

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Introduction

In this passage of 1 Timothy we learn a great deal about prayer – the forms of prayer, for whom we pray, why, how etc. We could explore the whole Bible on these topics, but we shall just adhere to the context of 1 Timothy before us.

What forms of prayer are there?

Paul uses four different words for prayer in v.1. There is some overlap in meaning between the four, but they have slightly different emphases.

In supplication (δεησεις), the fundamental idea is a sense of need. Prayer often begins when we feel this sense of need. We recognise we cannot deal with life ourselves, for we are inadequate and weak. Supplication appeals to the helplessness of manhood.

A more general word Paul uses for prayers (προσευχας) acknowledges certain needs which only God can satisfy – strength and help which He alone can give, assurance which He alone can impart.

Intercessions (εντευξεις) are petitions made to one who is superior, like a governor or king. We have the priceless privilege of talking to the Lord of the Universe. The one to whom we pray is no less than King of Kings. It is impossible to ask too great a favour from a king.

*“Thou are coming to a king,
Large petitions with thee bring.”*

Thanksgiving (ευχαριστιας) is a neglected aspect of prayer. It was always prominent in Paul’s prayers, but so often absent in modern prayers. Too often our prayers are just shopping lists of requests, when there ought always to be a “Thank you” card.

So with these various terms we get a picture of the vast importance and many-sidedness of prayer, which we should constantly practice, as Christ did.

For whom are we to pray?

For all men (1 Timothy 2:1 A.V.). Nothing could be more comprehensive. It is a rebuke to our narrow interests and parochial outlook – our own family, church, denomination, and country. Our prayers ought to be for all men, high and low, good and bad, Christian and non-Christian. Notice how often the word “all” comes up in this passage: “for *all* men”, “God wants *all* men to be saved”, “who gave Himself a ransom for *all* men”.

Then particular emphasis is placed on kings and all in authority (v2). The extraordinary point is that the Emperor reigning at this point was Nero, that monster of cruelty, who initiated the first persecution against the Christians in 64AD. He lit up his gardens in Rome with burning bodies. Even in face of bitter persecution, the

Christian church never gave up praying for the Roman authorities. So whether our civil rulers are perverted or not, we ought to pray for them. They were ordained by God to keep outward order in a sin-burdened world. There are none in more spiritual danger, none who can wield such influence for good or ill on the nation, they bear tremendous responsibilities and problems, fierce temptations, knowing the disastrous effects on national life or international relationships their mistakes could make. Few who criticize rulers realize the enormous difficulties they face. Christians of all people should pray more for them and criticize them less.

As Buchanan, one time tutor to James I, lay on his deathbed, he sent a letter to his royal pupil saying that he was going “to a place to which few kings and princes ever came”.

For what are we to pray?

That we may lead peaceable and quiet lives, in all godliness and holiness (v2). That government may achieve conditions of peace and security enabling Christians and their fellow men to pursue their own interests and live their own lives in society. Prayers along these lines are good and acceptable to God. He is pleased with prayers which promote the righteousness which exalts a nation.

This is to be the first concern of prayers – not great wealth, prosperity, or conquests. Christian citizens may influence the course of national affairs – a fact we often forget except in times of national crisis.

Pray for a national life free from disturbances, which will facilitate the spread of Gospel. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of – restraining powers of darkness, strengthening good rulers. By the mighty ministry of intercession, we can all help to strengthen and sweeten the life of the nation. Prayer plays a crucial part in national life.

J.C.Ryle, in a sermon in Liverpool Cathedral in 1887, said “The how, why and wherefore of prayer is hidden from us. But it is God’s command. Great men of Scripture are examples of intercession. Are we wiser than they? I believe the last day alone will show how the prayers of God’s elect have effected the history of the world, and influenced the rise and fall of nations.” Mary Queen of Scots rightly said, “I fear the prayers of John Knox more than an army of 20,000 men.”

To whom are we to pray?

To God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3,4). “His will to save is as wide as his will to create.” Few passages in the New Testament stress more the universality of the Gospel. This passage is the charter of missionary work. If men are lost, it is not because God has so decreed, but because men have not come to Him to be saved. The will of man, not the purpose of God, is the cause of damnation. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. **How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing** (Luke 13:34).

This particular verse is the battleground between Calvinists and Armenians. Calvinists say it embraces men of all kinds and from all races. One Calvinist writer said, “This is applying grammatical gunpowder to the text, exploding it by way of expounding it. My love of consistency within doctrinal views is not great enough to allow me knowingly to alter a single text of Scripture. I would soon a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than with the Word of God.”

Through whom do we pray?

There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men (1 Timothy 2:5,6). The grounds of salvation and acceptance in prayer are the same – we are accepted and our prayers are accepted only because of the one mediator (or bridge-builder) who is qualified to secure our acceptance. Christ Jesus gave His life as a ransom price for all. Because of His sacrifice, men in bondage and under sentence of death can go free. He paid the exchange price to purchase the freedom of all. The Cross has infinite value. Christ could give nothing less than Himself. His sacrifice is sufficient for all, and saves all who will accept it.

This is the heart of the Gospel message which God had appointed Paul to spread. **For this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles** (1 Timothy 2:7).

How are we to pray?

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing (1 Timothy 2:8). The Jewish habit in prayer was to lift hands, palms upwards, as if to receive an answer. This gesture suggested earnestness and urgency. “Holy hands” suggests unstained hands, cleansed from defilement, with no unforsaken sin. **If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened** (Psalm 66:18).

“Without anger or disputing” – we must not be involved in a quarrel with anyone. First we must be reconciled to our brother, and then we can seek God’s face. Harboring a grudge and refusing to forgive will rob a prayer of its effectiveness. “Without doubting,” (A.V.) suggests there must be belief that God will answer. If our prayers are hopeless and pessimistic, with no real belief that prayer is of use, then the prayer will be useless. There will be no point offering prayer if that is our attitude. We must have confidence that God is a God who hears and answers prayer according to His will. Plead His promises.

Conclusion

Pray with a sense of need to the king who is able to do what no other can, and do so with thanksgiving. Pray especially for our rulers. Pray to God who loves all and wishes salvation for all. Pray through Christ, and pray earnestly, with no unforsaken sin, no grudge against a brother, no doubt about God’s ability to answer.

Make prayer the regular business of life. Persevere, be warm, and fervent. Here true religion begins and flourishes, or else decays. It is a key indication of our spiritual pulse.