

HOLY MEN

1 Timothy 2:1–8

Dr. George O. Wood

I hope the with two weeks of “being Timothy” a different perspective was shared on the New Testament letter. I know that by being Timothy myself for a while and trying to feel in his place it certainly lent me a new understanding of Scripture. I’ll personally try to keep that in mind as I study Timothy and present the Word to you. I was thinking, *What is the difference between the way that I would read the letter in the twentieth century and the way Timothy read it for the first time?* I think one subtle difference, which I hadn’t noticed before that is very true, is that by and large I can read the letter simply for the purpose of saying I read it. Or the purpose of information. But I’m sure when Timothy read it he was making either mental notes or written notes of things that were being required of him. He knew that the moment would come when the apostle would ask for an accounting as to, “What did you do in light of the advice and the command I gave you?”

That is probably the key to really understanding and studying the Scripture. It’s not only getting a grasp upon the information in Scripture, but it’s keeping a little notebook or a mental checklist of what the Scripture is asking for and then asking, “Have I done it? Am I intending to do it? Is there any principle there for me to obey? Any specific command for me to set out to accomplish?”

With that in mind, I would just like to share with you the first eight verses of the second chapter of 1 Timothy today. This is a chapter that deals with the subject of worship, both personal and corporate worship on the part of men and women. Next Sunday is Mother’s Day, and we’ll have

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verses particularly related to the role of women: “Women will be saved through bearing children.” What does that mean? That’s a great text for Mother’s Day!

But today, the men. In the language in which Paul writes, there were two words that could be employed for man. One word is the word from which we get “anthropology,” which simply means mankind. Both male and female. It is the word when you find the word “man” that is the word used in verses 1–7. Wherever the word “man” occurs, it is this. In verse 8, however, it specifically refers to the male.

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Timothy 2:1–8, NIV).

Paul is set to give a series of instructions for how we ought to behave in the household of God. That’s the employment of the word “first.” First, let me urge. Of course, the subject of prayer that he really is responding to in this particular paragraph is one that is to occupy the place of prominent position in our Christ-lives. Paul urges prayer. He cannot demand it nor can he command it. You cannot command an adult to pray if you are an apostle any more than as a parent you can command a child to pray. What you’re going to get is not prayer. You may get some words, but you cannot force it. Of course, there are some things that can only be won from us through an appeal. Thus, an appeal is made here.

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In this particular text before us Paul says what we should be praying for as Christian people. And what goal particularly prayer should have when it involves praying for national leaders. Then he also shares the manner, or how we should pray. Particularly, in this case, how men should pray. It's kind of neat what he does. Paul, we noticed last week from Timothy's words, he at times can get stuck on a thought and take off on a digression. In chapter 1, Paul is talking about persons who are giving themselves to myths and genealogies and are teaching the Law but really don't know anything about it. Then, when he starts thinking about the Law, he says, "I must say a word here: the Law is for the ungodly and not for the godly." Before he's through saying that, he says, "I once was ungodly myself and I needed the grace of God." Finally, when he gets done saying all that, he gets back to the point of dealing with heresies at Ephesus.

He does the same thing in chapter 2. He talks about how we ought to pray. When he comes to the words "God our Savior" in verse 3, it's like an explosion goes off in his mind. What does that term mean—God our Savior? So from verses 3–7 he is off on something completely unrelated, but thank the Lord he had that digression. There are things we pick up from that digression we would not have obviously.

I. Who are we to pray for?

Who are we to pray for? Paul says to the Ephesian believers—which is the believers where Timothy is pastoring—he says to them and to us, we ought to pray for all men and especially for kings and those in high positions.

What is our responsibility? To pray for all men? That's kind of a wide view. If you started praying for all men and you prayed for all four billion of them and gave each one of them a second of your time, you would probably be dead before you got through the whole list and you would have done nothing else in your life but pray. Which I suppose ain't that bad!

