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SERVICE—OR CIRCUS?

Scripture text: 1 Timothy 2

Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40) is a basic principle for the conduct of the ministry of the church. Apparently, young Timothy was having some problems applying this principle to the assemblies in Ephesus. The public worship services were losing their order and effectiveness because **both the men and the women members of the church were disobeying God’s Word.**

“The church is an organism,” a pastor told me, “so we shouldn’t put too much emphasis on organization. We should allow the Spirit to have freedom.”

“But if an organism is *disorganized*,” I quickly reminded him, “it will die. Yes, I agree that we must permit the Spirit to have freedom, but **even the Holy Spirit is not free to disobey the Word of God.**”

Often, what we think is the “freedom of the Spirit” are the carnal ideas of some Christian who is not walking in the Spirit. Eventually this “freedom” becomes anarchy, and the Spirit grieves as a church gradually moves away from the standards of God’s Word.

To counteract this tendency, Paul exhorted the men and women in the church and **reminded them of their spiritual responsibilities.**

The Men—Praying (1 Tim. 2:1–8)

The priority of prayer (v. 1a).

“First of all” indicates that **prayer is most important in the public worship of the church**. It is sad to see how prayer has lost importance in many churches. “If I announce a banquet,” a pastor said, “people will come out of the woodwork to attend. But if I announce a prayer meeting, I’m lucky if the ushers show up!” Not only have the special meetings for prayer lost stature in most local churches, but even prayer in the public services **is greatly minimized**. Many pastors spend more time on the announcements than they do in prayer!

The late Peter Deyneka, Sr., founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, often said: “**Much prayer, much power! No prayer, no power!**” Prayer was as much a part of the apostolic ministry as preaching the Word (Acts 6:4).

Yet some pastors spend hours preparing their sermons, but never prepare their public prayers. Consequently, their prayers are routine, humdrum, and repetitious. I am not suggesting that a pastor write out every word and read it, but that **he think through what he will pray about.**

This will keep “the pastoral prayer” from becoming dull and a mere repetition of what was “prayed” the previous week.

But the **church members also need to be prepared to pray**. Our hearts must be right with God and with each other. **We must really want to pray, and not pray simply to please people** (as did the Pharisees, Matt. 6:5), **or to fulfill a religious duty**. When a local church ceases to depend on prayer, God ceases to bless its ministry.

Matthew 6:5-8 "And **when you pray**, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, **that they may be seen by others**. Truly, I say to you, **they have received their reward**. But when you pray, **go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret**. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And **when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases** as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, **for your Father knows what you need before you ask him**.

The variety of prayer (v. 1b).

There are at least seven different Greek nouns for “prayer,” and four of them are used here.

Supplications carries the idea of “**offering a request for a felt need.**”

Prayers is the commonest term for this activity, and it emphasizes the **sacredness of prayer**. We are praying to God; **prayer is an act of worship**, not just an expression of our wants and needs. **There should be reverence in our hearts as we pray to God.**

Intercessions is best translated “petitions.” This same word is translated “prayer” in 1 Timothy 4:5, where it refers to blessing the food we eat. (It is rather obvious that we do not intercede for our food in the usual sense of that word.) The basic meaning is **“to draw near to a person and converse confidently with him.”** It suggests that we **enjoy fellowship with God so that we have confidence in Him as we pray.**

Giving of thanks is definitely a part of worship and prayer. **We not only give thanks for answers to prayer, but for who God is and what He does for us in His grace.**

We should not simply add our thanksgiving to the end of a selfish prayer! **Thanksgiving should be an important ingredient in all of our prayers.** In fact, sometimes we need to imitate David and present to God **only thanksgiving with no petitions at all!** (see Ps. 103)

Psalm 103:2-5 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, **who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

“Prayer and supplication [petition] with thanksgiving” are a part of Paul’s formula for God’s peace in our hearts.

Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

It is worth noting that Daniel, the **great prayer-warrior, practiced this kind of praying.**

Daniel 6:10-11 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. **He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.** Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God.

The objects of prayer (vv. 1c–2).

