

Session 2

May 2, 2021

START WITH PRAYER

1 Timothy 2:1-8

As far as I am concerned, prayer is a mystery.

I cannot accept the idea that my prayers actually change the mind of God. If that was the case, then I would be in control, and that makes *me* God. But nor can I believe that prayer is useless, and God works His plan with no regard to us. If that were true, we would simply serve as meaningless pawns on His divine chessboard. As is often the case, the truth must lie somewhere in the middle. But even though I am not sure *how* prayer works, I am absolutely certain *that* prayer works! Paul's letter to young Timothy provides some guidance.

Global praying (vv. 1-2). The four terms for prayer used in verse 1 could just as easily be summarized, “*Pray for everybody!*” Yet Paul saw enough nuances in the *types* of prayers offered to list them out. In general, *petitions* are prayer requests. *Prayers* is a generic term, but Paul may have had in mind proscribed (ie: standardized) prayers; either those written out to be read, or those memorized and recited orally. *Intercession* is normally praying on behalf of someone or something intimately and specifically. And *thanksgivings* are statements of gratitude. The focus of the text, however, is not on the *variety* of prayers, but the *scope* of those being prayed for. Everyone made the list, but especially emphasized were those in both supreme and lesser levels of government. The presumption here, is that Paul urged the early church to pray for their Roman oppressors (from the top to the bottom) so that the believers under their watch could live out their faith unmolested by their pagan rulers. This had been taught earlier in the Bible (see Ezra 6:10 and Jer. 29:7, for example), and later, in church history (as recorded by Tertullian and Polycarp). For reflection: *How might free churches use these principles in regard to the many persecuted churches meeting around the world?*

Gospel praying (vv. 3-6). In this section, Paul describes the universal appeal of the exclusive gospel message. In paraphrase, Paul says, “This directed praying for the pagans (vv. 1-2), and the relative peace it will bring on the church is a good thing, that pleases God. After all, His desire is that everyone would be saved by understanding and accepting His truth.” Paul here is speaking more popularly than doctrinally. Technically, if God sovereignly *willed* everyone to be saved, they would be! But Paul is not speaking technically. Rather, he is revealing the *heart* of God, and the compassion He has for the whole world (see 2 Pet. 3:9; John 3:16). Set against the broad appeal of the gospel is the narrow singularity of the message itself. There is one God, one mediator, one ransom paid, and one sacrifice made, on behalf of all who will receive it. For reflection: *If God wanted everyone to be saved, then why do you think He doesn't simply save everyone? Wouldn't that make the most sense?*

Godly praying (vv. 7-8). It is the testimony of the gospel witness (v. 6) to which Paul is here referring. Since faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (Rom. 10:17), God has ordained preachers to proclaim it. And this was both Paul's calling and his vocation. The word *herald* refers to a messenger or preacher; the term *apostle* denotes one who is sent; and the office of *teacher* explains his role. *Of the Gentiles* describes his mission field, and *faith and truth* denotes the subject of his teaching. Since Paul was so heavily invested in gospel proclamation,

he was particularly anxious that the power of prayer be brought to bear everywhere, by every believer, without being sidetracked by the pettiness of church disgruntlement. For reflection: *What are some ways that pettiness among church members hinders the work of the gospel? How does Paul see prayer as a solution to this problem?*