



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 1:18-20 First Things First...Prayer

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter two, verses one through seven. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 991...1st Timothy 2:1-7.

This is what God's Word says:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:1**...First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷ 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.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

I want to begin our time this morning with a quote...a quote from that most august and enlightened of all American theologians...Kesuke Myagi...better known to most of us as Mr. Myagi...you know Mr. Myagi from the movie, the *Karate Kid*...and I am not talking about Jackie Chan. I am talking about the real Mr. Myagi, Pat Morita.

There is a scene in the movie where Mr. Myagi is off sort of doing his own thing as Daniel-san is learning to control his balance and weight distribution by bracing himself in the surf against the incoming waves of the Pacific Ocean. Daniel looks down the beach and sees Mr. Myagi balanced on a piling doing kicks in the air. Later on, we learn that the kick Mr. Myagi is doing is something called the Crane Technique.

After Daniel-san finishes his workout, he asks Mr. Myagi about what he was doing and when he finds out what the technique is called...that it has a name...he asks Mr. Myagi if he will teach him the Crane Technique. Mr. Myagi looks at Daniel sympathetically and then responds with one of my very favorite lines from the movie, **“First learn stand, then learn fly. Nature rule, Daniel-san, not mine.”**¹

Now I have to apologize for the dreadful accent but I do not apologize for using the illustration because in many ways it gets exactly to the point that the Apostle Paul is making to his young protégé Timothy here is 1st Timothy 2:1-7 and that is that in his fight against these false teachers in Ephesus he is to put first things first. Look at 1st Timothy 2:1-2 with me.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:1**...First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

The thing that ought to jump off the page for you, I think, is the phrase **“first of all, then.”** You’ll remember that Paul started off his letter to Timothy by charging him to take up the fight against the false teachers that plagued Ephesus. You’ll remember he did that back in 1st Timothy 1:3.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 1:3**...As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

And then Paul went off into a bit of a digression in which he talked both about what these false teachers were up to and how he himself had remained faithful to the ministry to which he had been called in spite of the fact that he had originally started off as a persecutor of the church and a blasphemer.

And then in 1st Timothy 1:18 Paul returns to his main point to Timothy that Timothy is to take on the false teachers in Ephesus. Look at verse 18 with me.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 1:18**...This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience.

You can see what I mean. He is saying something like this, **“Yes, now let’s see where was I? Oh yes, those dreadful false teachers in Ephesus. I want you to take them on just as the prophecies about you said you would be able to do and I want you to fight the good warfare both with your doctrine and with the way you live.”**

And then we come to 1st Timothy 2:1 and it says this:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:1**...First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Now it seems to me that Paul’s point when he says **“First of all, then, I urge...”** is that he is telling Timothy straight out just how to begin going about the business of taking on those false teachers there in Ephesus, and I have to admit I am a bit surprised that Paul tells Timothy to start his defense of the faith with prayer.

But that is clearly what the text says.

Now the word **“first”** that is used may either mean **“first in terms of sequence”** as in the **“first batter in their lineup”**² or it can mean first in terms of importance³ as in **“their most dangerous hitter.”** It is used both ways in the New Testament.⁴

I think here in 1st Timothy, perhaps both things are implied. That is, I think prayer is where Timothy should start in his battle with the false teachers at Ephesus and it is essential that he do so because of just how important prayer really is. I say that because of the repetition of the word “**urge**.” It is the same word used in chapter one (**urged**) and is picked back up here to stress the importance of Paul’s command to Timothy.

Now having commanded Timothy and the church at Ephesus to pray Paul identifies the scope or range of the prayers they are to pray. Paul makes his point clear by identifying two different categories of people for whom he wants Timothy to pray. Those two groups are: *all* people (the end of verse one), and kings and *all* those who are in high positions (end of verse two).

And then Paul explains to Timothy and the Ephesians that he wants them to pray for these two groups of people by using four different kinds of prayers. That is, he uses four different words: *supplications*, *prayers*, *intercessions*, and *thanksgivings* to describe the kinds of prayers he wants them to use.

Now I have to agree with Calvin here concerning the four different words that Paul uses to describe the kinds of prayers Timothy and the Ephesians are to pray. Calvin writes this:

What is the difference between three out of the four kinds which Paul enumerates, I own...freely admit...that I do not thoroughly understand.⁵

Still, I think the basic idea is clear enough. We are to pray generally, and to make requests on the behalf of all kinds of people. We are to thank God for blessing

them and directing their steps, and we are directed to ask for specific things on their behalf, and even, perhaps, to intercede on their behalf when they fall into sin and judgment. Philip Ryken puts it like this, **“The real point is that all kinds of prayer are to be offered for all kinds of people.”**⁶

Now I will come back to this point later on but I do want to say that I think Ryken is exactly right in saying that Paul’s point is that we should pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people. I do not think that Paul’s point is that we should pray for every single person on earth at least not by name. I think the logic of the way Paul has constructed his argument is that he is not necessarily thinking of each individual on earth as much as he is thinking about various people groups...all kinds of people. I get that both from the difficulty of trying to pray for each individual person on earth and from the way he constructs his argument.

