

Instructions On Prayer

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Introduction

The letter began with Paul's exhortation to Timothy to preach sound doctrine (vv.3;10). Paul has warned Timothy about false teachers and directed Timothy to fight the good fight of faith (vv. 18-19) and to maintain a clean conscience (v.19b). Now Paul directs Timothy to consider the subject of corporate and public worship in chapter 2 (vv.1-8); and the role of women in the church (vv.9-15). In this brief but powerful portion Paul reminds Timothy of the priority of prayer (v.1); for whom we pray (vv.1-2a); why we pray (v.2b) and how we pray (v.8). We pray in fact for all men (v.1); for those in authority (v.2a); we pray in order to live lives in quietness and peace—that is lives that reflect godliness and reverence (v.2b); and we do this in the will of God (vv.3-7); “*with holy hands lifted up to God free from anger and controversy*” (v.8). We do this always looking for opportunity to preach the gospel (vv.3-6).

In this chapter Paul reminds Timothy of several things; the importance of prayer; the nature of prayer, the aims and outcomes in prayer; and the optimal conditions for prayer. In chapter 1 Paul has dealt with the ministry of God's Word; but now in this chapter the emphasis is on worship and prayer. In the book of Acts the focus or attention of the leaders in the church was to give themselves “*continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word*” (Acts 6:4). The Pastor's job was not necessarily to please the people or practice politics but engage in the spiritual ministries of worship and discipleship and evangelism. The Word of God instructs the people and prayer to God inspires the people. But the purpose of prayer goes well beyond inspiration of the people; prayer invites God to do all He says He can and will do. Prayer is admission that we can't but God can.

The Importance Of Prayer (v.1)

1 Timothy 2:1 (NKJV) Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,

It would appear that Paul's instructions are directed towards corporate prayer, these are not simply instructions for the leaders or Pastors but for the whole congregation. The importance of prayer is indicated by Paul's language of priority; “*Therefore I exhort first of all*” (let's put this at the top of the community to do list). Paul charged Timothy to wage war (1:18). Now Timothy is charged to pray. We pray because we must pray. Supplications are fervent requests and petitions; prayers (what we wish or earnestly desire); intercessions (prayer as a meeting or rendezvous with God). Prayer is vital to the saint but also to the entire church. Warren Wiersbe writes; “The Holy Spirit works in the church through prayer and the Word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 3:20-21). Wiersbe goes on and says that the church that prays will possess power for lasting impact and the saints in the book of Acts turned to prayer in crisis and persecution in order to allow God to overcome enemies. No wonder Paul exhorts us to pray.

The Church's prayers included supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving *for all men*.

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Supplications are fervent requests to God for needs; prayers are petitions that include worship and adoration; intercessions involve requests on behalf of others and thanksgivings are expressions of appreciation or joy over what God has done in the lives of the saints and the Church as a whole.

Paul's instructions concerning the giving of thanks is most interesting. It translates the Greek word *eucharistias*. It is similar to the English word 'eucharist'—a word familiar to those who may have been raised in a more liturgical church. In the early church thanksgiving was that outburst of joy over the elements in the Lord's Supper. Some people have no problem coming up with a list of people to pray for and things to pray for—but may be negligent in expressions of thanksgiving. All men need our prayers. Including the false teachers and those separated from our fellowship for any number of reasons (see 1:19-20).

The Nature Of Prayer (v.2a)

2 for kings and all who are in authority. . .

What happens when we pray for leaders in government? We are provided a measure of protection for the church from wicked men. Is that selfish? Perhaps. When Paul wrote these words Nero was Emperor of Rome (AD 54-68). Paul no doubt prayed for the man who would one day take his head. In Corinth when Paul wrote his masterpiece of theology—the letter to the Romans—he reminded the Christians “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

Persecution had already begun. And cruel persecutions would erupt with ever increasing ferocity. Christians have always faced challenges from cultures and governments with various degrees of tolerance and hostility. We are to pray for our leaders in crisis and in calm.

