

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-2

INTRODUCTION

In chapter one the main lesson that we have been taught is to defend the faith, we are to fight the good fight, and we are to hold on to the faith with a good conscience (1:18-19). As we move into chapter 2 and 3, Paul moves on to deal with some very practical subjects about church life. In chapter 4 Paul will come back to his central message of defending the faith. The issues that Paul covers in these chapters are likely to be issues that the church had either neglected or were in danger of being influenced by the false teachers to introduce false practises into the church.

So this section of Paul's letter is a very practical section concerning church government and practice. Paul is concerned that the church at Ephesus should have a global vision. It is possible that the church had become very parochial; perhaps it was being influenced by the false teachers to be very exclusive. Well Paul urges the church to have a global vision.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL PRAYER (v 1)

Notice the use of words that Paul under the influence of the Spirit chooses to use here. He says 'first of all' this simply means this ought to be the church's highest priority. Paul urges the church to get its priorities right, in all likelihood the church was failing to make prayer its highest priority, especially global prayer. It immediately challenges us concerning our own personal prayer life and in particular the prayer life of the church. How far up the scale of priorities is prayer for us as a church. Do we see it as vital, essential, necessary, or is it a little less important than that.

O I know that none of us would say so, but how often as a church is prayer seen as the first thing we need to do. If someone from outside our church watched us for a short period would they get the impression that prayer is vital and a central part of the life of the church? I will leave that with you to think about.

A) Who should we pray for?

i) **Everyone** - Its not just prayer that Paul is urging the church to make a priority but its prayer for everyone. Paul is urging the church to have a global vision when it comes to prayer. This idea of global vision is at the heart of this passage. (Look how times the words 'everyone' or 'all' is used v 1, 4, 6, and 7).

What does Paul mean when he uses this idea in this section? There has been much debate among scholars about what is meant, and it very much depends upon one's theology how it is interpreted. It is clear that when that term "all" is used the context has to decide its meaning. The context here is not referring to every single person or individual, for v 6 tells us that Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all men (v 6). We are also told that God wants all men to be saved (v 4). There are people who argue that what God wants and what He wills are different things.

However I am told that the word "wants" has a very broad meaning and can mean 'wills' as well as 'wants.' What I am getting at is this. Is it possible that Jesus 'wills' everyone to be saved and dies for every single individual and yet fails in his mission to save those He wills, has died for and wants to save?

I think other Scriptures make it perfectly clear that Christ died for His people (Matthew 1:18); His church (Ephesians 5:25) therefore those who He chooses to save, those He wills to save surely He will and must save. Otherwise we would be dealing with a God who is not all-powerful, for He could not save those He wants to save. So if these verses do not mean every single individual what do they mean?

Paul is concerned for a global vision for the church and therefore what is meant is that our prayers should be for every people group and every nation. Our prayers should not just be local but global; our concern should be for all peoples, for every tribe, tongue and nation.

We should not just pray for our own nation but we should have a global vision, we should be concerned for the people of every continent of our world. The church's prayers should reflect a global vision. The public prayers on a Sunday should think of other lands and peoples as well as our own. This sort of praying should be our highest priority as a church. Why?

We will not be able to preach the gospel in many lands across the world; our influence in sharing the gospel within this world is so minute. But we can influence world mission through our praying, for we know that God in His wisdom responds to the prayers of his people. What was the great secret behind the breaking up of the Communist states of the former USSR? Prayer was behind it. People prayed that USSR would be opened up to the gospel for years.

I remember as a young Christian hearing people pray for USSR and saying to myself; that's impossible. This is why it is important that we get missionary magazines and use them prayerfully. Only eternity will tell us how much is accomplished for the kingdom of God through the prayers of God's people.

Paul uses four different words for prayer here. His point is to show the comprehensiveness of prayer. The word 'requests' comes from a word that means "to be without something." This kind of prayer comes from a sense of need. Knowing what is lacking we plead to God to supply it. The word 'prayers' is a general word for prayer, it is a word used only in reference to God. The next word 'intercession' comes from a root word meaning "to get involved with someone." The verb form of this word is used of Christ's intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). It is a word that speaks of empathy, sympathy, compassion and involvement.

Paul's final word 'thanksgiving' tells us of the great privilege it is to pray for the nations and people of the world. We are to be thankful that God hears and will answer our prayers. Put all those words together and you can see that the sort of praying for this world that pleases God is not cold, detached and impersonal praying, the sort of praying that is done out of a sense of duty. But praying that pleases God is praying that is aware of the great needs within the world that is aware that only God can meet those needs.

