

Public Prayer

¹⁸ This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, ²⁰ of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. ¹ Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. ³ For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, ⁷ for 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 truth. (1 Timothy 1:18–2:7)

If you are in the market to buy a new house, experts tell us that the first thing you should check is the foundations. Check that the foundations are solid, that the supporting walls are thick enough, and there aren't signs that they are unstable. From there, we're supposed to look at wiring, plumbing, gas hookups, the integrity of the roof, all the kinds of structural things that mean the house is in good shape. The painting, the light fittings, the doors and bannisters, mouldings and trim and carpets, these are all cosmetics that can change. If you choose a house based on cosmetics, while ignoring really bad or dangerous structural things, you're making a bad decision that will probably bite you in the future.

A lot of people choose churches based on the spiritual equivalent of cosmetics: a nice children's program, a friendly first-time visit, lots of parking, plenty of people just like me, a non-threatening sermon, vibey, entertaining music. They choose their church for the same reason that people buy houses ready to be condemned on structural grounds because of chandeliers or in-floor heating, or smart windows, or a sparkling pool. They ignore the deep structure of the church. What is that deep structure of a church? What are the concrete foundations, the brick and mortar and steel beams and girders of a church? That's what Paul is guiding Timothy to remember and to uphold in his church. Make sure your church is structurally sound.

Paul is about to do that in chapter 2, 3, 4, and 5. Before we get there, we need to see how seriously Paul takes this in 1:18-20.

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After a small detour to speak of how the law is to be properly used, and how the gospel saved him, Paul now comes to the main body of the letter, and he returns to the charge he gave back in verse 3. 1 Timothy 1:3 “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine”. Build the church on the Word, Timothy, not on speculation or amusement or false philosophy.

Now in verse 18 Paul repeats the charge: I commit this charge to you, son Timothy. He is charging Timothy, calling him to accept a task, summon Timothy to rise to the occasion, to accept his mission, to enlist, take the oath of commitment and see it through. This is an order, a command from a general to a captain in the field. The charge is to uphold sound doctrine in Ephesus through a well-ordered church.

This is a scary charge, and Timothy needs all the encouragement he can get. So Paul says he can do this in line with some prophecies that were made about him, probably at his ordination. We don't know anything more about this, but perhaps Silas and others, as happened during the apostolic era, received specific prophecies identifying Timothy's giftedness and call to ministry.

1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

The similarity of 6:12 seems to suggest that: “1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

Often, a man's ordination serves as a reminder that he did not appoint himself.

Paul says, remember that affirmation that came from other godly men, and in the confidence of those, wage a good warfare. Fight the good fight of faith. Prosecute the cause of sound doctrine and healthy churches. Defend truth. Attack error. Fight against the flesh, the world, the devil.

Timothy can uphold this charge because he not only has encouragement from what those men said, but right now, he has faith and a good conscience. These are indispensable necessities for ministry. You must know and believe the truth, and you must know in your conscience you are obeying the truth. A man who loses confidence in the Word, in sound doctrine cannot continue. A man who does not live out what the Word teaches has a defiled, harmed, maybe even seared conscience. Paul mentions two men who have made a shipwreck of their faith, by abandoning either faith or a sound conscience or both. Hymenaeus seems to be the man mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:17: “ And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.” He seemed to have abandoned the core truth that Christ is still returning and will raise the bodies of Christians up when He does. Alexander may be the one Paul refers to in 2 Timothy 4:14 “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.” Maybe Hymenaeus had abandoned faith and sound doctrine while Alexander had abandoned a good conscience. Either way Paul had disciplined both of them out of the churches they were in. That's the meaning of “delivered unto Satan”. Paul expelled them from the protective hedge of God's church, so that perhaps they might repent, and learn to no longer blaspheme God in word or in deed. So, armed with memories of men prophesying over him, possessing faith in God's Word and a clean conscience, Timothy is ready to fight the good fight of faith, and see sound doctrine preached and taught in the church in Ephesus.

Well, with the Word of God as the core of the church. Paul comes to the first thing he wants Timothy to attend to in church. And no surprise, it all begins with corporate worship. How the church worships when it gathers is of central importance. It is the concrete foundation of the church. So it is the “first of all” theme of chapter 2. After that, he will get to the topic of leadership in chapter 3. But first, the topic of worship: prayer and preaching in the local church.

Here we going to see Paul give Timothy a command, which will have a consequence, which is based on a certain confidence. Three ideas related to prayer are at the very top of Paul's list of how Timothy will fulfill his charge.