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Pray for all men. Perhaps the word is simply a term meaning pray for everyone that comes into your mind to pray for. And pray especially for all those with whom you have a relationship with. And, furthermore, Paul illustrates. He knows immediately when he writes that there are going to be those who are hearing this and reading it and are going to say, “What do you mean?” So he starts by giving an illustration of what he means by all men. He doesn’t finish the illustration, by the way. He could have ticked off a series of groups of people we should be praying for. But instead he starts with the most unlikely group that the early Christians would pray for—kings and those in high positions.

Peter writing at about the same time says, “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

What Paul is saying here in this letter to Timothy at Ephesus is the person that you as believers are most likely to neglect praying for is the emperor or the persons who are with him in high positions and the kings that rule under him. It is these very persons we must pray for, for two reasons. We must pray for them, lest in failing to pray for them we become bitter in our spirit toward them. And, secondly, we must pray for them because no man is beyond the grace of God. Even if he’s a Nero. Therefore Paul admonishes the believers to come and bring supplications, prayers and intercessions, which are kind of three interrelated words—slightly different connotations, but essentially it involves thinking of the needs that exist in the lives of those who govern and bringing those needs of theirs personally to God for prayer, as well as bringing broader needs for civil society to operate in peace and without strife. Bring to the Lord those prayers.

The incredible thing is that when Nero stands in his moment of judgment before the living God he will never be able to say, “No one prayed for my soul.” Nero, of all the men in history, it will

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be said of him that he had more powerful prayers going out on his behalf than probably any man who ever lived. Pray for kings and for those in high positions.

How do you take that broad principle of praying for kings and those in high positions and reduce it down to our own lives first of all where it needs to be, and then we can work back up to praying for the state? I think that each one of us have within us a picture gallery. If we could, think for a moment of the walls of our mind being adorned with photographs. Persons we know or persons we have heard about. As we walk through that gallery in our mind, we look at the pictures there and—take a conscious moment to do this—whose picture is on the wall of your mind that you do not want to pray for? That you resent? Or whose authority you do not like at all? It is that person whom Paul is saying to pray for with supplications, with prayers, and intercessions and even thanksgiving. For let no one in your mind who comes to your mind or who is in your life as a result of personal association or knowledge—let no one be neglected from your prayers.

That's a tremendous application to students in school. Pray for your teachers and your principal or dean. Pray, if you work, for your boss. And for the president of the company. Pray, if you're in this free land, for those who rule by the people's choice over them. That includes not only the president but also the legislature and the judicial branches of government. We are not a monarchy. We are a republic. And to pray for the government means not only to pray for the executive branch but the Supreme Court and the legislature. We're to respond even if we don't like some of the things they have done. I'm sure that the early Christians didn't like some of the things that Nero did. But one must be kept free from hatred and instead have a soft spirit of love and intercession. Pray for those who are in positions.

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I think Christians, in regard to politics, are first of all concerned with moral issues. Less with candidates, maybe, than they are with moral issues. If the candidate is the right person morally it really doesn't matter what party he belongs to. Supplications, prayers and petitions for persons in authority. Why? So that we should live a quiet and peaceable life. Does that sound strange? If you're young, I think it sounds strange. Who in the world that's full of vim and vigor wants to live a quiet and peaceable life? God forbid that you should live a quiet and peaceable life! What therefore does this mean?

It's really talking about the kind of status of society. Under Nero the society was turbulent. The apostle said it is right for Christians to pray for a civil state that is orderly and right in which Christians can function with outward tranquility and inward tranquility as well. In that kind of an atmosphere godliness and respectfulness might be fostered.

We see what ungodly is in 1 Timothy 1:9, the list of things which are given which are ungodly. We know what godly is by simply taking the reverse. Respectful and with decency, in decorum and dignity. These sorts of things are to be fostered. In other words, Saint Paul is saying at this point it's not the Christian's desire for the society to be in a continual panic. The Christian priority is for peace and calm. It's ok, if you're a Christian, to pray for peace. You don't have to pray for the world to end this year. If the Lord wants to end it this year, fine. But I'm praying for peace. A quiet and serene social order. It's in real contrast, by the way, to the prophetic teachers of turmoil that existed in the Ephesian situation. Paul is saying of the Christian gospel that it produces, instead of speculation and turmoil, it produces trust. Instead of upset, it produces peace. Instead of a sense of doom, the gospel brings tranquility. We pray that these things will occur.

