

Prayers

Opening prayer

We praise you and bless You, Holy and majestic Lord. You stand above all the cultures, institutions, governments and organisations of the world with the authority of the only One who can make all things happen according to Your own will and purpose. We place our trust in You because You alone can make good things happen out of everything we experience day by day. All glory be to You! ALLELUIA

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: CULTURE

1. For yourself

Pray today in thanksgiving for everything you have been given by God; especially for your country of birth and your culture

2. For your friends and family

Thank God for those who you love and are a part of your life. Thank God for the culture in which you live, for its benefits, and everything you enjoy about it

3. For the church and its work

Pray for the church, and pray that it will both be completely true to the Gospel and also a witness to people in the culture of today

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

Pray against the forces within the world that work to make some culture dominate others, and pray for God's people to be an influence for good within the world.

Meditation

I go out to do my daily work;
With the radiance of this day's light
Glowing on my every move:
The Creator knows my doing.

I thank Him for this opportunity;
He has selected me for a task
And in its doing I am fulfilled:
The Creator knows my being.

I focus to dispel my wandering;
The motivation of His presence
Directs my mind and rules this work:
The Creator knows my thinking.

I serve the only God for all my life;
His wisdom ever goes before
And all my graft is for His glory;
The Creator knows my living..

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 6:17-21

¹⁷ As for those who in the present age are rich, give them strict orders not to be arrogant, or to put their hopes on something as uncertain as riches, but on God who richly provides us all with things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, generous, and ready to

share. ¹⁹ In this way, they will store up for themselves the treasure of a firm foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

²⁰ O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Avoid the irreverent chatter and opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge; ²¹ for by professing it some have strayed from the faith. Grace be with you.

Review

This conclusion of Paul's first letter to Timothy is full of touching and personal comment by which Paul sought to strengthen Timothy for his task, as he had done during the whole letter. In addition, as we might expect, it contains some sound advice for all who have followed in Timothy's footsteps as leaders of God's people throughout the ages. The advice here is concise, godly and sensible, and it reflects the teachings of Jesus about wealth and riches and the relative value of the spiritual things we store up for ourselves in the future. There is also a healthy degree of caution here about not just the goods and wealth of the world, but also the ideas, chatter and false knowledge that people gather as a substitute for the truth of the Gospel. Paul's advice to Timothy is simple. Keep close to the ever present guidance of God's Holy Spirit and the true teachings of the Gospel which feed and sustain all God's people. They do not let us down!

Paul sums up his advice to Timothy about the rich by telling Timothy to give them 'strict orders not to be arrogant'. This phrase is rather strange, because the verb 'to give strict orders' is one which comes from a military rather than a religious background (see Acts 5:28), and there is nothing social or polite about the instruction. Those who have riches are therefore under discipline to both use their resources for the glory of God (6:18) and to do so without acting as if they were more important or significant people because of their wealth. This is a tough instruction, because it is natural for people who have resources to wish to have a degree of control and power over how their wealth is used, even if it is handed over to the church. For example, people tend to give larger gifts to the church in a personal manner rather than in the 'offertory plate'!

Of course, many rich and wealthy people who are godly do indeed act in a right manner with the benefits God has given them (6:18). They are generous of spirit, ready to share and avoid any sense of personal grandeur due to their wealth, and they build themselves spiritual stores in heaven just as Jesus taught (Matt 6:19). However, as Paul was so aware, the devil is ever present and seeks to tempt people to pull back to themselves the arrogance of wealth. This is an ugly thing amongst the people of God whether the one afflicted is a lay person or a leader.

Timothy had received from Paul the fullest possible support in this letter, and in contrast to many of Paul's letters, it ends with no long lists of people or greetings, but with simple focus on Timothy. We are used to reading the ends of Paul's letters (such as that to the Romans) in which Paul mentions everyone of importance in a church and ensures that no-one is left out or offended; offering a word of advice here and some encouragement there according to need. The personal letters to Timothy are quite different in this respect, although the second letter to Timothy does contain a few verses of greetings which Timothy is asked to pass on (2 Tim 4:19-21).

Paul summarises what has been a theme almost for the whole letter; 'O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care.' (6:20). Paul had spent the whole letter encouraging Timothy to act according to the authority given him by laying on of hands (4:14) for leadership and teaching within the church. He had the duty and the spiritual authority to address the wealthy and powerful in the church and tell them not to be arrogant, and he had a duty to persist in teaching those truths of the Gospel which were rooted in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

The last piece of advice given by Paul is to avoid 'irreverent chatter and opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge' (6:20). This is a very similar phrase and train of thought to that found right at the beginning of the letter 'I urge you ... not to occupy yourself ... with endless genealogies and speculations ...' (1:3,4). Paul was therefore clearly concerned about the power of human criticism and speculation to derail the progress of the church. He was not an opponent of religious enquiry or scholarship, but he was ardently opposed to the endless pursuit of natural religious philosophy, which seeks and never finds, and knocks, but never finds any open doors. This pursuit is as damaging today as it ever was, and it is all a matter of perspective. If the Holy Spirit directs the human mind, it can engage fully and purposefully in all human scholarly enquiries, but if it is tempted to pursue knowledge for its own sake, for example, then God is not merely left to one side, but excluded from intellectual pursuit. The result is warped soulless religion and a departure from the revelation of God in Christ; it can be observed all too frequently amongst those who have exchanged their Lord for the temptations of the world, as Paul so clearly observed and prophesied.

Paul's last phrase 'Grace be with you' occurs only in the two letters to Timothy and in Colossians (4:18). The 'peace', which Paul frequently mentions in his greetings alongside 'grace', has already been conveyed in the

letter through Paul's personal concern and warm approval of one who was a dearly loved friend and companion. Paul's final wish was for Timothy to have the grace of God to fulfil His call.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group; do those who possess wealth tend to be arrogant, or is this an unhelpful charge?
2. How do we go about storing up treasures in heaven?
3. What are the contrary ideas and irreverent chatter that disrupts the life of the church today? How can it be avoided?

Discipleship challenges

- *Who are those most close to you in Christian fellowship? However old or young you are, would it be wise to think of trying to encourage someone else younger in the faith than yourself? Ask the Lord to help and guide your thoughts about this.*
 - *Pray for those who are rich in the church, and have considerable means. Pray that they may maintain the integrity demanded of them by God's Word.*
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Final Prayer

When people all around me reject the faith I have, give me the presence of mind, O Lord, to stand firm in You in all circumstances. Your hand is my guide, Your Spirit is my strength and Your love is my comfort. No-one can take this away from me if I remain in Your presence; Thank You Lord; AMEN
