

## Group Notes 26 June 2011

### Contending for the Faith

#### Welcome - Ice Breaker

What is your top tip for getting out of an argument?

#### Word – 2 Timothy 4:1-8

2 Timothy is a letter written by the apostle Paul from prison while he was awaiting execution for his faith. Paul was mentor to a young Christian leader called Timothy and his main concern as he writes to his protégé is to ensure, as his own life comes to an end, that the Gospel will be passed on to the next generation – see 2 Timothy 2 verse 2. In today's passage he warns Timothy that it's not going to be easy to be faithful to the Gospel because people don't want to listen! Instead they want teachers who will only tell them what they want to hear (2Tim 4:3).

#### Questions:

- **Do people have "itching ears" today? Do we screen out bits of the message we are not comfortable with?**
- **Is the Gospel inherently uncomfortable? Is there something wrong if people do not find our message challenging?**
- **What parts of the Gospel are challenging and what parts are comforting?**

Christianity seems to be under attack from two opposite directions these days. On one side we have angry atheists proclaiming that no explanations other than scientific ones are allowed. Such people rubbish Christianity as a nasty ignorant superstition. Their aim is usually to relegate faith to the private and personal sphere: "If you want to believe a load of rubbish that's up to you, but let's not have crosses, prayers and scruples about the sanctity of life in the workplace."

#### Questions:

- **Is our faith a purely personal matter? Or should Christians try to influence public life?**
  - **If so, in what ways can we do so?**
- **Does science have all the answers? Or if it seems to, is that because it only asks some of the questions?**
  - **What questions does science ask? What questions does religion ask?**
- **Will reasoned arguments ever make any difference to someone who is anti-Christian?**

On the other side are the New Agers and multiculturalists who tell us that all beliefs are sacred, no matter how illogical, contradictory or downright silly they might be. Such people rubbish Christianity for claiming that Jesus is the truth. Their aim is usually to promote an uncritical spirituality: "My beliefs are true because I believe them - how dare you insult what I hold sacred using your outmoded rationalist world view!"

### Questions:

- **What comes first? Is it true because I believe it? Or do I believe it because it's true?**
- **Many converts become Christians primarily because of personal experience. What are the strengths and weaknesses of basing our faith mainly on experience?**
- **What evidence can you come up with as a group for the truth of Jesus' claims?**
- **How would you try to draw someone from a New Age background closer to Jesus?**

It is very faith building to add an understanding of the very compelling evidence for the reality of Jesus' life, death and resurrection to our own personal experience of His loving presence. Some good starter resources are:

- *Evidence that demands a verdict*, Josh Mc Dowell
- *The Case against Christ – some statements for the defence*, John Young
- *Who moved the Stone?* (evidence for the resurrection), Frank Morison
- *Questions of life* (Alpha handbook), Nicky Gumbel
- *Foundations for Ministry*, Course by the Diocese of Lichfield

### **Question: are there any books or courses that have particularly helped you with these issues?**

Conclusion: Today's scene may seem discouraging as the Christian consensus that gave structure to British society breaks up under various pressures. However we are actually moving towards the situation in which Paul and Timothy were operating: there were lots of religions and philosophies competing for attention in the market place in the later years of the Roman Empire and Christianity was more than able to spread and thrive in that environment. So look forward with hope and contend for the faith!

### **Worship Ideas**

Today's material has been mainly rational and intellectual so for contrast I recommend that you do something that is purely devotional. Try a prayer soak:

- turn down the lights
- ask people to sit or lie down and make themselves comfortable
- remind them of some of Jesus' promises of his love for them
- play some quiet worship music and give people a few minutes to bask in His presence
- Use a clearly defined ending when you reckon everyone is ready.

### **Works / Witness**

#### Alpha Course this autumn

I hope your group is sorting out how they can support Alpha this autumn... Please keep in touch with Liz Chamberlain about your ideas.