

Message #4

Kurt Hedlund

1 Timothy

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FOR WHOM SHOULD WE PRAY?

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

You may have heard that there is something going on Tuesday. While the presidential election has garnered the most attention, there are important races for Congress and the Senate as well as state and local contests. Some of you have already voted.

The political divide on the presidential level is pretty sharp. Backers of Donald Trump argue that Joe Biden will raise taxes and hurt the economy. He is pro-abortion and too beholden to the left-wing agenda of his party. Recent revelations show that he is part of a corrupt family which has sought to profit from his influence by making deals in foreign countries and that Joe has been very much a part of it.

Backers of Joe Biden argue that Donald Trump is an egomaniac. He has not handled the coronavirus well. He stretches the truth badly. He hardly displays Christian virtues. He promotes divisiveness. He favors big business, and he will cause millions of Americans to lose their health insurance coverage.

One of these two probably will become president for the next four years. Many Americans will not be happy with the result of the election. Many will be convinced that it is a rotten person in this high office.

The Christians living in the first century in Asia Minor were dealing with an emperor who would make either of the two presidential candidates look like saints in comparison. Nero had Christians burned alive because of their identification with Jesus. So what the Apostle Paul has to say to the Christians at Ephesus about their responsibility toward civil government has special relevance to us today.

In the last several weeks we have seen that the Apostle Paul was writing to his representative Timothy, who was trying to provide leadership for the church at Ephesus in Asia Minor. But Timothy was having

problems at Ephesus and may have had doubts about his fitness for the job in that church. He was taking flack from false teachers in that city who were promoting wrong doctrine. Some of them were part of the church leadership. Paul encouraged Timothy to hang in there. He was the right man for the job. Timothy needed to fight the good fight in Ephesus.

We have also considered the fact that these early churches had no well-established bylaws or manuals of operation. They were largely dependent upon the teaching and the revelation that came through the apostles and prophets. Each church had different characteristics and challenges. So in Chapters 2 & 3, when the Apostle Paul provides instruction for Timothy and the church at Ephesus, he is probably responding to questions and situations that had arisen in that local church. His answers, however, have relevance for us today. His instructions concerning a Christian's responsibility to civil government, explained in our passage today, have special relevance to our own circumstances.

I.

So in the first two verses of 1 Timothy #2 (which is found on p. 991 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we discover THE PRIORITY AND OBJECTS OF PRAYER. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE PRIORITY AND OBJECTS OF PRAYER) In #1 the Apostle Paul was giving personal direction to Timothy about how he should respond to the false teachers in Ephesus. Now he begins to give direction to Timothy about how the church there should operate.

He writes in v. 1, **"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people..."** "Because, Timothy, it is clear that the Lord wants you to stay at Ephesus and confront the false teachers--- because I want you to fight the good fight and help this church to get its act together, give your attention first to prayer. Make it a priority when the church is gathered together, whether in big meetings or small meetings."

In v. 1 Paul uses four of the seven New Testament words for prayer. His point is that the church should offer all kinds of prayers. Those prayers are to be made for all kinds of people. The false teaching at Ephesus seems to have had an exclusive bent to it. We are not clear on the details. Perhaps there was favoritism toward Jewish Christians. Perhaps there was a spirit of elitism that favored only those who bought into the teaching of the false teachers.

Paul's message was that the true God has a universal concern for all people. The original Greek word here is the generic term for men, which can be legitimately translated, as many of you have it, "people."

The apostle's point is that no one is so bad, or so different, or so hopeless as to be excluded from consideration for prayer. Many years ago I was in a Bible study where the leader brought up the issue about whether people can get so bad as to be beyond hope of God ever getting a grasp on their lives. He brought up the example of a guy he once worked with at GE who would occasionally call late at night under the influence of alcohol and spill out all of his problems. The guy was a disaster. His family was a mess. He was an alcoholic. He had been in jail for arson, and he was resistant to any talk about needing Jesus or God in any form in his life. So we had a discussion in this Bible study about whether people like him could ever get to a point of being beyond hope of redemption.

