

Prayer

Lead us in our worship this day, Lord Jesus. Be a worship leader to us, inviting us to open our hearts, encouraging us to join in, showing us the possibilities and drawing us into the presence of Almighty God. May the Spirit of God so capture our hearts that we become enthralled and liberated in our worship; all praise be to You, Almighty, Living God!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Land

We all live on this earth, and land means a great deal to many people. It lies at the heart of many of the great issues of our day, so today, please pray for the land on which you live.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for the fellowship of the church
- Pray for all who are affected badly by the world recession
- Pray for all who seek to solve the world's troubles in peace

Meditation

(This meditation invites you to follow each question or suggestion and answer it carefully and honestly)

What is on your heart today? What matters most to you just now?
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Do these things really deserve your full attention, what about others?
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Where does God figure in your immediate thoughts and plans?
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What would Jesus say to you about what is on your mind?
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Think again about your current priorities in the light of Christ;
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Commit this day to the Lord; and seek do what is right before God.
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Bible Study - 2 Timothy 2:20-26

²⁰ In a large house there are items made not only of gold and silver but also of wood and pottery; some for special use and some for ordinary. ²¹ All who cleanse themselves of wrongful things are special items, consecrated and useful to the home owner, prepared for every good work. ²² Turn away from youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart. ²³ Avoid foolish and senseless controversies; for you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ A servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome but be kind to everyone, able to teach, be tolerant, ²⁵ and correct opponents with gentleness. It may be that God will enable them to repent and come to know the truth, ²⁶ and they may escape the devil's snare, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Review

Paul continues with his general advice to Timothy here, putting together a sequence of reflections which deal with recurrent problems amongst people within the church. The first few verses pick up a general theme of Paul's writing about the relative importance of different gifts and graces within the church, and he speaks about them as like 'items' of varying use found within a house. He then continues the theme of urging people to turn away from foolish talk carried over from previous verses (see 2:16-18), urging God's people to live in peace, avoiding 'foolish and senseless controversies' (2:23,24 – see 2:14). He then develops this theme however, and applies it directly to Timothy, giving him advice about the right attitude towards dealing with problems within the church (2:24,25). As always, Paul's deepest concern is that false teaching will lead people astray. Paul does not always speak directly about the presence of evil amongst God's people, but here his view is plain (2:26); the 'devil's snare' is set within the church, holding some captive even whilst they partake of fellowship and discussion within the church; Satan is an ever present enemy to be fought.

Gifts and graces It is possible that by the time Paul wrote this letter to Timothy in his later years whilst bound in Rome awaiting the calling of his case to the Emperor, his earlier writing to the Corinthian churches was becoming well known, perhaps also his great theological treatise in the letter to the Romans. We may reasonably assume that Timothy was aware of Paul's teaching about the body of Christ and its several parts (Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12), each with its gifts and graces and yet completely interdependent because of the church's unity in Christ. Verses 20 and 21 therefore remind Timothy of the importance of this teaching, but with a special emphasis.

Paul speaks about the different 'items' (or 'vessels') used in a house some of which have 'special' use and some have 'ordinary' use (Paul used a similar illustrations in Romans 9:19). The difference here alludes to the natural perception of status, for people easily think that an oil lamp used for religious purposes, for example, would have a greater intrinsic value than a pot used for cleaning out drains. In addition, just as today, items used for special family or religious activities were made of valuable materials (gold and silver) whereas everyday functional items were made of ordinary clay or wood. Paul asks us to think differently about all this. Following his teaching elsewhere, he says that we are all like these different items within the household of God, but our value in God's eyes is not related to what we do or what we are made from, but whether we have been 'cleansed' (2:21) from the wickedness which he has just spoken about in his letter (see 2:14f.). This cleansing consecrates the item, whatever its material or function, for any work the 'master' requires. This is not normal human thinking due to the desire for status bedeviling humanity; but it is God's way for His children to make themselves useful for His purposes.

Avoid the evil and pursue the good, with good grace! Verses 22 to 24 repeat Paul's earlier theme about avoiding foolish talk, and we might wonder why he mentions this again. It is possible that Paul was aware that Timothy had a tendency to engage in hot disputes with people about theological matters, but we do not know for sure. Nevertheless, Paul takes the opportunity to emphasise that in turning away from 'youthful passions' and 'senseless controversies', the man or woman of God should 'pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.' These are wise words from a man who had lived with his own share of controversy, but in his later years knew the deeper importance of security in Christ.

Lastly, these comments flow into Paul's advice to Timothy about a right attitude towards dealing with controversial issues in the life of the church. Yet again, despite the evidence of Paul's letters that earlier in his life he never shirked an argument concerning matters of faith, his mature advice speaks of kindness, tolerance, gentleness and helping people

towards repentance (2:24,25). Paul had served the Lord long enough to recognise that all Christians are in danger of Satan's traps and snares (2:26), and the right way to build the church is through love and compassion, not conflict and dissent. The temptation to wade into difficult issues is ever present, but Paul clearly says that our duty to each other in Christ means that we show kindness and tolerance of heart. It is not easy to put this into practice, especially when matters of faith mean so much to all who hold their faith dear, but the advice is written in God's Word, and we cannot ignore it.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Where do you see yourself in Paul's picture of a household full of objects with various functions? Is this a helpful exercise or not?
2. How can the Christian 'turn away from youthful passions ... and avoid senseless controversies'? What controversies today are senseless?
3. How can God's people build up love and tolerance at the heart of the church? What are the obstacles?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It may seem obvious to say this, but the more you look at passages such as this, the more you see. I began this study thinking that I had read most of this elsewhere in Paul's letters, and I wondered what I could say about this text which was distinct and practical. In the end I had no difficulty, and I am left thinking about the many times I have read a passage of scripture and not given it any thought because I reckon at first reading that I know what it says! I am chastised by the Lord to remember that He always has more to say to us in His Word!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Fast and pray for those who find it hard to see themselves as anything more than a 'scrubbing brush' (or similar) in the household of God. Pray for any individuals you know who may fit this description and ask the Lord to raise them up.*
- *Ask the Lord to reveal to you what you need to learn from this text. It does in truth contain some considerable challenges for those who may need to hear them. Let the Lord guide you, for He challenges us for specific reasons and with His plan for us in mind.*

Final Prayer

Great and mighty Lord, Your name is known throughout the earth! Forgive us when we give a false impression of our faith, which leads other people to turn away from You. Teach us the truth and correct us when we are wrong, so we may learn and be effective in mission. Keep us close to You, O Lord, and make us secure in You; AMEN