

Prayer

Your love for people, Lord God, is never ending, single minded, faithful, unconditional, eternal, purposeful, compassionate, steadfast, fearless and fruitful; and if that were not enough, Your love has been made known to us personally through Jesus Christ our Lord! We praise You, Lord God; King of the Universe and Master of Redemption. We praise You forever! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Preaching

In this coming week we will pray about a number of issues to do with preaching and preachers in church. Pray today for any preachers personally known to you.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who entertain us in great sporting events*
- *Give thanks for scientists who work to find medical cures*
- *Pray for those who risk their lives to help keep international peace*

Meditation

For those with open eyes to see the Father,
For those who know the truth in Jesus Christ;

Salvation comes to all who own His name,
and judgment falls on the rich who oppress the poor,

Blessings fall on those who strive for good,
and curses fall on all who choose the evil paths,

Deliverance comes to all who trust in Him,
and bondage holds all those who love their own ways,

The Kingdom grows where people do Your will,
And justice comes when captives are set free;.

Open our eyes to see Your Word Lord God
Your love, Your works, Your plan for all humanity.

Bible Study - 1 Timothy 5:23 – 6:2

²³ *Do not drink only water, but take a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent ailments.* ²⁴ *The sins of some people are evident and go ahead of them to judgment, but those of others appear later.* ²⁵ *Likewise, good works are obvious; and others cannot remain hidden.*

^{6:1} *Let all who are under the yoke of service as slaves regard their masters as worthy of all respect, so that the name of God and the doctrines may not suffer abuse.* ² *Those who have masters who believe must not regard them with any less respect because they are in fellowship; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit from their service are believers, and loved. Teach and urge these things.*

Review

Paul continues to give Timothy rather unrelated words of advice; nevertheless, they give us a feel of the humanity of the communication and a possible insight into some of the issues affecting the life of the early church. The passage starts with some quaint advice to Timothy to be less abstemious and drink some wine, for the sake of his stomach. Paul was certainly of the opinion that there were medical benefits to what we might call 'drinking in moderation!' He went on to speak rather enigmatically about the way in which sins and problems within the church are sometimes obvious and sometimes not; we will see shortly whether there may have been a reason for this comment of Paul. Lastly, Paul writes about slavery and the specific circumstances of slaves and their masters being in fellowship together. It raises some interesting issues not just to do with slavery!

We already know that slavery was an issue which caused some unease in the early church (6:1,2), because it is mentioned in a number of New Testament letters (1 Peter 2:18f, Ephesians 5:5f. and Col 3:22f.). The general attitude of Peter and Paul was that slavery was part of the social fabric of the day and it would be unwise to disrupt this for fear of compromising the Gospel and the church. In their day, vast numbers of people lived in forms of slavery and service within the Roman Empire, and if the church had challenged this, the antagonism of the Empire would be shown in swift and brutal persecution. The apostles felt that the infant church was not at that time in a place to change society except by the proclamation of the Gospel alone. We cannot fault their judgement, because the news of Jesus Christ did eventually change the Roman Empire and the whole world. Tragically, it took too long for the worst forms of slavery to be legally banned, though as we know today, all kinds of illegal slavery has always existed, and of a far more shocking nature than that found in Roman times.

The issue within this passage is whether a master and a slave who were part of the same church might have a different kind of working relationship because of their fellowship in Christ. In those days there were no competing denominations to enable some to go to a church in one place, and others to attend a church elsewhere. As far as we know, all the Christians in one town or place were regarded as one fellowship, and were likely to meet together. Paul therefore gave carefully measured advice, saying that the only difference being a Christian should make was that the slave, through Christ, should aspire to a higher standard of service for the master! We may think this is somewhat biased, but it is worth remembering that one whole letter of the New Testament, Philemon, contains Paul's pleading to a master (Philemon) to apply a higher standard of personal behaviour towards a slave (Onesimus), and in terms of scripture, this redresses the balance. Paul's general position was that for any Christian, the presence of Christ should inspire them to higher standards in whatever service they performed or life they lived. This is the best message we can take from this passage.

Paul's advice to Timothy about taking a little wine (5:23) is hardly more than well meaning health advice. It is probably true that wine would have helped someone who normally drank water, because water was not purified in Roman times and it contained more potential water-borne health risks than fermented grape juice. Through the years, the church has often offered health advice, as a way of extending the healing ministry. In this instance, we have no real knowledge of Timothy's ailments, so we would be wise not to place much emphasis on the advice. It is best if we ensure that any health advice the church offers is moderate and accurate; moreover, the church should always seek to practice the ministry of healing given by Jesus in His commission (e.g. see Matt 10:1f.).

Lastly, Paul's comment about people's sins in verse 24 seems a little obscure, but it is easy to understand. It is his way of describing the observable fact that some sins are evident when they happen and some are only discovered later. Paul then states the obvious sequel, which is that the same is true of good deeds demonstrating faith. There seems to

be no clear reason for the comments however, for although it would naturally follow Paul's advice to Timothy about keeping discipline in the church (5:17-24), it seems odd coming after Paul's advice about drinking wine! We cannot fully explain this, but it may be that by saying this to Timothy (5:24,25), he was wisely advising him that no church leader can deal with all the problems of a congregation; many will only be sorted out, as he says, when they reach 'judgment' (5:24).

This reading comes across as a hotchpotch of comments, but taken carefully, they each yield helpful advice.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. To what extent should Christians seek to look after their health as a form of obligation to God or a witness to the faith?
2. Discuss in your group the difference between sins which are 'obvious' and sins which remain hidden. How can Christians help each other with sins that remain hidden?
3. Why does slavery persist in parts of the world today and in what forms. What can the church do about this?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

When Paul speaks to Timothy in this letter, he seems to slip quickly between offering personal advice and speaking about the principles of leadership and service. It can be hard to pick up quickly what Paul's main motives and points are. This is a problem many of us have with communication, and we are often unclear about what lies behind the things which people say to us. The Holy Spirit is the only true guide to human communication, however, and our trust in Him is the key to all understanding.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Investigate where slavery exists in our world today by whatever means you have at your disposal; newspapers, internet, etc. Discuss this with Christian or non-Christian friends and search for ways of making a difference and tackling these issues.*
- *Fast and pray about the issue of personal health amongst Christians, and pray that they will appreciate the wisdom of scriptural advice to look after oneself as part of the testimony of faith.*

Final Prayer

When we struggle to understand things, heavenly Father, break through the fog of our difficulties and enable us to perceive Your ways. Shine a light into our lives, and into our minds our feelings and our thoughts, so that we may begin to understand what You are saying to us about how to make things better. Heavenly Father, You are our one true Light: AMEN