

## Prayer

Thank You and praise you, Heavenly Father, for the privilege of gathering together for worship this day: may we honour You by our thoughts, words and deeds, both in worship and in resting. May we be a testimony to the greatness of Your saving power throughout the world, and may we demonstrate the love we celebrate this day throughout our lives and so fulfil our calling. Thank You and praise You, Heavenly Father: ALLELUIA!

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Gifts of the Spirit

*This week we will pray using the theme of the famous 'gifts of the Spirit'. Pray that God will bless His people with these gifts, and that His people will be open to receive them.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for young people who know nothing but a life of crime*
- *Give thanks for the fellowship of believers throughout the world*
- *Pray for small businesses which are closing due to the economy*

## Meditation

Lord Jesus, give me a heart committed to worship,

which touches every part of my life;  
which cannot take place without You or me;  
which leads me to bow down in repentance;  
which lifts my heart to receive God's love;  
which raises my voice in praise and in song;  
which feels like music playing in my soul;  
which is a sacrifice of my time and money;  
which receives the truth of God's Word;  
which excites the heart and restores the soul;  
which changes my heart towards others;  
which sees things differently in the light of Christ;  
which empowers me to fulfil God's call.

Then, Lord Jesus, may I never stop worshipping You!

## Bible Study - 2 Timothy 3:10-13

<sup>10</sup> Now indeed you have paid close attention to my teaching, my way of life, my intentions, faith, patience, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup> and the persecutions and suffering that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra; those persecutions I endured, yet the Lord has delivered me from them all! <sup>12</sup> Yes, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution; <sup>13</sup> whilst wicked people and impostors become worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

## Review

So much of God's Word is given to us in the form of contrasts, and this is exactly how Paul delivers his message here in this brief section of 2 Timothy. At the beginning, Paul

unashamedly offers his own life as an example of godly living, with the qualities he has demonstrated during his life as a missionary and apostle for Christ Jesus (3:10-11); and at the end, he comments on the life of wickedness and evil God's people must reject (3:13). In the middle (3:12), he observes a truth about the life of God's people, something that lies at the heart of the Christian Gospel and reveals to us what was on Paul's mind as he wrote this part of his letter.

**The theme of persecution** The theme of persecution runs throughout the New Testament, and is found at the very beginning of Jesus' teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says; 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.' (Matthew 5:11). During His life, Jesus spoke to the disciples about suffering and persecution on many occasions (e.g. Matthew 13:21, Mark 4:17, John 16:33), helping them to understand something they may well have only understood after Jesus' death; that Jesus' ministry fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of a 'Suffering Servant' (Isaiah 53). This defining Old Testament prophecy identifies God's work of redemption and salvation as only achievable through One who was prepared to suffer and be persecuted even to the point of death in order to show God's love. Therefore, when Jesus died on the Cross and was then raised to life, the disciples were able to piece together the theological 'jigsaw' of what Jesus had done for them, and what they were called upon by God to do. The apostles knew that their life was to be lived according to the model of Jesus, accepting persecution, suffering and vilification as the necessary price for the proclamation of the Gospel, the establishment of the Kingdom and the winning of souls for God.

**Paul's personal search** We know that Paul spent many years in prayerful contemplation and theological enquiry before he was able to fulfil the undoubted potential he showed as an evangelist after his conversion (see Acts 9:19f.). It would have been easy for Paul to ride the story of personal success as an evangelist from the beginning of his Christian journey. However, it seems certain that he agonised over God's call for many years (see Galatians 1:13f. 2:1f.) before he began the missionary journeys which were indeed the start of the expansion of the church throughout the Roman Empire. It was during this time he received what must have felt like a ludicrous call, but one he defended throughout his subsequent life. The Lord appeared to him and called him to be an authentic 'apostle', a witness to the risen Lord with an authority to teach, which apart from himself, was only granted to those who had been Jesus' disciples.

**Paul's testimony** Unless we accept this testimony of Paul, then everything he says about himself in this passage of scripture sounds like no more than bragging; but we must remember that Paul lived under the constant twofold pressure of persecution and the need to uphold in his own life the highest and most rigorous personal standards of faith. If Paul had slipped up in his ethical standards, for example if historians found he had a wife in Ephesus and one at Philippi, then it would not be just Paul whose credibility would be in doubt. The acceptability of his writings in the New Testament would be questioned, perhaps even the integrity of the Bible itself! It is of the utmost importance to understand that in theory, such a discovery could be made today, and it could destabilise the faith of many in the church. However, we must accept the truth of the matter, which is that no one has found evidence that Paul was anything other than the person he claimed to be, and for that reason, his testimony is of utmost importance to us. He upheld the Gospel and the teachings of Christ, he was an example of Christian faith, he demonstrated the highest moral qualities of a man of God, and consequently, he suffered appallingly as prophesied by Christ (Matt 5:11f.). The whole of his life was lived as an example of the life of Christ whom he preached, and such a testimony is inspirational. We can only be grateful that part of Paul's call was to write down some of the detail of his life in the form of these letters.

**A challenge** It is easy enough to read through the Acts of the apostles and familiarise oneself with the details of the mobs Paul encountered, the beatings he received and the suffering he endured during his ministry, but our passage today asks us one question. Will we live according to Paul's example and commit our all, whatever the persecutions or troubles, or will we opt out and take the only other option which is to become 'worse and worse', devoid of the love and power of God, deceived and deceiving, and cycling downward into self-centredness and folly.

Some are worried that the Christian call involves accepting persecution and suffering. This, however, is not an option; it is in one form or another, a fact of life for most people. The evidence however is that because Christ has conquered death, we, like Paul, have nothing to fear and can rejoice to be those who follow unashamedly in his footsteps as disciples of our Lord.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. This is only a brief passage of scripture. What does it say to you about Paul, the man who wrote it?
2. What can we learn from Paul's example about how to live the Christian life today, or are his standards too remote for us to follow?
3. In what ways do we suffer persecution today, in our own church life and throughout the world?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Although this is only a small passage, I believe it is necessary to face the important issues about Paul's testimony. Some scholars feel that Paul's comments about his own life are unhelpful because they suggest to Christians that they might speak in a similar way about their lives; and that would be boastful. However, just as we need the examples of David and Solomon, or Moses and Aaron in the Old Testament (although they are not perfect), so we need the personal example of Paul's life and ministry in the New. Without it, there are few people (with the possible exception of Peter) who have a high profile in the New Testament and whose humanity has been visibly touched by Jesus.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Reflect on whether your spiritual life is spiralling upwards or downwards, and what you feel, if anything, you should do about this. Read through this passage carefully to see if the Lord is saying something to you through it.*
- *Pray for those who find it hard to accept the prophecy of Christ that His disciples face persecution. Pray that God's people will face this issue and come to understand how persecution works in the open and also in hidden ways, so that it may be overcome.*

## Final Prayer

Glorious redeemer! You have taken my life from darkness to light, from death to new life and from despair to hope. Lead me on a path which reflects the new life, light and hope You have created in my soul; and fulfil the promise of these great gifts, I pray. Thank You, Glorious Redeemer! AMEN