A few months later, in one of these late night phone calls, this pagan guy responded to the invitation of the Bible study leader to invite Christ into his life. He was still skeptical about whether this supposed convert was genuine. But this wreck of a guy started to show signs of Christian growth. He started going to church. He started treating his wife decently. I eventually had an opportunity to meet him. He was still rough around the edges, but he was headed in the right direction.

Verse 2 in our passage singles out kings and other civil leaders as being individuals who especially need our prayers. Paul says that these prayers should be made **“for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”** Government leaders are in positions of authority where they can influence the rest of society, and prayers for them can make a difference for good.

(PROVERBS 21:1) Proverbs 21:1 says, **“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”** Christians ought to turn to the Lord to ask Him to turn the hearts of kings and other rulers toward Him. The early churches caught on to the importance of this. For by the end of the first century prayers for civil leaders were becoming part of church liturgy. Tertullian, a church bishop in North Africa, prayed at the end of the second century for the Roman emperor to have a long life, secure dominions, a safe home, a faithful senate, righteous people, and a peaceful world. (*Apology*, #30)

David Farah was a Wycliffe missionary from New Jersey. He was a bookish, scholarly type who had a degree from Wheaton College. He went to Bolivia (BOLIVIA) years ago to translate the Bible into the language of remote tribes in the jungle. He also prayed regularly for the leaders of the country. That is a challenging task, because Bolivia has had more changes in government than any other country in Latin America. According to the *Washington Post*, Bolivia has had more than 190 coups and revolutions since becoming independent in 1825. Much of the time it is difficult to keep up with who is running the government.

Col. Hugo Banzer (HUGO BANZER) was the official in charge of Indian affairs during the early part of David Farah's time in Bolivia. Because of David's involvement with translation work with remote Indian tribes, he had the opportunity to meet Col. Banzer a couple of times. So this Bolivian leader was one of the people whom David prayed for in a regular way.

After one of the Bolivian coups, David learned that Col. Banzer was holed up in the Chilean embassy. He went to visit him. He was not allowed in to see him, but he left the colonel a Spanish Bible. A few months later there was another coup, and Col. Banzer's group gained power. David went to see the colonel, and the leader told him that he was the only person who came to see him when he was confined to the Chilean embassy. He said that he read the Bible, and that David was his friend for life. A few months later there was another coup, and Col Banzer became head of Bolivia. This was 1971.

The Wycliffe missionary went to visit the president. The new president expected everyone who showed up to ask favors from him. David instead came in and asked if he could simply pray for President Banzer. He granted permission, and David prayed up a storm for the president and his family and his leadership and the country. When he was done, the president was in tears and was vowing again that David was his friend for life.

A couple of months later President Banzer called up David and asked if he could go to Wycliffe's retreat center for the weekend with David and his family.

During the weekend the president poured out his heart about his concerns for the country and the problems with corruption. So here was this Wycliffe missionary, kind of a nerdish, bookish type, giving advice to the president of this South American country. One of the things which David suggested, and which the president bought into, was that the Bible should be introduced into the public school curriculum of Bolivia. It came to pass.

President Banzer served as president from 1971 to 1978. He served again from 1997 to 2001 as the result of a democratic election. He died in 2002 from cancer. But during his tenure millions of school children were exposed to the truths of the Bible, partly because one man--- a foreigner--- prayed for the leaders of his adopted country.

II.A.

(II. THE REASONS FOR PRAYER) Consider next THE REASONS FOR PRAYER, as they are provided for us in the second part of v. 2 through v. 7. In the second part of v. 2 we are told about THE BENEFIT FOR US. (II. A. THE BENEFIT FOR US) Paul says that we should pray for our leaders **“that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”** We want to live in a peaceful society. We want decent conditions not just for the benefit of all of society but also so that we can spread the gospel.

