

### **Pray - Prayer - Praying**

The main point of the text is the command to pray and Paul mentions three things about this command to pray that we should listen to very carefully. First, he mentions its principal importance, "**First of all, I urge** you to pray!" Second, he mentions the span of its range, "Pray for **all people, especially kings and all in high positions.**" Third, he mentions the content of these prayers. Prayers are to include thanksgiving and the request that our lives be **a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way** to the end that God **desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

Let's pray that God would cause His Word to sink into our hearts and minds this morning. Father, grant, that no one here today will have a hard heart. Take out of us the heart of stone and put in us the tender, sensitive heart of flesh. Cause us to hear and to love your instruction and to walk in it. Grant us to sense the utmost importance of prayer for others and help us have hearts big enough to embrace the tremendous scope of prayer and hearts pure enough to pray the right things with the right motivation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **Pray**

First, let's focus on the utmost importance of God's command to pray for others. Why Paul writes this is of first importance becomes clear when we look at the word "then" or "therefore" in verse 1, "**First of all, then (or therefore), I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.**" The

word “then” alerts us to the fact that Paul's command to pray for all people is related to something he had just said. In the preceding verses 18 to 20 of chapter 1, Paul charged Timothy to “wage the good warfare,<sup>19</sup> holding *to your faith and a good conscience.*” Paul warns Timothy that, if you reject a good conscience, you may make shipwreck of your faith, like Hymenaeus (*hoo·men·ah·yos*) and Alexander did. A good conscience is a conscience that does not condemn you for the things you do right. Therefore, what Paul is saying is that in order for your ship of faith to stay afloat, you need to see to it that you don't do the things your conscience condemns and do the things your conscience demands.

I think we all understand this connection between a clear conscience and a vibrant faith if we think about our own experience. At least my experience confirms it. If I fall into a habit that my conscience condemns, what eventually happens is that my conscience begins to say, "Bill, all your talk about trusting Christ is hot air, because if you really trusted Christ, you would not go on with this behavior or that attitude." So a bad conscience begins to drill its little holes into the belly of the ship of faith until one of two things happen. Either we confirm the genuineness of our faith by changing our ways and plugging up the holes of a bad conscience, or we show that our faith never was seaworthy and sink into unbelief and blasphemy like Hymenaeus (*hoo·men·ah·yos*) and Alexander. Paul's charge to Timothy to hold on to faith by keeping a good conscience is tremendously important. Any help Paul gives Timothy and us on how to keep a good conscience should be received with open arms.

This is what I think Paul is saying in verse 1 of chapter 2. Since you must keep a good conscience in order not to make shipwreck of your faith, therefore I urge you first of all to pray for all people. In order to see why failing to pray for people will lead to a

bad conscience and jeopardize our faith we have to ask, "What is it that will prick a Christian's conscience in his relationships to other people?" The answer to that question is clear from the whole breathe of the Bible. All of God's instruction are summed up in Jesus' words, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31) Therefore, anything we do to people that is unloving will prick our conscience and threaten our faith. With that as a foundation we can start to see why prayer for other people is at the top of Paul's list of things we must do in order to keep a clear conscience.

## Prayer

I observed three reasons why prayer for other people is of first importance in keeping a clear conscience and this is consistent with Jesus' teaching that love is our greatest duty. First, prayer taps into the power of God on behalf of others. We could try to help others, even presidents and congressmen and governors and mayors and police chiefs, without praying for them. When one views this effort from a very limited perspective, we might do some good. But the little good that we could do by our little power is not worthy compared with the great good God can do for people with unlimited power. So if we want the best for people, if we really love them, of first importance, will be prayers on their behalf. **The first thing you do for a person, if you love them, is to ask God to work within their hearts for their good.** Of course, God's answer to your prayer will almost always include your work of love, but it will also include much more than what you alone could accomplish. Your power is greatly limited; God's power is limitless!

A second reason prayer is of first importance in keeping a clear conscience is that it is the easiest step of love. You don't even have to get out of bed to pray for kings and all those in high positions. It requires no financial sacrifice and no great physical exertion. Of all the forms love for others, prayer is the easiest. Isn't it true that if you are unwilling to do something easy for the good of another, then it is very unlikely that you will be willing to do something hard for them? So it makes sense that Paul, in urging us to keep our consciences clear first of all he urges us to do the easiest act of love and that is to pray for people.

The third reason prayer is of first importance in keeping our consciences clear is that it reaches farther in its effects than anything else we can do. Before the satellites were orbiting the earth we could broadcast a TV program live across the country but not around the world. Now it is easy to reach the other side of the world with a live broadcast by sending our signal out into space and bouncing it off a satellite.

