

mpc study guide – week of Feb 15th

a word to former fools

This week's study focuses on paragraphs **v** to **z** in the letter to Titus printed on pages 6 and 7. Paul has told Titus to straighten out what was left unfinished at the newly established church in Crete. It's a useful guide to what it takes to "build a church" – preach the gospel, appoint leaders who will guide by their example, and teach people how to live godly lives that bring honour to Jesus. We want to focus on those same things as we work together to "build" our own church. As he draws his short letter to a close, Paul highlights some key things to be stressed, and other things to avoid... Go back and **read what he says in sections v to z on page 7.**

For Discussion

1. Stress This...

- a. How does Paul describe the way "we used to be"? (para **v**)

- b. What has happened since then, and how? (para **v to x**)

- c. In practical, every day terms, what difference should we see between those who are Christians and those who are not? To what extent is this true of you?

- d. According to paragraph **w**, what is the source of this change?

Think back to our series on The Holy Spirit in 2005. (It's available at www.mpc.org.au/resources if you missed it.) God's intention was always to bring together a people who **delighted to serve him from the heart.** That was the grand plan for Israel, the descendants of Abraham. But even though God gave them his **law**, which described what righteous living

would look like, time and time again they turned away from Him. Their hearts were simply not in it! They had no hunger for righteousness... and they proved it in the way they lived. The Old Testament kept looking forward to a better day, when God would give his people a new heart; where the desire for righteousness would come from within.

Jesus promises to baptise, or wash, his followers with the Holy Spirit. Paul says, "Keep reminding people that Jesus has done this for us. Keep reminding people that they are heirs."

e. Again, notice WHY. He says, "Stress these things so that..." (para **x**)

f. This must be important, because he says the same thing again in paragraph **z**. He wrote it twice, so you may as well do the same...

2. Avoid this...

Paul has told Titus to stress the fact that Christians have been called from their old ways, to a life that's devoted to doing good. In contrast, there's also something to avoid.

g. What are they to avoid, and why?

h. From what we saw in the summary paragraph above, what theory could we develop about the source of these problems?

Here's a hint. As he went about preaching about Jesus, Paul's message was simple. Turn to the risen Jesus, and you'll find forgiveness of past evil, and a new heart that desires future good. He preached this same message

to Jews and non-Jews, with no extra additives. At every point, Paul was opposed by Jews – and even Jewish Christians – who insisted the Old Testament law should be part of the package. This is the “Circumcision group” he mentioned back in paragraph H. The issue is the same in Paul’s other letters. In Galatians 3, he says,

3Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ... 5Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

The issue is the same. The Gospel Paul and Titus are preaching is not a set of rules or laws. It’s a message that produces changed actions from changed hearts, by the power of the Holy Spirit. To go back to preaching the law would be a disaster.

- i. What instruction does Paul give for dealing with this kind of persistent troublemaker? Does this seem overly harsh?

- j. Have you seen evidence of this kind of problem more recently?

3. How Sound is Your Doctrine?

These days, doctrine has almost become a dirty word. We don’t want to be troubled with the intricacies of doctrinal debates. And Paul doesn’t want us to either – he says to avoid foolish controversies! **But the bottom line is, you’ve got to have the right doctrinal foundation to be able to recognize foolishness when you see it!**

Scattered through the letter, there have been comments like these:

“Paul, an apostle... for the **knowledge of the truth** that leads to godliness... Encourage others by **sound doctrine** and refute those who oppose it... so that they will be **sound in the faith** and will pay no attention to Jewish myths... You must teach **what is in accord with sound doctrine.**”

Having “sound doctrine” simply means you can know the truth and live by it – instead of being sidetracked by foolish myths.

4. From the mpc Newcomers Guide: Our Doctrinal Standard

Every church or denomination is defined by a historical “doctrinal standard.” Ours is called **The Westminster Confession of Faith**; our ministers and elders are required to affirm its teaching; ordinary church members, however, are not. Even so, everyone needs to grapple with doctrine, so as to be guided by the truth! The great beauty of the Westminster Confession of Faith is that it places the Word of God, the Bible, as the “supreme authority.” Here’s what it says in the opening clause:



“The supreme judge by which... all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits are to be examined... can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.” (WCF 1:10)

In short, we are a church guided and sustained by God’s Spirit inspired Word, which leads us directly and simply to God’s Son Jesus Christ – the one who promises to change our way of life by that same Word and Spirit at work in our hearts.

Coming Soon at mpc...

- **MPC presents ‘Classic Hymns’** – **Join us for an** afternoon of singing some of those great hymns that have been part of our Christian heritage, Saturday 25th February, from 2:30pm to 4pm. As well as singing, we ‘ll enjoy Devonshire tea together. For more information, contact Kathy Wright on 3353 8847.
- **AGM** – We’re holding our Annual General Meeting, Tuesday Feb 28th starting at 7.30pm. Come along, hear what’s happening, and be part of the action.
- **Chappo Visit** – Who are you planning to invite to hear Chappo on April 2nd?
- **DaVinci Decoded** – Advance notice: Our Food For Thought Dinner on May 11th features author Dr Greg Clarke on the Da Vinci Code.