“All men” makes it clear that no person on earth is outside the influence of believing prayer. (We have no examples of exhortations that say we should pray for the dead. If we should pray for the dead, Paul certainly had a good opportunity to tell us in this section of his letter.) This means we should pray for the unsaved and the saved, for people near us and people far away, for enemies as well as friends. Unfortunately, the Pharisees did not have this universal outlook in their prayers, for they centered their attention primarily on Israel.

Paul urged the church to especially pray for those in authority. Godless Emperor Nero was on the throne at that time, and **yet the believers were supposed to pray for him!** Even when we cannot respect men or women in authority, **we must respect their offices and pray for them.** In fact, it is for our own good that we do so: *“that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”* (1 Tim. 2:2b).

The early church was always subject to opposition and persecution, so it was wise to pray for those in authority.

“Quiet” refers to circumstances around us, while **“peaceful”** refers to a calm attitude within us. The results should be lives that are godly and honorable.

To be sure, Paul has not named all the persons we can and should pray for, since **“all men”** covers the matter **fully**. We can't pray for everybody in the world by name, but **we certainly ought to pray for those we know and know about**.

Why? Because it's a good thing to do and because it pleases God.

The reasons for prayer (vv. 3–4).

The word “**good**” is a key word in Paul’s pastoral epistles (1 Tim. 1:8, 18; 2:3; 3:1, 7, 13; 4:4, 6; 5:4, 10, 25; 6:12–13, 18–19; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:3; 4:7; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14).

The Greek word emphasizes the idea of something being **intrinsically good**, not just good in its effects. “Fair” and “beautiful” are synonyms. **Certainly prayer of itself is a goodly practice, and brings with it many good benefits.**

But prayer is also pleasing to the Lord. **It pleases the Father when His children pray as He has commanded them to.** The Pharisees prayed in order to be praised by men (Matt. 6:5) or to impress other worshipers (Luke 18:9–14).

True Christians pray in order to please God. This suggests that **we must pray in the will of God,** because it certainly does not please the Father when we pray selfishly (James 4:1–10; 1 John 5:14–15). **It's often said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth.**

Luke 18:10-14 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, **but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. **For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."**

James 4:1-5 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. **You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

James 4:6-10 But he gives more grace.

Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. **Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.** Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

What is God's will? The salvation of lost souls, for one thing. We can pray for "all men" because it is God's will that "all men" come to the knowledge of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. God loved the world (John 3:16) and Christ died for the whole world (1 John 2:2; 4:14). **Jesus died on the cross that He might draw "all men" to salvation** (John 12:32). This does not mean all people without exception, for certainly the whole world is not going to be saved. **It means all people without distinction**—Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, religious and pagan.

If God doesn't want anyone to perish, then why are so many lost? God is long-suffering with lost sinners, even delaying His judgment that they might come to Christ (2 Peter 3:9). But **salvation depends on a "knowledge of the truth"** (1 Tim. 2:4). Not everyone has heard the truth of the Gospel, and **many who have heard have rejected it**. We cannot explain the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility (see John 6:37), but **realize that both are taught in the Bible and are harmonized in God's great plan of salvation.**

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and **whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**

We do know that prayer is an important part of God's program for reaching a lost world. We have the responsibility of praying for lost souls (Rom. 10:1) and making ourselves available to share the Gospel with others.

Romans 10:1 Brothers, **my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.**

The basis for prayer (vv. 5–7).

Many believers do not realize that prayer is based on the work of Jesus Christ as Savior and Mediator.

As the God-Man, Jesus Christ is the perfect Mediator between the holy God and His failing children.

One of Job's complaints had to do with the absence of a mediator who could take his message to the throne of God. "There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33, nasb).

Job 9:33 There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both.

Since there is only one God, there is need for only one Mediator; and that Mediator is Jesus Christ. No other person can qualify. Jesus Christ is both God and man, and, therefore, can be the “umpire” between God and man. In His perfect life and substitutionary death, **He met the just demands of God’s holy law.** He was the “ransom for all.” The word ransom means “**a price paid to free a slave.**” His death was “on behalf of all.” Though the death of Christ is efficient **only for those who trust Him,** it is sufficient for the sins of the whole world. **Jesus said that He came “to give His life a ransom for many”** (Matt. 20:28).