Paul does not give an exhaustive list of what we pray—but rather that we pray. Clearly the Bible teaches that God allows some to rule and others not to rule (see also Psalm 2). Paul's exhortation is broad enough to allow prayers to suit the situation.

Prayer is a spiritual weapon that has both offensive and defensive capabilities.

Even in nations where there is great tolerance and great freedom leaders need prayer. Decisions by leaders right now are strengthening freedom or weakening freedom. Remember Government exists to promote righteousness and impede wickedness. Constant prayer allows us to continue our work for Christ.

The Aims Of Prayer (vv.2b-7)

2b. . .that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

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Paul lists an unexpected outcome of prayer. Peace for the Saint. Peace for the Church. But also peace in society. Paul's outcome was never meant to mean quiet isolation from the cares or concerns of this world. It is just the opposite. The church is not called to assimilate this world's values; or to isolate itself from this world's tragedies but offer God honoring Christ loving engagement. We are continue the work of spreading the gospel in all godliness and reverence. Godliness here is not reverence and religious devotion simply in our home or in our church but service in this world. Reverence here carries the idea of dignity—but this is dignity with a purpose and earnestness dare I say enthusiasm. Godliness and reverence are descriptor words; not restricted to private piety or personal unseen devotion. Paul's exhortation to prayer leads to *“a public faith consistent with God's purpose to achieve the salvation of persons and bring them to a knowledge of the truth” (2:4 NIV)(see Life Application Bible Commentary; 1&2 Timothy/ Titus p.38).*

Will prayer quench the fires of persecution or soothe the sting of a hostile culture? Not always. But sometimes there will be moments of respite and relief. Prayer is our weapon against Satan. With prayer we can continue our work of preaching the gospel and discipling the saints and offering compassion and mercy to a suffering world with all godliness and reverence (or dignity).

The word *godliness* means those things that reflect the character and will of God—that leads to godly conduct. Dignity or reverence includes the ideas of a serious purpose coupled with a keen sense of moral urgency. **Here the context is not simply the private individual believer but the over-all character of the church.** Think about what Paul proposes to Timothy. The dangers are not simply inside the church but also outside the church. The Church should be a place of peace (not simply the absence of conflict); a place of love and support. We do not simply preach or teach the Bible; we do not simply confront error—but we also promote prayer—both public and private; prayers that are consistent with the God's goals and the mission of the Church; and of course God's goals must include the salvation of people so that they will come to the knowledge of the truth (v.4).

Paul now preaches a mini sermon. Preachers are fond of three “p’s “ and a promise. Here I see four “M’s” with a reminder about some of the conditions necessary for effective prayer (v.8).

Mission	God Wants Everyone Saved (vv.3-4)
Mediator	Jesus stands between God and His people (v.5)
Method	Salvation comes from the sacrifice of Jesus (v.6)
Messenger	Paul has been chosen by God to serve as a missionary (v.7).

The Mission

3For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior;

God is our Savior. For some politics are our Savior. But politics have never been able to give sight to the blind or healing to the captive. God is our Savior. Not the Republican Party. Not the

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Democratic Party. Not the government. Not the economy. Not our jobs or our children. Remember the immediate context. Paul has warned about false teaching and false teachers. We pray for their salvation. We pray for opportunities to bring the truth and restore people to fellowship. Some of the false teachers have been turned over to Satan to learn the much needed lessons of *how not to blaspheme (1:20)*. How can we keep the door open to repentance for those who have lost their way? We pray. How do we create an atmosphere where the gospel can be both preached and lived? We pray. What do we do with those who question the faith or abandon the faith? We pray. What do we do with those who ignore the faith or live outside the faith? We pray.

Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

This is precisely where some people's thinking goes astray. They have a false view of God and Jesus and salvation. God loves every person you will meet today. Our prayers include salvation for the lost. Paul's instructions to pray for everyone is based on his conviction that salvation is available to everyone! Paul reminds Timothy that prayer is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior—prayer pleases God and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. What else? God's mission—purpose—and so our mission and purpose is to cooperate with God and His Holy Spirit to present Christ and the gospel as God's plan to save people.