I. The Command to Pray

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all

men, for kings and all who are in authority,

The first thing that Timothy is to do in his church to make sure it is sound, is to make sure the church prays. Supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks are four slightly differing ways of referring to prayer.

This is not a reference to private prayer to be made in solitude. This is public prayer, prayers made and offered when the church meets. We know that because in just a few verses Paul is going to say that this kind of prayer must be offered in public by the men. 1 Timothy 2:8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

Prayer should be offered on behalf of the church by men of spiritual character, men who can pray with a clean conscience. A portion of every worship service of the church should be someone offering up prayer on behalf of the body. Paul says, Timothy, the church is to be a house of prayer for all nations, and you must make sure that when the church gathers, it prays. How sad to see that in many churches, prayer is by far the smallest, if not the most invisible part of their worship. There might be a casual prayer to open things up, maybe an extra prayer before the sermon, and a closing prayer to finish things off. But many churches have no real space for actual prayer in the service, prayer as a part of how Christians worship. Paul here commands prayer in the Christian worship service.

These prayers should be both various in form and universal in scope. Four forms are mentioned here, with words that overlap in meaning. *Supplications* is a word that means urgent requests, entreaties we make to God. *Prayers* is the more common word for prayers, it just means any petition or thing said or made to God.

Intercessions was a word that meant formal requests that were made to a high official, rather like our idea of make an application, apply for something from an authority. *Giving of thanks* is that rejoicing and expressions of gratitude.

Public prayers must be varied in their form. Public prayer should not be a boring recitation of needs, nor a rambling reciting of vague things we know about God, nor a collection of cliches and stock Christian phrases that are virtually meaningless. There should be variety, colour, interest as we lay before our God our needs and sanctified desires.

Variety in form but universal in scope. Paul says public prayers should take in all men, for kings and for all in authority. Rulers of society, presidents, ministers, and all in authority, policeman, magistrates, governors. Everyone from the top of society to its bottom, young and old, rich and poor, people in our nation and in every other nation. What are we praying for about them? As we'll see in the next verses, we are primarily praying for their salvation, that these people be saved.

During the Reformation, Protestant churches prayed for five areas: civil authority, Christian ministry, all people, building up of the church, the sick and afflicted. Spurgeon says, "There are many topics which require your attention; the church in its weakness, its backslidings, its sorrows, and its comforts; the outside world, the neighbourhood, unconverted hearers, the young people, the nation. Plead for the supply of the great and constant needs of the church, and do not fail to urge, with devout fervour, the special requirements of the present time and audience. Let the sick, the poor, the dying, the heathen, the Jew[ish people], and all forgotten classes of people, be mentioned as they press upon your heart. Pray for your people as saints and sinners--not as if they were all saints. Mention the young and the aged; the impressed and the careless; the devout and the backsliding." Universal in scope.

How long should a public prayer be? That will vary from time and place and occasion and even ethnicity. Jesus told us to be short in our prayers, not trying to maximise their length to imagine that the longer they are the better they are. But they should not be so short as to sound casual, breezy, perfunctory, offhand. The Puritans used to pray for forty-five minutes in one service, by Spurgeon's day, he recommended ten minutes. So we have come a long way where today a two or three minute prayer begins to tax people. Perhaps we need to get used to wanting longer, well-thought out public prayers. After all, don't we all wish that we prayed more in our private lives? Well, public prayer is where you get to make up for missed prayer on your own, and more importantly, you get to pray in unison with others. If a prayer has no cliches, no rambling, no repetition, then there is no fat on it, and nothing to complain about.

Does that mean the men who pray should prepare their prayers? Yes and no. I think a purely read prayer begins to sound like a purely read sermon. It seems too rehearsed and if we're not careful, a bit artificial. At the same time, a completely spontaneous and unprepared public prayer sounds about as good as a completely unprepared sermon: rambling, vague, repetitious, cliched, circular and shallow. So a man who prays should put some preparation into it.

He should also remember that he is praying for us, not for himself privately. The pronouns for public prayer are *we, us, our*, not *I, me, my*. He is not there to confess his private sins, describe his private longings for a better spiritual life, ask for some personal struggle, ask forgiveness for having kicked the cat that morning. The moment he does that, we are not praying. He is praying for himself. We are now just listening to a private conversation he is having with God. It's that awkward moment when a married couple begin to gaze into each others eyes and ogle each other while they are in your company. If you are called upon to pray, don't start telling the Lord you are miserable worm unworthy of this moment. We already know that. And the Lord knows it better than we do. So just get on with representing us as a body before the Lord.

