

Prayer

Dear Jesus, take away from us the tensions which make us unhappy with each other or with You, and restore our souls with Your peace and love. Open our hearts to the free reign of Your Spirit, so that we may be saved from bitterness, fear, hopelessness, aggression and every form of sinful reaction to our circumstances. We praise You for Your work of grace and love within our lives. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Cross

Pray for the church, and ask the Lord to pour His blessings and His Spirit on His people so that they witness to the truth of the message of the Cross; that love is victorious over evil.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for all who are affected badly by the world recession*
- *Pray for all who seek to solve the world's troubles in peace*
- *Give thanks to God for people who do good in our midst*

Meditation

How blind!

The God who gave our world liberty and freedom of speech
Through the faithful work and integrity of godly people in the past
Is mostly rejected by those who rule and think they know what's best for all.

How deaf!

The voice of the poor, the marginalised and the suffering
Is drowned within our aggressive world in which the rich benefit
Because they make the rules, but have no place for the love of God for all.

How dumb!

The church watches quietly as the world wallows in its mess;
Its prophetic voice muffled by self-centredness and faithlessness
Its preaching and witness quashed by lack of zeal and freedom in the Spirit,

How awesome

If the Spirit were to heal the church's broken bones again,
Restore its flesh and voice, and make God's presence known to all
Within a world that needs to hear its Maker's voice again restoring moral order!

Bible Study - 2 Timothy 2:14-19

¹⁴ *Remind people of these things, and charge them before God to refrain from arguing over words. This is of no value and harms those who are listening.* ¹⁵ *Work hard to present yourself to God and others as someone who is genuine, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, and able to explain the word of truth correctly.* ¹⁶ *Avoid godless and idle chatter, as continuing with it leads people into ungodliness,* ¹⁷ *and their talk will consume like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,* ¹⁸ *who have strayed from the truth by claiming that*

the resurrection has already happened. They are ruining the faith of some. ¹⁹
Nevertheless, God's foundation stands firm, and it bears this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wrongdoing.'

Review

Here, Paul advises Timothy about the use of words. This passage is a mixture of common good sense and spiritual truth, which is worth remembering but can be hard to put into practice! The themes within the passage have become rather mixed up, but as a whole, it deals with the issue of the use of words (2:14,16-18), and with the example of leadership Timothy should show (2:15). Then at the end, Paul quotes two well known 'sayings' (of his day) which illustrate the foundation of the church, concerning God's authority over His people, and their duty to refrain from sin and wrongdoing (2:19).

To begin with, Paul's advice about avoiding 'arguing over words' sounds straightforward, and we can easily agree these will distract people from their faith and hinder the commission of Christ to continue His work on earth. What sounds so simple however is not so easy in practice. Most arguments have different components, being about feelings, things said or done, or expectations. In addition, all arguments include differences of opinion about what certain words mean; but Paul has something more specific in mind as he writes, and after a further piece of advice to Timothy (2:15 – which we will look at later), he explains himself more accurately.

Words and arguments Loose talk and chatter amongst Christians is something that draws God's people away from their convictions and the truths of the Gospel as preached and passed on through the traditions of the church. When we release our tongues to 'say what we want', then we can quickly say things injudiciously, as we all know to our cost, and Paul had an example of this in mind. Two people at Timothy's church, Hymenaeus and Philetus, concluded that the final great resurrection of the dead had already happened (2:18). This teaching was an early 'heresy', which was 'gossiped' around the church of the first century, and we have glimpses of it in a number of Biblical texts. These reveal that some believed they would not die because by baptism, they had been raised and would soon be transported into heaven when Jesus came in glory. It sounds so obvious when you say it quickly, especially if you sincerely believe in the imminent coming of Christ, as most did. Some of the Gospels are at pains to explain that this is not the truth of the resurrection (see John 21:21-24), and Paul had to tread a careful balance throughout his ministry when handling this issue. His teaching emphasised the return of Christ, but in the meantime, he taught that real life on earth demanded a more practical approach than merely expecting Christ to come shortly and put everything right.

Paul's deep concern was that wrong teaching about the return of Christ would lead people astray and prevent them from fulfilling Christ's evangelistic commission to the apostles (Matt 28:19) to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. Heresies flourish where there is a lack of sound and faithful preaching and teaching, and this was true in Paul's day as it is in ours.

A ministry guide In order to guide Timothy, verse 15 stands out in this passage as a seriously important piece of advice for leaders of God's people. Paul recommends two things to Timothy; firstly to present himself as visibly doing God's work. The importance of this is that not only is it right before God for a leader to get on with their work, but it is also right that the people see their leader being busy with the things of God. Congregations become very restless and unhappy with their clergy (or other leaders) if they cannot understand what they spend their time doing, and in their own words, they 'only see the minister on Sundays'. Secondly, it is essential that a church leader teaches and preaches the Gospel in a way which people recognise to be authentic and godly; in other words, 'to

explain the word of truth correctly' (2:15). I was once advised that if I wished to lead God's people well, then I should love people and demonstrate that I work for them, and also preach the Gospel; and this is where this good scriptural advice came from!

The church of God stands on two pillars, the authority and empowerment of those who are saved by God Himself ('the Lord knows who are His'), and the sincere efforts of God's people to do what is right ('let everyone ... refrain from wrongdoing'). In the life of the church, we all need to ensure our faith is authentic and keep in close touch with our Lord; and also work hard at ensuring we do not fall into the evil traps which are ever present. This may be basic teaching, but it is essential.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Why do people always argue? Is this generally true, and how can such arguing be overcome?
2. Is it sufficient to require a church leader to demonstrate that they are doing God's work and preach the truth? What else would you like to add?
3. What heresies are gossiped around the church today and destructive of the truth of the Gospel?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have always valued the advice of my friend about ministry. The way he said it to me was that I should love people and serve them and preach the Gospel; I did not realise that this was Paul's advice to Timothy for a number of years until I came across 2 Tim 15 whilst studying the passage for another reason. I have had the opportunity to see many ministers and clergy at work, and I would be hard pushed to say that some of them either love people, or wish to show them that they are hard at work for them. Some are hesitant themselves about the nature of the true Gospel. My heart sinks when I see this, and I wonder what has gone wrong. Scripture must be our guide in these things.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you are not a church leader, consider those issues which would draw you into argument today within your church. I am sure there will be some! Ask yourself how you can sustain a godly approach to these issues whilst debating them. Seek the Lord's will on this.*
- *If you are a church leader, then ask yourself whether you fulfil the call to leadership which Paul gives Timothy here. The Lord will guide your response to this challenge!*

Final Prayer

Give us truthful hearts Lord God, which rejoice to be fruitful for You in love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control. May we not fail to show this fruit, but submit our hearts and minds to the power of Your Holy Spirit which produces this fruit in us. Thank You Lord God: AMEN