

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You bless us by helping us in the midst of the most difficult of situations. Stay close to us, we pray, so that when we do not know what to do or fail to understand what You required of us, we may call upon Your assistance and have confidence in Your wisdom and authority. You are our inspiration and we delight in praising You for everything You have done for us. Thank You, Lord Jesus, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Look realistically at the problems in each situation you face today, and offer them to God in prayer

On-going prayers

- **Pray for major industrial nations** *Pray the UK and its particular contribution to world affairs, pray for its government, facing elections next year*
- *Give thanks for the children now being born into the world*
- *Pray for world leaders soon gathering at Copenhagen*

Meditation

Think again; think about the people you see,
The people you meet and those you pass by.
There are none whose mind and heart,
Whose body, soul, spirit and feelings
Are not precious to the heart of God.

Think again; think about the person you are,
Moulded by your choices and experience.
There is no part of past or present,
Precious memories or future's promise,
Which is not precious to the heart of God.

So think again; think about the family of God,
Those you know who love and worship Him.
There's none within the Kingdom
Less or greater, better or worse than you,
For all are precious in the heart of God.

So think again, and reckon this O child of God,
Who are you to think more grandly of yourself
The Saviour knows the engaging truths
Of every soul yet loves without complaint;
No partiality is found within the heart of God.

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,

Bible Study

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 use in 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?

Topics covered by this text

- *The proper conduct of people within the life of the church*
- *Devotion, and the 'articles of faith' of a Christian*

Personal comments by author

This is only a brief passage of scripture, and yet it is fascinating. Because of this passage, I am convinced that the positions of bishop and deacon as described in 1 Timothy 3 are only secondary roles, and in my opinion we should look very carefully at whether we are right to make so much of what the Bible means by the word 'bishop'. That may be controversial for some, but for me it is following the logic of what scripture says. Far more important than defining roles and status is the importance of leaders giving a good moral and spiritual example for others to follow.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *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