Does God really desire all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth? The answer is an emphatic yes. Jesus died for all human beings. Peter writes (2 Peter 3:9) "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*"

Both Peter and Paul use all inclusive language. God is patient. The Holy Spirit directs us to pray for the unbeliever and intercede for the lost.

In the early church wicked and false teachers brought damnable heresies into the Church. One of the first was the wicked and false teaching popularized by Jews who said that Gentiles must become Jews in order to be true Christians or a part of the covenant community. Some Jews held tightly to the belief that Gentiles were created as fuel to stoke the fires of hell. Some Jews believed you were saved or damned for all eternity—simply because you were saved or damned for all eternity. You were saved or damned by the mere accident of birth. This wicked and perverse notion caused some Jews not to associate with Gentiles. The second perversion included the gnostic notion that salvation was available to only the spiritually elite. The spiritual elite were defined by the gnostic teachers as those who had special knowledge or teaching known only to the gnostic leaders. In short the gnostic teachers believed the basic human problem was ignorance and with the right information you could experience God and salvation. Clearly God's desire for all men to be saved does not mean that all will be saved. But it is not so clear to the universalist. How do we know that universalism is false? The Bible repeatedly teaches and affirms the notion that some people will hear the gospel and accept Christ and others

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will hear the gospel and reject Christ (see Matthew 25:31-46; John 12:44-50; Hebrews 10:26-29).

The Lord's desire for all to be saved is reflected in the fact that salvation is available to all. The sacrifice of Jesus is available for all people. The sacrifice of Jesus is not restricted to a race of people or a specific gender or the spiritually elite (think Watchtower and Tract Society teaching of the 144,000 or the LDS teaching concerning those who attain to the Celestial Kingdom). Jesus is a provision for all people; Jew and Gentile; Slave and free; male and female—all human beings. 1 Timothy 4:10 shows that the guarantee of salvation is for all who **receive (not reject) salvation**. Here the *knowledge of the truth* means the gospel message. Faith in Christ. The knowledge of the truth is not simply directed to Jews or the spiritually elite. God loves the whole world. God provides salvation for all. The offer is to all who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The offer is to all who see themselves as sinners in need of a Savior. No one is beyond God's mercy or beyond God's grace.

God desires both salvation and understanding of the truth. Faith is not simply knowing the truth but believing the truth and trusting the truth. Salvation is not simply knowledge of the Savior but loving the Savior and serving the Savior. We do not love and serve the Savior to be saved but rather we are saved by the Savior and therefore love and serve Him.

The Mediator (v.5)

5For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

The knowledge of the truth is the gospel. And now Paul like a Russian nesting doll pulls three more necessary things that are foundational for the New Testament believer.

One God

Paul must have prayed the *Shema* thousands of times over the course of his life. Hear O Israel the Lord thy God is One. The God of the Bible stands in stark contrast to the pantheon of pagan idolatry; the mystical dualism of Zoroastrianism or the radical monism of Hinduism.

One Mediator

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6 NKJV). The One God chose Jesus to be the singular Savior. Muslims insist there is One God and Muhammad is His prophet. The Jews insist there is One God and Moses served as mediator. Some Jews in Ephesus may have regarded angels or some other supernatural creature could serve as an adequate mediator between God and men. Romans knew that Caesar claimed the title Pontifex Maximus (the ultimate bridge between this world and the next world).

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Paul knew that only Jesus Christ could properly serve as mediator between God and men. We have mediator so there is hope. God wants to reach out to all human beings. Jesus as man reached out to all human beings. Jesus is the Second Adam, the prototype of the new creature and we are a new creation in Christ. Jesus is God. He acquires a second nature a human nature. Jesus retains complete divinity and complete humanity.

6who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

One Ransom

Paul repeats one Jesus said of Himself; “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 NKJV; see also Matthew 20:28).