Now this public prayer is going to have a result, a consequence.

II. The Consequence of Our Prayer

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

The hope of this public prayer is that Christians get to go on with normal lives, lives that are quiet and peaceable, savouring of godliness and reverence.

We want to live our lives, have our homes and raise our families, live out our vocations, build our church, and we want to do it in quiet and peaceableness. These two words mean a life that is tranquil, orderly, without disturbance.

Here is the gold standard for a Christian church, a Christian family, a Christian community, a life of quiet and peace. It is a simple life, not a loud, noisy life that disturbs others, that draws attention to itself. Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Sin is always noisy, cantankerous, contentious, clamorous. Sin can't leave others alone, it must meddle, provoke, stir up trouble. Christians should not be those that relish controversy, that enjoy the conflict, that enjoy the thrill of the fight. Christians actually want to mind our own business. As Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

But there are plenty of non-believers who also want peaceful lives and to mind their own business.

There are two additional words that explain how Christians live quiet and peaceable lives. *All godliness and reverence.*

Godliness refers to a life that is God-centred. This is a life of piety, of being devout, where God and His glory lies at the centre of who you are, what you do, how you think. Reverence means a life of seriousness, worthy of respect. A way of life worthy of esteem.

So picture living next door to the Christian family living a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. What do they seem like? They are very normal. They greet you warmly and welcomed you to the neighbourhood. They seem to have a steady and predictable routine in their lives. Sometimes you'll hear laughter echoing over the wall, or children playing. But you don't hear screaming and shrieking, dishes shattering and doors slamming, or if you do, its the very rare exception. There isn't obnoxiously loud music assaulting the neighbourhood, the shrieking sounds of late-night parties with inebriated people convincing themselves that they are having fun. Sometimes you'll hear the odd but sweet sound of them singing together. It's not unusual for them to be hosting people, but they love to be together; their home is their castle and safe place. And like clockwork, you know where they'll be on a Sunday and a Wednesday night. Their lives are quite predictable, not impulsive, not untidy, not ill-disciplined, not being visited by a social worker on one day and a debt collector on the next. Worship, order, harmony, love, contentment.

Are they angels on earth? Perfect people living idyllic lives? No, they have their share of troubles, problems and pains. But they are God-centred, God's Word rules their roles in the home, their work habits, their entertainment habits, their spending, their parenting.

But they are not characterised by the strife, discontent, and worldliness of the world. This is how James describes the home, the business, the church not characterised by these traits:

James 3:14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

Now how will praying together when we meet to worship bring about these quiet and peaceable lives of godliness? We learn that when we see the content of our prayers that is implied in the next verses.

III. The Content of Our Prayer

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, for 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 truth.

Here is the answer. Christians can live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and reverence when more and more of our immediate neighbours, and our bosses and our rulers are also saved. That's what we are praying for.

God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. In other words, if kings, and people in authority are saved come to know the truth about reality, it changes life for everyone. Life is filled with more freedom. Freedom from persecution, from crime, from poverty and subsistence living, from abusive tyrants, from oppressive masters. Wherever true Christianity has taken deep root, and been present for centuries, certain evils disappeared like slavery, child labour, prostitution, rampant drunkenness, utterly corrupt judges and magistrates, gangs and cartels. These evils destroy quiet and peaceable lives. Where Christianity disappears, might is right. Right now Christians living in North Korea, Syria are not living quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and reverence. Nor are Christians in Ukraine, or in drug-controlled sections of

Mexico, or Muslim-controlled north Nigeria, or North Sudan. Frankly, under the tyranny of some Western governments, Christians in Australia, New Zealand, Canada have not been able to.

So we pray for all kinds of people to be saved, and then to be in healthy churches, and to grow and be disciplined.

What are the chances of God answering these prayers? Look at the language of verses 3 through 5. He is called God our Saviour. That's His title. He doesn't just organise others to do the saving. He Himself saves. He dives into the water to rescue. He burst into the burning building to get you out. He comes into the hostage situation with bullets flying to get you out. He is the Saviour. How so? Look at verse 5 and 6: For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all,

There is only one true God and therefore only one true Saviour.

