

Prayers

Opening prayer

Give us generous hearts O Lord; give us love which overflows, faith which is never-ending, hope that is steadfast and sure, and an attitude towards others which is open hearted and accepting. In this way, may our testimony to the love of God be found to be true by those who meet us, and may they be drawn towards Jesus Christ, and respond to the Good News of His generous love. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: CULTURE

1. For yourself

Make a resolution to pray today for all the very different people you meet. Give thanks to God for His creative genius in making such varied people

2. For your friends and family

Pray for any of your friends and family who are facing difficulties at this time. Pray for their protection and their ultimate blessing

3. For the church and its work

Pray for the work of the church in those parts of the world that are little known, which create no publicity, and are hence largely ignored by most people today. For example, in Greenland, The islands of the 'South Seas', central Russia, etc

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

Explore today's news and pray for those items to which you are directed by God

Meditation

My God, I ask You, guide my ways,
so I may learn the truth about my Saviour, Christ,
so I may find within His Word
the way which guides me out of death to life.

Free up my soul, flood my life with light,
cease my faltering vision of many little things,
and raise my sights to greater, spiritual realms,
to make me touch the possibilities of grace.

Stir up my zeal, my latent passion
to serve all those I meet and love such work,
and through this toil my call complete
as all my best is done for others and for Christ.

Save my spirit, cure my broken soul,
that shies away from sharing all Your faithfulness;
and turn me all round to live more perfectly
to sow and reap a harvest for Your Kingdom.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 6:3-10

Teach and urge these duties. ³ Now, whoever teaches something different and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and teaching that is godly, ⁴ is puffed up with pride and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, malicious talk, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people with corrupt minds who are deprived of the truth. They think that godliness is a means of gain!

⁶ Now, there is much to be gained in godliness and contentment combined; ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and neither can we take anything out of it; ⁸ but if we have food and clothing, we can be content with these.

⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Review

These words are some of the most mature and yet sharp spiritual words of advice in the letters of Paul. We are often enraptured by Paul's ability to describe the indescribable, as he writes about the love of God and the benefits of grace, for example; but here, he speaks in the most forthright terms about the dangers which await God's people if they let slip the disciplines of faith. This section of Paul's letter to Timothy comes towards the end of what he has to say, and he begins by urging Timothy to continue to do the right thing and 'teach and urge these duties' (6:2). What Paul means here is the specific rights and duties he has written previously in the letter; but the reason for his urging is because when people take their focus away from the disciplines of faith, then Satan quickly fills the void with alternatives, and these are amply illustrated in what Paul says next.

Throughout his letters, Paul was adamant that the simple truth of the Gospel was distinct and clearly definable and a means of salvation for all people, so much so that he could say 'whoever teaches something different ...' and be confident that God's people would know what he meant! One of the great tragedies of the church today is that there are serious disputes amongst Christians about even the very nature of salvation and how it may be found and administered, so a Christian is liable to be confused about what is the truth about the Gospel and what is not! In a lifetime's experience within one church I have found little consensus about the Gospel, and few who feel confident about how they are saved, whether they are saved, from what they are saved, and whether they have a relationship with God at all! My personal response has been to return to the Bible to answer these questions. I have found that at the heart of his letters Paul does write a straightforward Gospel and the whole Bible does witness to God's love for all people expressed uniquely in Jesus Christ, and it confirms that I may have a relationship with God through Christ. Everything Paul says in this passage is set against this.

It is hard to point fingers and unwise to do so, but verse 4 of our text amply describes a considerable number of settings I have unfortunately experienced, in which people discuss the things of God without having done their homework in scripture and with the intent of pursuing agendas to represent certain church interests. What Paul says about strife, envy and pride amongst God's people then becomes true. The results can be awful, whether the subject is baptism, the return of Christ, the unity of God's people and how it is expressed or the way in which bread and wine is shared and served. The more God's people discuss religious things without reference to the Bible, the more verse 5 is fulfilled amongst them; 'constant friction among people with corrupt minds who are deprived of the truth'!

However difficult it is when people lose sight of the heart of their faith, the worst problems arise when money is involved. This is clear from the rest of Paul's observations here, especially when he warns against the perilous dangers of using 'godliness as a means of gain' (6:5). First of all, Paul speaks mildly about the great wisdom of being content with what we have; 'for we brought nothing into the world, and neither can we take anything out of it' (6:7), and with these words reminds us of Jesus' teaching about the minimum needs of those who are His disciples (Matt 10:8f.). He concludes his warnings with a series of cautions about the possession and use of money, including the famous phrase. 'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ...' It is wise to pay careful attention to how Paul has written this phrase; money is not the only source of evil on the world, and neither is money itself the evil. Money lies behind a variety of evils in the world and the church largely because in the world, those who control the money control what happens; the church then suffers when those who have responsibility for money assume that they have spiritual as well as financial authority.

Only we can say how this Biblical truth affects either our own churches or us. I know that I am very cautious whenever I hear that the reasons for any decision taken within my own church denomination are financially

driven. Money must be handled properly, but when it is treated as the master and not the servant, then there is a problem. Paul's only answer is to call God's people back to the simplicity of Christ, His mission and His salvation. Although he does not say this here, the strong implication of this whole passage is that if we allow the Gospel to be our guide, then we prevent Satan from using argument, dissension, strife and money to create divisions and upset amongst God's people. He was right.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Does the church of God teach the Gospel in a way which everyone can understand? If not, why not?
2. When and where have you observed the problematic behaviour Paul mentions within this passage?
3. How can money be used to the glory of God?

Discipleship challenges

- *If you are someone who attends church meetings, watch out for dissention and strife, and watch how it evolves. By observation, see if you can spot how the lack of godly principles leads to argument and division. Pray about what to do with what you have observed.*
 - *Fast and pray for the church of God today, that it may come together around the Gospel of Christ and recover confidence in its core message of the salvation of all through Jesus Christ.*
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Final Prayer

Keep me in Your presence this day, Jesus Christ, my Lord; keep me close to Your side as I walk the path You have before me. Then, when difficulty comes, may I have the confidence to deal with everything in the way You would wish of me, knowing that You are always there to help me. Thank You, Lord; AMEN
