

Prayers

Opening prayer

Almighty God, bring quietness to my heart and soothe it by the wonder of Your love and the mysteries of Your grace. In Your mercy, You calm the pressures and sorrows of my life, You ease the wounds of my spirit, and You bear the burdens of my soul so that I might be free. I praise You for the way You work in my life to bring me peace, and I worship You this day: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

1. For yourself

Read a favourite psalm and listen to what the Lord has to say to you about your life and your lifestyle

2. For your friends and family

Listen to what the Lord would have you do for your friends and neighbours, it may be that he needs you to do something important but you have not yet heard ...

3. For the church and its work

Reflect on recent church meetings or worship services you have attended. What do you believe Jesus has been saying to your church or fellowship? Pray about this, and talk with others

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Listen to what the Lord is saying about the state of the world at the moment, use, for example, a Christian news website, such as the 'the Christian Post' or 'Christianity Today' (they have versions for different countries and regions of the world)

Meditation

By Your gracious love, Lord God, You continue to speak to us.

You are firm when we need to be guided;

You are gentle when we need to be loved.

You are direct when we need to hear instructions;

You are silent when we need to make our decisions.

You are challenging when we need to be confronted;

You are encouraging when we need to be affirmed.

You are heartening when we need to be courageous and act.

You are cautious when we need to take care of ourselves.

You are critical when we need to know our mistakes;

You are accepting when we need to know Your care.

By Your gracious love, Lord God, You continue to speak to us.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 1:1-7

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the authority of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, ² To Timothy, my loyal child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ When I was on my way to Macedonia I urged you to remain in Ephesus to instruct whoever it may be to teach no other doctrine, ⁴ nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which create disputes rather than doing the things of God that are known by faith. ⁵ Now the

aim of this instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. ⁶ Some people have strayed from these and turned to empty words, ⁷ wanting to be teachers of the law, but without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

Review

Paul's first letter to Timothy is a classic epistle containing a considerable amount of theology mixed in with comment and instruction about the life of the church. There is one major difference between the two letters written to Timothy and the other letters by Paul (apart from Titus); they are not general letters written to churches, but personal letters to a dearly loved friend and companion concerning the missionary work in which they were engaged. For this reason, they offer a considerable amount of personal advice.

It is not clear when this letter was written from the various reference to Timothy in Acts (16:1f., 17:14f., 18:5, 19:22, 20:4), but they do indicate that Timothy was with Paul in his missionary work in the Ephesus region, and was therefore someone who could carry his authority there (1:3); this gives us a hint at the purpose of the letter. It begins with affectionate greetings from Paul, littered with some of the theological words that are characteristic of his preaching the Gospel around the known world; '*hope*', '*faith*', '*grace*', '*mercy*', '*peace*' (1:1,2). Paul also sets out his authority as an apostle (1:1), but such introductions did not serve to tell Timothy anything about Paul which he did not otherwise know. Their purpose was probably to ensure that the bearer of the letter knew about its importance, as well as any future readers of the letter!

Paul was 'on his way to Macedonia' (1:3), though none of this fits exactly with the sequence of events found in Acts. It appears though, that Paul needed Timothy to remain behind in Ephesus in order to stabilise the situation there (1:3). We must remember that Paul was not talking about the church in Ephesus alone, however, because while he was there (see Acts 18-20), he was involved in an extensive ministry to the entire region around the city, involving places such as Philadelphia, Laodicea and Colossae (e.g. Colossians 2:1). Acts also tells us that Ephesus was where Paul met Christians converted under Apollos. They did not know about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1f.) and Paul corrected this glaring error. As time went by, it seems that there was a further need for doctrinal discipline within the churches of the large metropolis of Ephesus and its satellite towns, and Paul was writing in response to this need (1:4,6,7).

Another issue may also lie behind Paul's comments here, which is hinted at in the phrase; '*myths and endless genealogies ...*' (1:4). It is most likely that this referred to heretical teaching based on something called 'Gnostic' mystery religions. These religions suggested that different layers of secret spiritual authority were stacked between earth and heaven, between people and God, and the soul had to pass through them sequentially to find salvation. Gnosticism is a complex subject, and it undoubtedly affected many in the first century AD. Some Christians thought of Christ as one of the spiritual levels through which one had to pass in order to attain to the divinity of God. Paul, naturally, sought to fight against all such beliefs.

So what was Timothy being asked to do? He was firstly required to be faithful to the apostolic teaching he had learned from Paul; he was to allow 'no other doctrine' (1:3). Then, in a fascinating sentence, Paul said more; '*Now the aim of this instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith*' (1:5). The dangers to the purity of the Gospel in the early church were plain, but notice that here, Paul was concerned not so much about the doctrines taught but people's motives for preaching and teaching about Christ. His emphasis on love, purity, good conscience and sincere faith show that he was concerned that those who preached the Gospel live the life of Christ as well as teach it; they were not to be hypocrites. People quickly spot hypocrisy and reject those who show it as well as their message.

What Paul says here is worth remembering. If such qualities are found in those who teach and preach God's Word today those who listen to them will seek to do the same, and the Gospel will be effective. Certainly, we can expect that the preaching of the Gospel will demonstrate 'good fruit', and if this is not found then like the churches around Ephesus, we may need a steadying hand on what is preached and taught.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What are the moral and spiritual qualities you would expect from someone who preaches the Gospel.
2. Why do people tend to be negative about the idea of teaching doctrine today? How might an understanding of doctrine be helpful today?

3. How can we know whether someone has a pure heart, or any other moral or spiritual quality?

Discipleship challenges

- *Read through some of the texts in Acts which mention Timothy (quoted above). This will give you a good idea of the relationship between Paul and Timothy, and aid your understanding of this letter.*
- *Reflect on the importance to you of those who are your closest friends. It may be that the Lord is asking you to make sure you do not lose some, or He may be saying your friendship is spread too thinly. Pray about this.*

Final Prayer

I praise You, Lord God, for You have saved me and provided for all my needs. Help me take hold of this truth when I feel vulnerable, unloved, challenged or rejected; and as I do this, strengthen my faith and draw me closer to the path of holiness. Open up my heart to enjoy the great life You have given me. Alleluia!