Paul knew from experience what effect rulers could have on the practice of Christianity. He had been involved by this time in his life with governors, proconsuls, kings, and other officials. Sometimes these leaders had imprisoned him for his preaching of the gospel; sometimes they had beaten him; sometimes they had flogged him. On other occasions they had protected him and had allowed him to continue his preaching. The apostle knew the value of good rulers, whether they were Christian or not.

Paul wrote this first letter to Timothy around 62 AD. Nero (NERO) was emperor of the Roman Empire from 54 to 68 AD. He came to power at age 17. His father had been noted for incest, brutality, and adultery. Some did not expect much from Nero when he came to power. But he did try to win approval from the people he governed, and ruled well in his first few years in office.

His family relationships, however, were a mess. He murdered his brother and his mother. In a fit of rage, he kicked his pregnant wife, causing her death. Then he married a young boy. At the time of this letter there is no evidence that Nero had yet begun a serious persecution of Christians. In fact, Paul had been released from prison in Rome shortly before writing this letter. That was probably done with the approval of Nero.

The Apostle Paul may have been thinking about the unfavorable conditions that Christians faced in particular localities around the empire, and he may have sensed that the deteriorating behavior of Nero meant trouble. Two years later Rome would burn, and Nero would blame the Christians for it. Many believers in and around Rome were killed. Church tradition says that Paul and Peter were among them. In 68 AD Nero was forced out of office, and the persecution subsided--- in answer, I suspect, to the prayers of Christians who had been taught these two verses. (PROJECTOR OFF) You may think that one, or both, of the presidential candidates have low moral character, but they both pale in comparison to Nero.

There is general recognition that Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world today. The Gordon Conwell Center for the Study of Global Christianity says that an average of 100,000 people have been killed for their Christian faith each year in the last decade. Another group called the World Watch List says that in 2018 one in nine Christians around the world experienced serious persecution. This outfit says that there are high levels of persecution in 73 countries. (*World*, 2/16/2019) China recently passed a law banning Christians from having religious funerals. We would do well to pray not only for our leaders but also for other leaders of the world. When you read about a governor or president or dictator, or when you see a news story about them on TV, send up a brief skygram, remembering Paul's admonition in our passage.

B. 1.

We should pray for all people, especially for kings because of the benefit for us. (II. A. B. THE BENEFIT FOR GOD) The second reason why we ought to pray for all men is because of THE BENEFIT FOR GOD. According to vv. 3 & 4, one of these benefits to God is TO SEE PEOPLE KNOW HIM. (II. A. B. 1. TO SEE PEOPLE KNOW HIM) The apostle writes, **"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior---** here he is talking about God the Father, rather than God the Son--- **who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."** Paul is using the language of the Old Testament which describes the acceptability of animal sacrifices pleasing to God. The idea implied is that prayers for all men, especially leaders, are an act of worship.

It is evident here that God cares about all people and wants all people to be saved. The implication is that our prayers for all people should include prayers for their salvation. In 2 Peter #3 v. 9 (2 PETER 3:9) that apostle writes, **"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."**

There was a strain of Judaism that taught that God hates sinners. Perhaps this perspective had been adopted by the false teachers at Ephesus. It seems quite clear that there was an elitist element in the thinking of these people. Paul counters such claims by arguing that God wants all people to be saved. His love is not limited to an intellectual elite. It is not limited to a particular ethnic group. The Lord wants people to come to an understanding of the real truth--- not the speculative intellectualism of the false teachers at Ephesus.

The question that arises is this: "Why are some not saved if God "wants" or "desires" or "wills"--- as the original Greek word may be translated--- that all people be saved? Ephesians #1 v. 11 (EPHESIANS 1:11) says, **"...[God] works all things according to the counsel of his will..."** Everything which God wills

ultimately comes to pass. For He is sovereign. If God wills that all be saved, why are some not saved? Or are they saved in the end?

