

Prayers

Opening prayer

Speak to me, Lord Jesus, in the quiet moments of this day, and minister to my needy soul. Whisper in my ear to remind me to turn to You and choose Your better way: Say a word that encourages me to exercise the gifts and graces You have given me: Shout a word of warning when I wander from the pathway of Your righteousness. Stay close, Lord Jesus, so I may hear the things You say to me, and learn to trust Your ever present wisdom in all I do and say. Thank You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: CULTURE

1. For yourself

What is your more pressing concern at the moment? Resolve to pray about this from as many different perspectives as possible

2. For your friends and family

Pray especially for those members of your friends and family who face difficult cultural issues, such as different forms of prejudice or misunderstanding

3. For the church and its work

Pray that God's people might rejoice to take the Gospel to people who reject Christianity. Pray that God will change the hearts of those who oppose His Word

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

Pray for journalists who have to work throughout the world in cultures very different to their own. Pray that the news we receive might be a fair reflection of the truth as it is seen by those who are affected by it, and a genuine attempt to report the facts

Meditation

Love is more than just an emotion; God is love.

Be careful, sometimes love says 'stop';
So don't retain the torments of the enemy,
Turn from all the sin that tempts your soul,
And let the Spirit lead you on to higher things.

Be patient, when in wisdom, love says, 'wait',
Give the Spirit space to do His work unseen;
Submit to Christ, and let His glorious plan unfold,
And love will guide you where you need to go.

Be ready for the time when love says 'go',
Grasp the moment, seize the open vision,
Use the overflowing power of God's Spirit,
Let love's latent fruitfulness be found in You!

Love is more than can be ever known, for God is love

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 6:11-16

¹¹ But as for you, man of God, turn away all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many

witnesses. ¹³ I charge you, in the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ He will bring this about at the right time, He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and lives in unapproachable light, and whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal power. Amen.

Review

Here Paul turns completely away from the many problem of the church, to encourage his friend and confidant, Timothy. His words are warm, and contain some memorable pieces of advice.

It is entirely typical of Paul that he gives the bad news before the good! Yesterday, we read with saddened hearts his piercing analysis of the sins of God's people and the ever present problem of money, 'a root of all kinds of evil' (6:10). Today we can rejoice with Paul as he encourages his younger friend Timothy to stand firm in the good things of God and the faith in which he was taught. Paul had used this technique before, and in other letters we can see how Paul explained the heart of a problem before offering a solution, for example, in Galatians, Paul wrote about the 'sins of the flesh' before he wrote about the famous 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5:19-26). Our passage today is similar in parts to the 'fruit of the Spirit', particularly in verse 11 where he writes one of his famous lists of godly characteristics; however, the passage goes further than this. It is like a Christian version of a 'call to arms'; a summary set of orders from the senior commander to the junior officer, a powerful piece of advice by a godly man written to all who seek to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

Paul begins by urging Timothy to aspire to what is good, commending to him a list of representative godly qualities; 'righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.' Only the first two words, 'godliness and righteousness' are not in the famous list of the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5:22,23), and they are the two words which characterise this list in particular. Paul asks Timothy to be a 'man of God' and therefore live and act in a godly and righteous manner, with the rest of the list representing those good qualities of faith and love which appear in many of Paul's exhortations to Christians. We can imagine that Timothy would have been someone who would have always sought to be just this, but we must not assume. All of us need the inspiration of great words such as this spoken to us to lift us up when we feel far less than the men or women of God we have been called to be. Paul does not intend to give Christian people targets for which to aim, but encouragement to sustain the qualities God has already given.

This is clear in the next verse (6:12), where Paul comments; 'fight the good fight of the faith', speaking like a sports coach, urging his athlete to perform to his or her best, imploring them to take hold of what they already have from their experience and training and use it to achieve a goal. In this illustration, however, the goal of the battle or the fight is eternal life, which Timothy already has in Christ Jesus, through 'his own confession and the presence of many witnesses' (6:12). The fight itself is the fight of daily living the Gospel of Christ and of keeping at bay the enemy who would do everything in his power to pull the younger Christian down.

Paul persists in offering encouragement which reminds Timothy of his previous words and deeds, and it is a wise way of encouraging anyone. Timothy had made his own confession of faith before other people, and Paul compared this to the confession of faith made by Jesus Himself when standing before Pilate (6:13) You might think that this is pushing things a bit much, for how can anyone's 'confession of faith' be of the same kind as Jesus'? Yet Paul insists this is so for Timothy, and he would not say it for Timothy if he would not also insist it is so for us. Christ went ahead of us by bearing our sins through His death on the Cross, and part of that death was His confession of faith. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus directly whether He was the Christ (Mark 14:62), and He said 'I am', and in so doing took on Himself the mantle of the Saviour of the World. Our confession of faith is our personal agreement with this statement of Jesus'; we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the 'Son of the Living God' (Matt 16:16); and in so saying we identify ourselves with Jesus just as He has first identified Himself with us.

The next part of what Paul says to Timothy sounds straightforward, but is an interesting insight into Paul and his beliefs. He says; 'keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Clearly, Paul believed in the imminent return of Christ in glory, and this comes as no surprise to us. However, much of what Paul says about the end times and the coming of Christ in glory is in response to problems in various churches (in particular Corinthians – see 1 Cor. 15,16; and Thessalonians). Here, Paul speaks with unbridled confidence and without any agenda other than to encourage his co-worker and friend in Christ. He is committed to be ready for the coming of the Lord and he believes that God will bring about the end in His own time (6:15). The very thought of God in His glory leads Paul into raptures of praise, describing Him as; 'the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who alone

is immortal and lives in unapproachable light' (6:15,16). Such is Paul's joy at the thought of Jesus coming again in glory!

The challenge of this magnificent text is simple. Are we encouraged by these words, or do they test us because we do not fully understand them, or perceive how they relate to us personally? If we have committed ourselves fully to the Lord, then we should have no problem with wanting to welcome Him again at His coming in glory. Paul asked Timothy to hold on to the truth of this hope; and he asks us to do the same.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. When you hear the expression 'fight the good fight', what does this suggest to you about living the Christian life?
2. How did you make your confession of faith in Christ Jesus?
3. What does the coming of Christ in glory mean to you and to the church fellowship of which you are a part?

Discipleship challenges

- *In what ways do we encourage each other as God's people. Think of ways in which you can encourage others within the life of your own church, and perhaps challenge them as well with the words of scripture!*
 - *Pray about the issue of the Lord's coming again in glory. Put aside some time and let yourself be challenged by the whole idea and the magnificence of Paul's description of His glory. Let God guide you in your thoughts according to His will.*
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Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, touch our lives with Your love and compassion, and as we receive from You, may we be empowered to be Your messengers of peace, love and compassion for others. May we always be willing to share the blessings we have received: AMEN
