

Prayers

Opening prayer

What a glorious day it is, Lord God! And what a wonderful opportunity there is in this day to press on with all that You have given me to do. Almighty Lord and God, You have guided my life through years of ups and downs, and here on this day and at this time, I seek to honour You in every part of my life and work. I praise You, Lord God, for You are my help and my strength, and You are my Salvation! Alleluia!

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WEALTH

1. For yourself

Get hold of your bank statements, savings balances, life assurance policies, loan payments, credit card balances and all other financial records and place them before the Lord in prayer.

2. For your friends and family

Pray for any of your family or friends who are dependent upon your financial support, and pray for any you know who support others. Pray for the grace by which all God's people help each other

3. For the church and its work

Get hold of the church's balance sheets and pray about them, and make a special note of any monies given to charitable organisations

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

Pray for your country's national bank and the government's treasury. Use the internet to find out a little about how these work and pray for their integrity

Meditation

Take in the breath of the Holy Spirit
And breathe more deeply of the things of God

Accept the peace and love of Christ
Which sweeps away all trouble and fear

Rejoice in the challenge of the Spirit's power
To achieve the impossible for God's Kingdom

Receive the unconditional gifts of God
The guarantee of faith and means of ministry

Be comforted by real presence of Christ
And feel the spiritual sustenance of His breath

Wonder at the mystery of His wind and fire
Which purifies, guides, protects and enlightens

Take in the breath of God's Holy Spirit
And be changed forever in body, spirit and soul

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 3:14-16

¹⁴ I write these things to you whilst hoping to come to you soon, ¹⁵ so that if I am delayed, you should know how to conduct yourself in the household of God, which is the church of the living

God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ Without doubt, the mystery of our devotion is great:

He was revealed in flesh,
Vindicated in spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed in throughout the world,

And taken up in glory.

Review

As so often in Paul's letters, he begins to show signs of ending his letter when he is only half way through! 1 Timothy is a letter of six chapters and here we are at the end of the third, and he writes as if by way of conclusion, explaining the purpose of his letter and then quoting a wonderful poem about faith. Verse 16 is perhaps a hymn from the earliest days of the church, and Paul uses it like a 'benediction', as if to end the letter!

So far, it is obvious that Paul's letter has been primarily one of advice to Timothy about leadership. Timothy had been asked by Paul to bear the responsibilities of leadership in a church (we do not know where!) until he was able to come himself. Here in verse 15, he apologises for this delay, but explains that he has written so that Timothy 'should know how to conduct' himself 'in the household of God' (3:15). What does he mean? We would be mistaken if we try to be legalistic about the subject of the overseers (bishops) and a helpers (deacons) and take from this an implication that Paul regarded Timothy to be a bishop over the church (as some suggest). No, Timothy's role was entirely temporary. Paul wanted him to demonstrate in his own life the moral and spiritual qualities that were required for leadership in general. In this way, he would influence the life of the church for good.

It has often been suggested that a church will take on some of the characteristics of its leaders, for good or ill. So, for example, a lazy minister who does not attend meetings will result in a church that sits lightly to its decision making and ultimately becomes ineffective because people do not know what decisions are being taken and why! Equally, a preacher who is obviously efficient and studies God's word deeply will encourage a congregation to do the same. His or her enthusiasm for God's Word becomes infectious through preaching. Paul advised Timothy to live by the highest standards because he knew this would affect the church positively and for good. He was right, and we should always aspire to do the same.

Leaders of God's people cannot go and hide in their own homes for the sake of 'privacy' as if their conduct and private life was irrelevant to ministry. Things do not work like this in God's church. Notice that Paul now describes high standards of moral and spiritual conduct as essential 'in the household of God' (3:15). You may have heard good and godly people in the church described as the 'pillars of the church', but look carefully at what Paul says here, for it is different. As far as the world sees it and also as far as God sees it, such proper conduct upholds 'the church of the living God', and the church is 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' (not its leaders!).

Moving on, Paul offers Timothy a typically powerful and memorable 'catchphrase' for remembering the Gospel, and he calls it the 'mystery of our devotion' (3:16). This is a six line hymn, with a clear rhythmic structure and simplicity of style. Hymns have always had the function of helping God's people get to know theology in ways they would not otherwise contemplate, and this brief hymn is no exception. It provides, in order, a brief and enigmatic glimpse of six theological truths about Christ;

'He was revealed in the flesh' – **His incarnation**, in coming into the world
'Vindicated in spirit' – **His work of salvation** on the Cross
'Seen by angels' – **His ascension to Heaven**, where He dwells now
'Preached among the Gentiles' – **His Gospel**, a message preached
'Believed in throughout the world' – **His Church**, universal
'And taken up in glory' – **His coming again** and final victory over evil.

This hymn is worth remembering and reciting, indeed it may constitute an early form of 'creed'. However, this is only half way through Paul's letter to Timothy, and the second half says more about these things. They are a sound basis of teaching which enables the church to flourish and have confidence in its calling.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What would you say holds the church of God together? What is the foundation of God's Church today?
2. Read through the hymn at the end of this passage and discuss in your group the theology of each line.
3. What place does hymnody have in your church? Can hymnody be used in other ways apart from simply being sung?

Discipleship challenges

- *Try writing a hymn! You can do this by writing down a list of half a dozen things which are important to you about Jesus, and then turning each word into a short phrase, each line having a similar rhythm. It takes a little practice, but it is not hard.*
- *Look at some hymns that have been written recently. Look at them carefully and ask the question; do they reflect Scripture? If they do, then use them; if not, abandon their use.*

Final Prayer

If I have become tired or sorrowful this day, my Lord, please accept my apologies. I have been wrapped up in my own feelings and have failed to see the bigger picture, which is coloured by Your gracious love. Save me from my problems, and lead me to trust in Your guidance and providence. Thank You, my Lord, AMEN