Augustine tried to solve this problem by saying that Paul in v. 4 was actually saying that God desires that only the elect be saved, that is, only those whom He has already chosen. These will be all kinds of people. One difficulty with this view is that Paul used the same Greek word for “all” back in v. 1. There it seems clear that he is not limiting the objects of the prayers of Christians only to fellow Christians, or only to the elect. In v. 2 he also speaks of “all who are in authority.” He is not talking there only about Christian leaders.

The answer to this seeming dilemma probably lies in the direction of understanding that there are different aspects of God’s will. One aspect of God’s will is His sovereign will. Everything which ultimately comes to pass is part of that sovereign will. If something could happen outside of God’s control, then He would not be sovereign. He would not be all knowing or all-powerful.

A second aspect of God’s will is His preceptive will. The Bible contains certain precepts, like the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not murder.” “Thou shalt not steal.” God wants people not to murder. He wants them not to steal. That is His preceptive will. Yet people sometimes do steal. And there are some who murder. So there is a distinction between the precepts which God gives us, the things which He is wanting us to do and yet does not force us to do, and His sovereign will which always comes to pass. It appears that God’s desire for all men to be saved falls into the category of His preceptive will, rather than His sovereign will. The main point is that God wants prayer for all because He wants people to know Him. Our prayers play a part in some coming to know Him.

2.

Verses 5 & 6 identify a second benefit that comes to God as a result of the prayers of His people. That is TO SEE HIS SACRIFICE APPRECIATED. (II. A.B. 1.2. TO SEE HIS SACRIFICE APPRECIATED) Paul writes, **“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”**

The most important doctrinal statement in Judaism is expressed in the Shema, which consists of three Old Testament passages which begin (DEUTERONOMY 6:4) with v. 4 of Deuteronomy #6: **“Hear (shema), O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”** Verse 5 in our passage begins with a reference to that truth. There is one God for all, including Gentiles as well as Jews.

The original word for “mediator” refers to one individual who intervenes between two people or groups, either to make, or to restore, peace and friendship, or to make a covenant. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this same word in Job #9 vv. 32 & 33 (JOB 9:32-33) when Job is complaining about the difficulties of his situation. He says, **“For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter (mediator) between us, who might lay his hand on us both.”**

In 1 Timothy the two parties involved are God and mankind. The thing which separates them is sin. Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, intervenes and dies on the cross to pay the penalty for man’s sin. (PROJECTOR OFF) He alone is our mediator, our go-between. There is only one mediator. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a godly woman. She had the unique privilege of serving as the mother of our Lord. But she is not the mediator between God and man. Jesus Christ is.

There are certain individuals in the history of the church who have stood out for their service to Christ. The Catholic Church has given them the label “saints.” But these saints are not mediators. There is only one mediator between God and man. He is the man--- and God--- Christ Jesus.

Why does Paul call Him “the man Christ Jesus,” rather than “the God Christ Jesus?” Perhaps he is countering false teaching at Ephesus which doubted His full humanity. Also by stressing Christ’s humanity, Paul is emphasizing God the Son’s identification with all of humanity.

In v. 6 Paul says that this mediator “gave himself as a ransom for all.” Jesus Himself said a similar thing, as is recorded in Mark #10 v. 45. (PROJECTOR ON--- MARK 10 45) There He is recorded as saying, **“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** The term “ransom” was most often used in that day to refer to the money paid to release a slave from slavery. In this context, the meaning is that the price was paid to release man from his slavery to sin. That price was the death of Christ. That price was sufficient for every human being. But each individual must decide if he or she is going to accept that payment that was made for him or her, and believe in Jesus as Savior. To truly become a Christian we must individually decide to put our trust in Jesus.

In the early church some Christians argued that this ransom was paid to Satan. God had to pay off the devil to claim these people. (PROJECTOR OFF) But that is not good theology. God does not owe Satan anything. The ransom price had to be paid because of the righteous demands of God’s own character.