That is the way it is with prayer. Without it we can influence a few things nearby, and if we wait long enough, our influence may spread. However, God's influence is everywhere and immediate, so if we send our signals or our prayers to Him, we can reach around the world in an instant. If a broadcaster wants to get a message to the most people possible in the quickest amount of time, he will send it first away from the people to a satellite. **If a Christian wants to do the most good possible for the most people, in the shortest time, he will turn first to God whose influence reaches, without interruption, to every molecule and every mind in the universe.**

So, if we do not want to make a shipwreck of your faith, we must keep a good conscience. Therefore, I urge you first of all to fulfill the love command by praying for all people because prayer taps into the power of God on other people's behalf.

Prayer is the first and easiest step of love and prayer reaches farther in its good effects than anything else we can do.

## Praying

This brings us to our second major point, namely, the scope of Paul's command to pray. Reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, chapter 2, verse 1, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions.” Have you ever been tempted to pray like this? "God, bless everybody in the best way possible. To You be the glory. Amen." That covers everything, right? A text like this, which commands us to pray for **all** people, might tempt us to pray in sweeping generalizations like that, especially since one cannot begin to name all people. However, God has not taught us to pray like that and we can be sure Jesus could not have spent whole nights in prayer if that is how He prayed. Proper pray takes time.

It is a great blessing if each day we receive our daily bread. It is a blessing if our trespasses are forgiven. It is a blessing if we are not led into temptation but delivered from evil. But Jesus does not teach us to say, "Bless everyone for all their needs, Lord." He teaches us to say, Our Father ... “Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:11-13) We have not been taught to pray in broad sweeping generalities, like, "God bless the missionaries." We have been taught to pray about particular kinds of problems. When Paul needed help, he asked it for himself in particular. Therefore, I do not think the command of 1 Timothy 2 will be satisfied by praying, "God bless all men everywhere. Amen."

If we read Paul with understanding, what he seems, to me, to be saying is this, "Timothy, push out the boundaries of your concern. Do not let your prayers be limited to any one group of people or kind of people. Enlarge the boundary of your love. Do not be limited in the scope of your prayers. **Let your prayers embrace all kinds of people; high and low, white and black, democrats and republicans, world leaders and Iranian Ayatollahs. Enlarge your heart until it embraces the world.** Pray with a heart of flesh before your most holy God until you can hate the bigotry and racism of the Ku Klux Klan and the neo-Nazis, but can pray with yearning love in your heart for these same men and women. Pray that those of hate come to know Christ as their Savior and have hearts and souls that love.

Is not Paul's point the same as Jesus', **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."** (Matthew 5:43-45) To put it another way, there is no category of people of whom it can be said, "You should not pray for them." Here is a message for this hour, for this day, for you and me! This decade is on the way to becoming the decade of hate, how easy it is for us aliens and exiles on this earth to get sucked into one group and begin to hate other groups. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24 beginning in verse 11, **"Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But the one who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."** We understand most people's love will grow cold because they are more focused on the world instead of Christ.

May it **not** be said of Canyon Bible Church that we have contributed to the destruction of the world through hate because of our spiritually cold souls. But let it be said, "Look how they love each other! Look how they do good to those who hate them and bless those who curse them and pray for those who abuse them. As Jesus instructed, **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”** (Luke 6:27-28) When we live as Christ tells us to, people will see that there is a God of grace in heaven and that He has on earth a peculiar people who are not conformed to this age or this decade of our society’s growing hate.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

After Paul has stressed that we pray for all men, he singles out **“kings and all in high positions”** to make sure that we include them. Why? It is clear from verses 4–7 that what Paul wants to emphasize is that nobody is to be excluded from our good will, for nobody is beyond the grace of God. Why then, do kings and those in high positions afford special mention? I can think of at least two reasons.

The first is these people had characteristics that made it especially difficult for the early Christians, and for us today, to pray for them. For example, they were so distant or remote, if not in actual miles, then at least in accessibility. It is hard to pray earnestly for someone you don't know. Yet, this difficulty must be overcome, Paul says, you must pray for emperors like Nero, governors like Pilate, kings like Herod, presidents like Obama. They may seem remote and inaccessible, but remember, they are not remote and inaccessible to God. By prayer you can get as close to Obama and other leaders as one of their intimate advisers.