It is praying with a real sense of empathy and compassion for the nations of the world and it is praying with a thankful heart for the privilege of praying for the lost and for answers to those prayers. I wonder how far short our praying falls from this picture. Perhaps our praying is much localised, it concerns those we know locally or nationally. But how many of us really do lift our eyes of faith and look globally. When we do then we will find that it is not too difficult to spend a reasonable amount of time in prayer every day. Just listen to the news and you will hear of countries in great physical need. Likewise these countries are in great spiritual needs and need our prayers

How do we start to become more global in our praying, for it is one thing to want to be global in our vision and another thing to actually start doing so? Let me suggest that you start praying for one country that interests you. Perhaps it's a country you have been on holiday, or you have seen it on TV or know someone who is a missionary in it. Let me suggest that you find out as much about that country as you can, use the operation world book if you need too.

Start praying for the needs of that country. Find it on a map and then take a neighbouring country and do likewise, and keep building up the number of countries that you are actively praying for.

Then as we become more global in prayer our vision for the Lord's work will in turn also become global.

ii) **For Those in Authority** – After telling us that we should pray for everyone Paul then tells us more specifically whom we should pray for? He says pray for kings and those in authority. This is an amazing thing that Paul is asking of the church at Ephesus for the emperor at this time was Nero. Nero was a vile, wicked man who made it his business to persecute the church; he would not be on many people's prayer list of the day. But the church was to pray for him. What were they to pray for? Well they were to pray that he would rule wisely and justly and that the church would be allowed to live peaceful and quiet lives free from persecution (v 2). I have no doubt that they were to pray for his salvation as well.

If the church is able to live peaceful and quiet lives then that means that the rulers will have created the social climate for that to happen. When the church is allowed to be the church without having to look over its shoulder in fear of persecution then the conditions for its evangelistic efforts will be more favourable.

Although it is certain that if the church is living godly lives then it will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12) and although it is true that persecution is generally good for the church, and although it is true the church tends to grow faster during times of persecution, we are still to pray for favourable conditions for the church. We in Britain have favourable conditions. We have freedom of religion; we can go out and proclaim the gospel without committing any offence.

Sadly many Christians in other parts of the world can't do that so we need to pray that our own land will stay peaceful towards the church and that those other countries where the church is persecuted will cease so that the gospel can go forth freely without fear of persecution. Pray specifically for leaders by name if you know them, pray that the social conditions in each land will be favourable towards the church of Jesus Christ, so that the gospel will be freely proclaimed and pray that many will be saved as a result.

I do wonder if the church took seriously its responsibility to pray for the nations of this world, how many countries would be turned completely around. How many tyrannical leaders would be removed or converted and how many countries currently closed to the gospel would be opened? It's an open question but I do wonder.

But of course there is no point having favourable conditions for the church to proclaim the gospel unless the church is living, as it ought to (v 2). The church is not just to live peaceful and quiet lives but we are to do so with godliness and holiness. Paul is probably thinking about the church's attitude by using the word "godly." The church is to live with an attitude to God that will show something of God's majesty, holiness, love and glory.

By using the word "holiness" Paul is probably thinking about the church's lifestyle. The church is to be marked by holy living, by a commitment to morality, which is higher, than this world's; a commitment to motives which are pure and unhyprocritical and a commitment to righteousness in behaviour.

So as we pray for favourable conditions for the church, let us also pray for the church in the various nations of the world. Pray that the church will take full advantage of the favourable social conditions by being godly and holy.

In order to conclude this message look at one reason that is given as to why we should pray like this (v 3). We will come back to this next time but one reason is that it is good and pleases God our Saviour. So if we want to do what is good and pleasing to God then we need to learn to pray with a global vision.

We need to develop within our lives a global attitude, we need to take our eyes off our own little corner of the world and we need to focus on all the people groups in the world. Pray for those in authority within our world. In doing so we may see remarkable events taking place within our world events that from our human perspective we may think are impossible.

As we pray for world leaders let's pray for the church throughout the world, that they may be granted favourable conditions to preach the gospel, that they may be able to do so without fear of persecution and pray that the church will live godly and holy lives so that the opportunities presented by peaceful conditions may be taken advantage of. Finally pray that those nations like our own that have favourable conditions for preaching the gospel may remain favourable and that the church may not take it for granted and become largely passive, but the church may be what it is meant to be and proclaim far and wide the lovely gospel message of the Lord Jesus.

Amen