He says he wants Timothy to pray for all people and then he turns right around and gives a sub-category of that particular group. And when he winds up doing that, it seems to me, that he is saying something like this, **“I want you to pray for all people...all kinds of people...and in case you’re wondering what I mean by that I mean to pray for kings and rulers and the like.”**

Now I am not implying that there would be anything wrong with praying for all people...for every single person on earth. In fact, I think it would be a noble task and my own prayer is that someday the Christian Church will advance to the place where we have adequate numbers of Christians to do just that...where churches can divide up the roles of every man, woman, boy and girl on the planet and pray for the salvation of their souls and for their ongoing

sanctification...but until that day comes I think we can do...and indeed must do more than we are doing now in praying for all kinds of people on the earth.

We must pray for those in our own church...for their health and well-being, for their families, for their jobs, for their ongoing sanctification, for their testimony; we should also pray for those in our own particular families...for their salvation, for their Christian walk and testimony, for their willingness to receive the truth of the gospel. But surely that is not enough. No, Paul tells Timothy...urges Timothy to pray for all people, all sorts of people and to pray specifically for kings and those in leadership.

Now the world in which Paul and Timothy lived was not a world with godly Christian leaders. It was a world under the iron thumb of the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor. Some of them were capable enough as leaders and some were vile human toads. At the time Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the emperor in power was Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus...better known to us simply as Nero. And the very best thing a person can say about Nero is that he was not quite the insane pig his uncle Caligula was, and yet Paul says that Timothy and the Ephesians were to pray for him and for all those like him who were in elevated positions of power.

That means at the very least that we are to pray for governmental leaders whether they are Christians or not. The original Book of Common Prayer was quite wrong, I think, originally in insisting that Christian prayers be limited to Christian kings and leaders. We are to pray for all kinds of leaders.

Now why would Paul command Timothy and the Ephesians to do that?

He gives us a number of reasons right in the text, and I want to go through them. Still, before I do I think I should tell you that there may be one reason that is implicit in the text but not actually stated. I think it is possible that Paul may have commanded Timothy and the Ephesians to pray for all kinds of people and all kinds of governmental leaders and magistrates simply because the kind of false teachers that were in Ephesus were much more focused on themselves and their own exaltation than they were on the advance of the gospel into the world around them. That is, I suspect that they were elitist types that only ever prayed for the advance of their own personal agendas and position.⁷

Still beyond that Paul is quite explicit as to the reasons he gives for them to pray. Let's look at the reasons that Paul does give starting at the end of verse two.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:2**...that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Now I do not for a moment think that Paul is praying that Christians should pray for governmental leaders and all kinds of other people simply in order they might live comfortable lives...you know, lives without any anguish or difficulty. That doesn't feel like Paul at all.

I think rather this idea of leading peaceful, quiet lives that are godly and dignified in every way has rather to do with the idea of world mission and evangelism. I think his point is that the gospel is best spread in a world where there is order and sanity. It is better advanced in a world devoid of chaos, and praying for all kinds of people and all kinds of governmental leaders is one way to secure a peaceful platform in which to advance the gospel. That is, I think his

point is that the gospel will be more readily communicated in a world that is marked by peace.

Listen to Philip Ryken:

The reason Paul insisted on good deportment is that it is essential to the witness of the church. Christians who do not pray for their political leaders tend to disturb the peace. They are cynical about their political opponents and rejoice when they fall into disgrace. Since cynicism about the government is so prevalent in the evangelical church today, we may well conclude that Christians are not always diligent in prayer for people in authority. For as John Chrysostom rightly claimed, "**no one can feel hatred towards those for whom he prays.**" Prayer replaces hostility with compassion.⁸

But Paul doesn't leave it at that. To the idea that we are to pray for them in order to promote general peace and order he adds the idea that we are to pray for them because God smiles upon the act and because God desire that all men be saved.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:3**...This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,
⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

You can see then that prayer for all kinds of people and for all kinds of governmental leaders and kings and the like is not simply for the purpose of providing Christians pleasant lives. It may provide that sort of thing, and then again it might not. Paul's point is then rather that praying for all people and for all those in authority will help create a measure of stability and peace and something else far greater and that is that it pleases God to see his people engaged in prayer on behalf of others. Our great compassionate God delights in the compassionate prayer of his own people, and the reason that he delights in

the compassion prayer of his own people is because he himself desires the salvation of all kinds of people. I take that as the principal point of verse four.