Another characteristic that makes rulers hard to pray for is that they are often godless people, insensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This was almost universally true in Paul's day and is certainly common in our day. In most countries around the world today is this not true? Even in our own country I am not automatically enthused when a politician claims to have had a religious experience. I ask, what kind of experience? Is it true and will it last? **It does not matter where or when we have lived, to obey God's command to pray for all in high positions will involve us in praying for many people who are indifferent or hostile to our faith.**

But this should not cause us to hesitate one moment to pray for them. First, God may save them and bring them to the knowledge of His truth. Second, God uses rulers to accomplish His purposes whether they believe in Him or not. When God wanted to punish His rebellious people, Israel, He turned the king of Assyria into the rod of His anger. Isaiah wrote, “**Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury!**” <sup>6</sup> **Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people (of Israel) of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.”** (Isaiah 10:5-6) The King of Assyria did not know he was doing as God directed because he did not believe in the one and only God.

Remember, the king who thought himself as a god, Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, he said to himself, “**Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?**” (Daniel 4:30) The result of his arrogance was that God took away his reason and made him eat grass for seven years like the cattle of the fields until he learned his lesson.

The dominion of the Most High is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures



from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing and God does according to His will and the host of heaven and the believing inhabitants of the earth worship Him alone and both believers and unbelievers serve Him.

No king, no president, no premier, no Ayatollah can stay the hand of the Lord when He has purposed to do a thing. **God's plan is sure and no man can change it, whether that man believes in God or not.** “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.” (Proverbs 21:1) Proverbs is a collection of writings concerning wisdom and the writer wrote truth that we recognize because God has brought our souls to life, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man (*including Kings and rulers*), but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.” (Proverbs 19:21) Therefore, we have strong encouragement to pray for kings and for all in high positions, whether they are believers or not, because our God reigns and none can stay His hand!

One implication of what I have just said is that our prayers for those in high positions go beyond a prayer for their conversion. We most certainly pray for their conversion as a witness of the power of God. However, we pray beyond this, we pray for God’s will be done through them and if we do not pray for them, understand that we are disobeying our Lord Jesus. We pray for unbelieving rulers because we know God is able to do His good purposes even through rulers who remain unrepentant.

The second reason I think Paul stressed that we must pray for kings and all in high positions is because through them God is able to do so much good for others, whether the kings know it or not, are willing or not. Paul's thought seems to be

something like this, "If you want your prayers to do the most good for the greatest number of people, be sure to include those persons whose decisions create the conditions in which the purposes of the gospel prosper." It is important to pray for leaders because the conditions they create either advance or impede the spread of the gospel. While Nero imprisoned Paul and had him executed, the gospel was spreading like wildfire through the empire.

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving**

Praying for leaders to carry out the will of God affects the content of our prayers. Also, according to verse 1 our prayers must include thanksgivings. When Paul wrote this, he had been beaten and arrested and most likely was in-between his first and second imprisonment in Rome. Therefore, Paul is not naïve when he says, "I urge that . . . thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all in high positions." He sees things in a much larger perspective than merely in relation to his own life or even his own ministry. The same emperor who executed Paul maintained the peace in the provinces where the gospel spread like wildfire. We may not understand what God is doing. However, our prayers for kings should be seasoned with thanksgiving.

### **Prayers for Peaceful Life**

The main thing Paul mentions concerning the content of our prayer for kings and those in high positions is "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." (v. 2) Taken by itself that request might seem to fly right in the face of everything we've said so far. Is it true that all we are really after in praying for our leaders is peace and tranquility? Some professing Christians seem to

think so! But that would be a terrible misunderstanding of God's Word. Verses 3 and 4 sharpen the focus of what Paul is really after. **Why pray that rulers will keep the peace? Because “it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** (1Timothy 2:3-4) God approves of our prayers for peace and tranquility because He approves of the advancement of the gospel. Peace is not the main thing; salvation is the main thing. Tranquility is not the goal; the knowledge of the truth of God, that is the goal.

May we never forget, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we are also aliens and exiles in this land. We are not at home in America or Russia or Israel or anywhere in this world. We do not pray simply for the prosperity of any land. We pray for magnificent advancement of the saving purposes of God in every land. We should be praying and I am now praying, "Almighty God, ruler of heaven and earth, grant to our president and presidential candidates and the thousands of other people in high positions that the decisions they make will create the conditions in which the good news of Jesus Christ will bear the most fruit for the salvation of people and for Your great glory. Amen."

Lets take a few minutes to do just this – pull your chairs around and pray in small groups for leaders. Pray that God will use them to create an environment for the Gospel of Christ to advance and for many to come to saving faith. Brother Leland will call us back to close our time in worship through song.