebrews 12:6)

The well-ordered household is a place where the whole is the sum of its parts. Without self-control being exercised for the good of all by all from youngest to oldest, we have a problem. This is true in our private dwellings and it is true of our team parish. We belong to each other in Christ.

The fruit of self-control brings nourishment and health to the church body. Not only is self-control good for ourselves, it is good for those around us. And even when we find it hard to have self-control perhaps we can be mindful and let the love of our Christian family give us extra incentive to manage our personal behavior. What I do, affects all of you!