And you know I find that extremely convicting. I find it convicting because in my own teaching ministry I have inadvertently reduced the amount of time given over to public prayer in order to have more time for the exposition of the text itself. And yet, I fear reading through Paul's epistle to Timothy here that I may have the cart before the horse. Of course, Paul is going to tell Timothy later on to preach the Word...he is going to tell him to do that...to commit himself to do that in the throes of the terrible times that lay ahead, but here in the opening salvos of 1st Timothy Paul is focused like a laser beam on the necessity of making sure that Timothy takes first things first...and that first thing is his prayer for all kinds of people and for all kinds of kings and rulers.

I fear that by minimizing my own commitment to public prayer, I may be displaying more of the spirit of the false teachers than I like to admit. Anyway, I am recommitting myself to seek to find more opportunities to pray for all kinds of people and for governmental leaders and those in authority.

The idea is certainly not new with me. Our own PCA Directory of Worship says this:

Then, after singing a psalm, or hymn, it is proper that, before the sermon, there should be a full and comprehensive prayer:

- a. Adoring the glory and perfections of God...
- b. Giving thanks to Him for all His mercies of every kind...
- c. Making humble confession of sin...

- d. Making earnest supplication for the pardon of sin...
- e. Pleading from every principle warranted in Scripture;

and then our own PCA Directory of Worship adds that we should be...

f. Making intercession and petition for others, including the whole world for mankind; for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh; for the peace, purity, and extension of the Church of God; for ministers and missionaries in all lands; for all who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for the particular church then assembled, and all other churches associated in one body with it; for the sick, dying, and bereaved; for the poor and destitute; for strangers, for prisoners, the aged and the young; for those who travel; for the community in which the church is situated; for civil rulers, and for whatever else may seem to be necessary or suitable to the occasion.⁹

I think that is the idea behind what Paul is saying here to Timothy and the Ephesians, and I think I have been remiss in doing that.

I have been remiss in doing that even though it has been a standard practice in the Protestant Church for a long time. Listen to one of the prayers included in one of the earliest editions of the American Book of Common Prayer for the Episcopal Church.

Most Gracious God,

We humbly beseech thee, as for the peoples of these United States in general, so especially for their Senate and Representatives in Congress assembled; that thou would be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations, to the advancement of thy glory, the good of thy Church, the safety honor and welfare of thy people; that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavors, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations. These and all other necessities, for them, for us, and thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the Name and Mediation of Jesus Christ, our most blessed Lord and Savior. *Amen.*

Now that doesn't mean that we are never to be critical of our governmental leaders or that we should cease to call them to account. We live in a republic and that means that leaders are to represent us and to have our best interests at heart. But we desperately need to add to our criticism and account taking earnest, passionate, continuing prayer on their behalf and the reason we are to do that is because God has ordained government for the peaceful ordering of society in order that the gospel might have an environment in which to spread. God delights in our being compassionate as he is compassionate.

That means, I think, that bumper stickers like the one that has **"Psalm 109:8, a prayer for Obama,"** are of a completely different spirit than what Paul has in mind herein 1st Timothy. Psalm 109:8, in case you're wondering, says **"May his days be few; may another take his office."** Now I have to admit when I first read that I thought it was clever. But the more I reflect on it...the more I realize isn't really all that funny. Especially since the next verse reads, **"May his children be orphans, and his wife a widow."** Why would I ever want to pray something like that? The passage goes on the same way—asking God to pulverize this poor fellow—that he lose all his worldly goods, that his orphans be abandoned, that his father be remembered as a sinner, and finally, that **"his memory be cut off from the earth."**¹⁰

It is an imprecatory prayer...and ought to be prayed only rarely if ever. When it is prayed it should be prayed in a general way and not specifically applied to any one individual. It minimizes, I think, the terror of God's judgment and the horror of what it means to be eternally separated from God.

Now before I leave verse four and move on to verse five, I suppose I ought to say something about the other controversy contained in verse four. I'm sure you noticed it. If not let me read it again.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:3**...This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,
⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The controversy is, of course, found in the first part of verse four. And you can just imagine how the verse is often used against those that hold to the sovereignty of God in election and predestination.

And the way it is put usually goes something like, **“How can you argue for predestination when the Scripture says that God desires all people to be saved?”**

As a result of this verse and a couple of others that are like it a number of possible interpretations have been advanced over the years.

One interpretation is that in the end all people will ultimately be saved. It is called universalism. The idea goes something like this, **“Since God desires that all men be saved...ultimately they will be.”** Of course, that has always been and should always be a minority view simply because it fails to take the Scriptures seriously that speak to the reality of hell and warn people about it.