The one God has become the Mediator between God and man. Jesus Christ is both God and man, and so He is the bridge from God down to man, and from man back to God. God is so desirous for the salvation of others that He took things into His own hands, became a man and gave Himself a ransom for all so that it is possible for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. That word ransom might give you the wrong idea that someone else held us captive and Jesus then paid ransom money to some evil person. The right idea is that it is a price paid to release us. But the price was paid by God to God. We were held captive by our own sin and our own fear of death. Jesus Christ, Messiah Jesus freed us from ourselves by paying the penalty of death for us.

If there is any doubt, verse 3 describes the heart and motive of God.

1 Timothy 2:3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

It is good and acceptable in His sight that we pray for people's salvation. For people to be saved, and for Christians to pray for this salvation, this is right and pleasing to God. God welcomes it; it delights Him for people to be saved. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, as Ezekiel tells us, and He has pleasure in the salvation of men. He desires this, he wishes it.

Whom does He desire to be saved? For whom is Jesus a ransom? The word in verse 4 and verse 6 is translated *all*, but in the original Greek, it means "all". That's right, *all* means all in both English and Greek. But that does present a theological problem for us. If God wants all men to be saved why aren't all men saved? And if Jesus was a ransom for all, then haven't all men had their sins atoned for? In that case, no one should go to hell, because you cannot punish a man who has already had his penalty paid. Some people are rightly concerned that we might misuse this passage and teach universalism, that everyone will be saved.

So, in response, some believers have taught the idea that the word "all" here does not mean all people without exception, but all kinds of men, all classes of men. Kings, authorities, commoners, people from every tribe, but not all men without exception. God wants Christians from all walks of life. And then, according to that view, Jesus paid the ransom for all kinds of people, not for all people everywhere. Jesus paid the ransom for all sorts of people, who become His children. Now that view has some merit. It is not far-fetched. The Bible does sometimes use the word all in that way. And it does guard the door against universalism.

But I do think it is the more difficult explanation, when a simpler one is available. I think it is more of an import from theology, not a clear export from the text. The simpler explanation is that God in His nature, genuinely desires all men without exception to be saved. In what we call God's will of

desire, the will that expresses His nature, God genuinely desires that every one of His creatures will be saved. It is not His will of decree or His will of specific providence that this will take place, but it is His will that all would be saved, just like it is His will that no one sin, or that all men love one another. The way God's will of desire, and God's will of decree work together is one of the deepest mysteries of reality.

But I think flowing out from that will of desire, Jesus Christ did provide the payment for the sin of Adam's race. On the cross, Jesus paid the penalty of the sin of the human race. The Second Adam substituted for anyone born in the first Adam. But Scripture does teach a distinction between atonement provided and atonement applied. The Passover Lamb was provided when it was killed, but it was only applied when the blood was placed on the doorposts of the home. The Lamb could have been provided, but if it was not applied, the home would not have been saved. Jesus has provided a ransom for all, but that ransom is only applied when a person repents and believes in Jesus Christ. Without repentance and faith, there is a provision that is being rejected. The Holy Spirit only applies the death of Christ to you on the day of your repentance and faith. A ransom is provided for all, but applied only to those who believe. Men will be held accountable for rejecting the Son, and it would be a strange thing if they were judged for rejecting a sacrifice that was never actually made for them.

From my point of view, that's why I believe I can pray for all men, and hold out a hope that every man has a chance to be saved, because Jesus is a ransom for all, and God does desire all men to be saved.

It's with that gospel truth that Paul finishes this paragraph: to be testified in due time, for 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 truth.

The message of God the Saviour, Jesus the Mediator, the ransom paid is supposed to be testified and told to all. Paul was appointed to preach this by God Himself. He is an apostle, a sent-one of this news, particularly to the Gentiles. He was the Hebrew of the Hebrews sent to the Gentiles to preach this.

If God is such a Saviour, then we can expect people to be saved when we pray. And if we faithfully pray and witness, more and more people around us, and ruling us will be true Christians, and we'll be able to live out our Christianity in quiet, simple godliness.

So one of the very first things you look for in a structurally sound church is this: how do they pray during corporate worship? Are there spiritually vital men who pray for authorities, for people in all walks of life, for all nations, for churches, for the gospel to spread and be heard. Do they pray the true gospel, not the self-esteem gospel, not the health and wealth gospel, not the ecumenical gospel, but the one God and one Mediator between God and Man Jesus Christ gospel? Does the church pray the same gospel they preach, and pray it for all men everywhere? That's a healthy church, healthy to the foundation.