Verse 6 concludes with the observation that this testimony was “given at the proper time.” Christ came at just the right time in history to accomplish God’s purposes. So if God the Son provided an adequate ransom for all men at just the right time, then the prayers of us Christians ought to extend to all people as well.

3.

The third benefit to God of our prayers is identified in v. 7. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. A.B. 1.2.3. TO SEE THE WORK OF HIS...) It is TO SEE THE WORK OF HIS APOSTLE PROCLAIMED. Verse 7 reads, **“For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”**

The word translated here as “preacher” referred originally to a messenger who announces the official message of kings, rulers, and military commanders. His responsibility was to give the correct message and to make it widely known. In this case, Paul was to make the message of salvation known even to the Gentiles. God’s choice of Paul to preach the gospel, even to the Gentiles, is further proof of God’s will to save all men. Therefore, Christians have an obligation to pray for all people, even Gentiles.

The church, then, needs to make it a priority to pray for all people so that we may live in a peaceful society, and so that we may be pleasing to God. God cares about all people. So should we, and one way to express that care is through prayer. Especially we need to pray for our leaders and for the leaders of the world.

The head of the Lebanese Bible Society understood the importance of praying for all people, including government leaders. I heard this story from Luis Palau. As this Bible Society guy traveled through the Middle East, he made it a priority to pray for the various heads of state. He did this for years. He prayed in particular that he might have the chance sometime to speak with one of these leaders.

Once, when he was in his sixties, he was visiting a hospital run by a Protestant organization in one of the countries of the Middle East. This man was in the hospital lobby when he looked up to see the king from another Muslim country come walking in with a large retinue of bodyguards and other officials. Palau did not give the details of the king or the country for obvious reasons.

The Christian saw this as the opportunity for which he had been praying. So he uttered a quick prayer and walked right up to the king. He introduced himself and said, 'I want to give you this book, Your Majesty. I have been praying for you for 25 years.' "That's the Bible, isn't it?" He replied. "Yes, but it's a marvelous book, and I think you would like it."

At that point the king whispered to him, "I want to see you in a few minutes, after I get checked into my room. I actually love the Bible." This guy was supposedly the king of a Muslim country.

So this executive of the Lebanese Bible Society waited a few minutes and then went to the hospital administrator. He said that the king had asked to speak to him. The administrator didn't believe him at first. But he checked out the story, and the man was able to see the king.

When he was alone with the king, the king began to explain. He said that his father, the previous king, had been a believer in Jesus. When the present king was just a boy, his father had been at this hospital for two months for an operation. He had taken a Bible from the bed stand and read it. He became convinced from his reading that Jesus was truly God. When he returned home, he gathered his family together and told them: We must keep quiet about this, or we will all be killed. But I want this family to understand that I believe in Jesus. I am going to read the Bible, and I wish that you would, too.

The present king told the Bible Society guy: "Personally I haven't made any decision. But I would like you to see me in my palace whenever you visit my country." Two months later he was in the king's country and went to visit the palace. The king interrupted a meeting to spend a half hour with this Christian. They read the Bible and prayed. He was invited back again several times.

What has happened since, I have no idea. But I hope that you see the lesson for us about the importance of prayer for all people, especially for those in authority.

We may never have the chance personally to share with a king or president, but perhaps one of us will. We may also have the opportunity to visit with a governor or state representative or mayor or city council person. We can also pray faithfully as a church for our missionaries in other countries who might someday have an opportunity like David Farah had.

We can also remember to utter little quickie prayers as we read the newspaper and watch the news on TV. We can pray for our local officials. We can pray for China and Pakistan and North Korea, asking the Lord to cause leaders to be more positive toward Christians in those hard countries. Then we can look for evidence that God may be at work in the lives of some of these people. Let's be sure to pray for all men, especially for those who are in authority.

[As we close this part of our time together, I would like to invite several of you to lead in prayer for some of the kings and rulers and people in authority who might need our prayers. Remember especially the election that is happening in our country on Tuesday.]