A second interpretation of 1st Timothy 2:4 is that God has two sorts of will: a preceptive will and a prescriptive will. I am sympathetic to this view. It argues that in a way God desires all men to be saved but he does not actually

prescriptively ordain it to happen. Such people like to cite Jesus' words to Jerusalem in Matthew 23.

^{ESV} **Matthew 23:37**..."O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

And you can see their point. The text says Jesus wanted Jerusalem to repent and receive him but it simply would not. They argue that Jesus desired Jerusalem to be saved preceptively but did not choose ultimately in the end to make it happen. The problem with the view, and I don't want to caricature it, is that it seems to make God unable to bring about that which he truly desires to see happen. I think, in a way, it makes God's will to be contingent upon the will of man. That is a problem for me. I tend to agree with Nebuchadnezzar who said:

^{ESV} **Daniel 4:34**...At the end of the days I lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; ³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

Now to be fair, people that hold this view don't think that it dishonors or minimizes God at all. Remember I am telling you my opinion of what it seems to do not theirs.

And then there is a third interpretation. It is the one I hold...and it argues basically that when the text uses the words "**all people**" or "**all men**" it is thinking in terms of class or group. That means that when it says "**all people**" it

means **“all kinds of people.”** Now I get that, as I said earlier, from verse one where Paul charges Timothy and the Ephesians to pray for all people. I simply take it to mean all kinds of people partly because of the impossibility of actually praying for every single person on earth and also partly because Paul then turns in verse two to subdivide **“all people”** into a smaller category...**“kings and rulers.”**

My point is that what he is doing in verse one and two he is also doing in verse four.

And though I won't actually get to the verse this morning I think Paul's reference to the Gentiles down in verse seven further supports the idea that he is referring here to kinds of people...as in Jews and Gentiles.

Now I think I am obligated to continue this section next week especially since I have three verses that I have left untouched. But I don't want to leave this morning having failed to drive home Paul's central point about the absolutely crucial nature of our engaging in prayer for all kinds of people and for all kinds of governmental leaders and authorities. I don't want us to miss Paul's **“big idea”** just because I want to argue for the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners.

I don't want to do that and I don't think Paul wanted Timothy and his readers to do it either. Look down to verse eight.

ESV 1 Timothy 2:8...I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

You see what I mean. He starts and ends this paragraph with an urgent call to prayer which is necessary to the proper mission of the church. That mean, of course, that he wants us to put first things first.

Now by way of application I think I would like to make a couple of suggestions with regard to you individually expanding the breadth of your prayers? Take a few minutes each morning and go to the webpage Operation World. It is a terrific resource. The folks that manage the site pick a different county in the world each day and give quite specific things to pray for. They do that by explaining the various unreached people groups in each country around the world and by relating the needs and struggles of the various people that live there...yesterday the website focused on Nigeria. I think using Operation World might be a terrific way for you to gain some insight and passion for world missions, and it might be helpful in teaching your children about the importance of world missions.

I think it would be beneficial too for you to simply get a church directory and pray for a couple of families each day. I know Mary Hamby does that and even emails those she is praying for to ask whether there might be something specific that she can pray for on their behalf. I always find her requests wonderfully encouraging.

Beyond that I think it would be a good idea for you to write down some specific governmental leaders and pray for them each week. I have included a list put together by the Billy Graham Association and you might want to use to list the names of those in your world for whom you can pray.

Finally, with the Middle East in the state it is in, we as Christians ought to take every opportunity to pray for all the different kinds of people there. I am thinking this morning particularly of those in Iraq...of the tens of thousands of Christian refugees that have exiled from their homes by ISIS. Let us pray that God will restore them to their land that might continue to be a Christian witness in a part of the world where that is exceedingly rare. Let us pray that President Obama and the members of congress and NATO and all our European allies will act and act decisively in such a way that stability and order will be returned to the area and that that stability will be of such a nature that missionaries will begin to have access to the region and that the gospel will grow there to such an extent that the peace of Christ will rule there in the hearts of all kinds of men.

Now I will continue next week starting with verse five and I will take all your questions but for now let us take to heart these words of Paul and put first things first by praying for all kinds of people and for those in authority over us that the gospel might go forth unencumbered.

Let's pray.

¹ <http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0007693/quotes>

² **ESV 2 Timothy 1:5**...I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt *first* in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

³ **ESV 2 Timothy 2:6**...It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

⁴ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 164-5.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1st Timothy*, vs. 1

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy (REC)*. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P& R Publishing, 2001), 59.

⁷ I.H. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*. (ICC) (London: T&T Clark, 1999), 420.

⁸ Ryken, 62.

⁹ BCO...Section 52.2f

¹⁰ <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/progressiverevival/2009/11/psalm-1098-a-prayer-for-obama.html#ixzz3DtWbQTth>