The pagan people of Ephesus and the Roman Empire would have grown up in a world where people worshipped multiple gods and strong family loyalties to these gods. Ephesus was the center of the cult of Diana. Craig Kenner in the IVP Bible Background Commentary writes;

“The Romans permitted subject peoples to worship their own gods, but they had to show their loyalty to Rome by also worshipping the goddess Roma and the spirit of the emperor. Because Jewish people worshipped one God to the exclusion of all others, Rome allowed them to pray and sacrifice for the emperor’s health without praying and sacrificing to him. Prayers were offered regularly in the synagogues, showing the loyalty of these Jewish institutions to the Roman state” (see p. 610).

Paul uses the metaphor of ransom to describe the sacrifice of Jesus. God is holy, sinless, perfect. Human beings are by nature and choice sinners, lost, estranged from God. Sin separates us from God. Jews offered sacrifices—blood to cover sin, Sacrifice could cover but never cleanse sin. In due time Jesus came and in due time died for sin. God sent His Son as ransom for sin. Ransom is a payment paid—we are purchased out of the market place of sin. We are bought with blood. What does Paul mean *in due time (v.6)*? The phrase literally reads; “*the testimony in his own times.*” Scholars are puzzled. Some have suggested it means the future preaching and teaching of Paul—and the preaching and teaching of Christ’s followers. Some suggest it is the whole chain of witness from the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament saints and reflect the timing of God in that process. If that’s the case—then it means the sum and substance of witness that God has provided in the past and continues to provide in the present and future.

God cannot and will not overlook our sin. We are not allowed to keep our sin or retain our sin our excuse our sin. The penalty for sin must be paid. Jesus pays the penalty. This payment allows access to God (we can pray!). We have forgiveness by God and fellowship with God. The word translated ransom (*antilutron*) was used by the Greeks to describe the price paid to redeem a slave or free a prisoner of war. It illustrates that Jesus exchanged His life for ours. Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all.

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The Messenger (v.7)

7for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and in truth.

Paul invites people to hear the truth, believe the truth and receive the truth. We understand that some will not embrace the gospel. The Christian is often charged with intolerance and disrespect. If we believe there is One God there are not many gods. If there is One Mediator there are not many mediators. If God gave Christ as ransom to satisfy our debt then our debt cannot be paid by someone else. Paul describes as appointed by Jesus as both herald (preacher) and apostle (one who is sent). In the ancient world the herald was tasked with speaking the message given by the king or ruler or dignitary. The preacher was an ambassador with a specific commission and message. Paul describes himself as being a true teacher to the Gentiles.

The Conditions Of Prayer (v.8)

8I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting:

In this verse Paul lays out (surprise!) three conditions for public praying in the local church.

Holy Hands

Without Wrath

No Doubting

Does public prayer require the lifting of hands? Note what Paul says; *lifting up holy hands*. What did that mean to Timothy and the churches in Ephesus? Holy hands meant clean and holy lives. Public prayer in the church calls the saints who leading prayer to live holy lives and to pray. Without wrath means—absent anger—which means having love in your hearts. And without doubt probably means with faith. When Paul says therefore that the men pray—does that mean no women? I don't think so. But we must be willing to consider that men are take the public lead in this matter of prayer. Both Jews and early Christians lifted hands to heaven to represent expectation and the longing for God's blessing. Open hands were a sign of humility and the fact that we are holding on to nothing! We pray in humility absent anger or argument. Divisions hinder prayer. The presence of anger can be a sign of hypocrisy in the heart. Anger fueled by quarrels and debates. We can say the right words in public but hold the wrong attitude in private. This is a recipe for disaster. No doubting. Prayer is weakness leaning on the divine strength.

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Conclusion

Oswald Chambers famously wrote; “Jesus Christ carries on intercession for us in heaven; the Holy Ghost carries on intercession in us on earth; and we the saints have to carry on intercession for all men.” And so we pray. We pray because we have relationship with the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. We pray in faith. We pray and worship. We pray in expectation. We pray in submission. We pray and offer petition, confession. We pray in compassion. We pray with dependence. We pray with gratitude.