

## Prayer

Hold me firmly with Your abiding love, heavenly Father, and show me how to live a life which honours the sacrifice that was made for my redemption and salvation. Give me the courage to live for the One who gave His life for me that I might live, and enable me to fulfil my commission to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour; AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Give thanks for something that gives you great joy, and let the Holy Spirit guide your words*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the United Nations.** *Pray for UNICEF, the United Nation Children's Fund, which gives world wide help to children and mothers*
- *Pray for Sierra Leone, where people still suffer after years of war*
- *Give thanks to God for His care and love, and His guidance of your life*

## Meditation

Take in the breath of the Holy Spirit  
And breathe more deeply of the things of God.

Accept the peace and the love of Christ  
Which sweeps away all trouble and fear.

Rejoice in the challenge of the Spirit's power  
To achieve the impossible within this world.

Receive the unconditional gifts of God  
The guarantee of faith and the means of ministry.

Be comforted by spiritual presence of Christ  
And know the healing of your body and soul.

Wonder at the mystery of the wind and the fire  
That purifies, guides and enraptures soul.

Take in the breath of the Holy Spirit  
And be transformed by the things of God.

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## Bible passage – 1 Timothy 1:8-11

<sup>8</sup> Now we know that the law is good, if it is used legitimately. <sup>9</sup> This means understanding that the law is not set out for the innocent but for those who are lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> sexual perverts, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching <sup>11</sup> that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he has entrusted to me.

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## Bible Study

### Review

We may not expect this, and it may come as something of a surprise, but the first thing Paul says to his dear friend Timothy when imploring him to uphold sound doctrine, is to make sure that people know God's 'Law'! Why would Paul start his recommendation on sound teaching here? To begin with, Paul has already complained that people were being led astray by false religions (1:4 – see yesterday) and when all these were imported into Christian faith, it created mayhem. Similar things happens today, but we will not know the truth about what is right and what is wrong without a knowledge of God's Law, and this is why Paul insists here that it is important.

Paul teaches that the basic understanding of God's Word is to be found in the Old Testament, and is loosely called the 'Law' (1:8f.). Here, he is not talking about the nit-picking legalism of the Pharisaic laws, built over centuries around the Old Testament. Jesus had fought against such religiosity, and Paul had consistently condemned such legalism and presented it as the very opposite of the Gospel of Jesus' grace (e.g. see Gal 3:10f.). So here, he refers to the true Laws of God, revealed in the Old Testament, and revealing the moral nature of the whole of Creation as made by God. Typically, by the word 'Law', we mean the first five books of the Bible. This includes the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), the moral codes of Leviticus and the great commandment 'love your neighbour ...' (Lev 19:18b), and the Israelite prayer 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength' (Deut 6:4f.). This was true Old Testament Judaism, which despite its failings, still held in its history the treasure of God's moral self-revelation.

In this passage, Paul sets out the incomparable value of God's Law, which identifies what is right and wrong in the created world, and enables those who want to do God's will to understand the moral background against which to make good judgements. In this way, it also identifies what is '*disobedient (to God), ungodly and sinful*' (1:9). Then to illustrate his point, Paul gives a long list of social and personal evils (1:9,10) in the Roman society but contrary to God's moral law. One of these sins is sodomy an evils that was regarded as acceptable in many Roman circles of his day, but was forbidden by God. Historians disagree about the extent to which homosexual practice was prevalent within the Roman Empire, but there is no doubt that it was common. Paul expressed his own horror at this by listing alongside this the Greek word 'porneia' translated here as 'sexual perverts'. In addition, Paul mentioned the sin of slavery, identifying in a unique way the terrible offense of the slave trade in ancient Roman society. In his other writings, Paul does not appear to suggest that slavery is wrong (e.g. Eph 6:5f.), but it seems from this passage that he was indeed aware of its evils.

There are all manner of debates and arguments we could have about the various issues raised here, but Paul mentions them all as 'contrary to sound teaching', and we should be prepared to listen and be careful. Whilst issues to do with homosexuality, for example, create great debate today, we should not forget that Paul also lists 'liars', 'perjurers' and the 'ungodly' in his list, and we have a duty to look at those things. They apply to us, and if we are to come to terms with what Paul calls 'sound teaching', we must accept that God's moral 'Law' forbids these as well. We are right to say that we are not saved by the Law, but we are wrong to say it is not important. God's law tells us what sin is.

All too often, we allow each other a significant amount of social lee-way in respect of sins, but to do so compromises God's Word. Paul presents a stern challenge from God's Word, and however powerful the work of God to save a sinner (of every category mentioned in his list), Timothy's task was to ensure that the leaders of the churches and the teaching that was given reflected sound doctrine, and gave no lee-way to what was evil or wrong before God. It was and is advice of great discernment.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. How do you react to the list of evils and sins mentioned by Paul at the beginning of this letter? Discuss the meaning of any you do not understand.
2. Discuss whether it is always possible to determine the nature of sin from what we are told in the Bible?
3. Have a look at some other lists of sins found in Paul's writing (e.g. Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-6).

### **Topics covered by this text**

- *The nature of sin*
- *The nature of God's Law*

## **Personal comments by author**

*It is quite hard to have to deal with a strong and negative list such as this at the beginning of a significant letter of Paul. However, it was necessary for Paul to get this out of the way before he could move on to the other, equally controversial issues he mentions to Timothy. It is clear that in writing a different form of letter, Paul is raising issues in a different way than in his other letters to churches. Expect more controversy to come!*

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *This passage of scripture is one frequently referred to in the debates amongst some Christians about homosexuality. What do you think of how the church handles this subject pastorally, given what the Bible says?*
- *Arrange to spend several days having a fast. By this I mean, miss a meal and replace it with a short time of prayer, asking the Lord to reveal to you any social sins which you have not seen in yourself. Confess them as necessary and ask the Lord to show you how to handle these issues.*

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## **Final Prayer**

Great and mighty God, who hears our prayers even before they are formed in our minds; mould our lives into the pattern of your great will both for us and also for all humanity. So may we be fulfilled in our inner spiritual life, and in our relationships with others. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

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