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As we apply these principles to the government and to our lives, we see a great inroad. How prayer, if it's properly used by us, lets no one escape our praying. We're praying even for the person who might do us the most harm. Thereby we are doing him and ourselves good.

II. Who empowers our prayers?

Paul says, in fact, that this is good and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. The minute he says "God our savior," he's off into his digression. The language used of God sparks in his mind those great things that God has done in order to show himself as our Savior. So thus he says, "There is one God who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." God's intention is that all of us should come to himself. His great desire is for that. And not only to be saved, which is the instant act of salvation, but to come to the knowledge of truth, which means the information of learning how to live a life that is based upon our salvation. God desires this.

Then he goes on to say, "There is one body and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." In that statement "one God" he wipes out the kind of speculations that are a part of chapter 1—myths and genealogies. This was a time when something known as Gnosticism was beginning in seedling form. Basically, this was a religious view that some Christian heretics unfortunately held that God could have never touched matter. He would never have mingled His hands with stuff like dust and mud and earth. Therefore, the real eternal God must be far, far removed, hardly aware that this world exists. Instead, He created an emanation who created another emanation, and through countless thousands of emanations finally we have the god of this world who made this world and the eternal God knows nothing about it. In order to know the eternal God, you've got to go through the labyrinth of the emanations.

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Paul wipes that out. There is one God—no emanations. In that stroke of the pen Paul wipes out atheism, polytheism, Hinduism—so many of the world religions that depend upon the idea that there's more than one divinity. Then, immediately after saying there is one God, he says there is one Mediator. Right away we read this: one God and one Mediator. One plus one equals two! Therefore there must be two gods. But Paul has just said one God. We say, "How can God be God, and yet be the Father and the Son and not be two gods but one God?"

Two things on that: in chapter 3 of Galatians Paul indicates what is meant by the word "mediator." He says a mediator implies more than one. But he says God is one. So right away you can't use that term to signify more than one God. But I think also it's true that Paul is responding to this whole doctrine of emanation, and he's saying to these people who believe there are all these intermediaries between God and man. He's saying, "Not at all. There's only Jesus Christ." Jesus is not a mediator in the sense we use it in the modern language. We think of a mediator as some guy who goes to a labor conference between labor and management, and the mediator is right in the middle. But that's not Jesus as a mediator. Jesus doesn't have to bring God down from His high requirements. Rather, it's the offending party of man He brings. We see Jesus as the connector who, through His life, connects us to the very person of God himself. Jesus, God in human form.

We don't understand how God can be this way. The fact that we can't understand that is tremendous. I'd be worried if you could understand the nature of God. That would tell me you're as wise as God. I wouldn't be surprised that the God of the universe has something we could not understand. There is one God and one Mediator between man and God, the man Christ Jesus who gave His life as a ransom for us. The term "ransom" is so powerful.

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We're understanding it much better now with the warfare and terrorist activity that's happening in our world. The Lord's view of the earth is that all of us are chained here; none of us can go to be with the Father in heaven. Therefore, Jesus comes to earth as the ransom, the One who pays the price on the Cross that is necessary for us to walk free, released. Christ has done something that allows us to go totally free. Therefore, Paul is able to say of Him that He was the ransom for all. The testimony that was born at the proper time. Paul says, "For this I was appointed an apostle and a teacher."

This is a key statement. What does this have to do with God being mediator? But it's very important. Paul is saying that the work of the Cross is never complete unless it is communicated. Christ has died in vain unless that news is communicated to someone else. Christ has triumphed over Satan on the Cross and in His resurrection, and the war is won. But the news needs to be announced to those who still think that the other is true.

Paul says, "I was appointed a herald of this, a preacher, one who declares this." One apostle, one who is sent out to tell it. And furthermore, a teacher, one who tells a person how to live based upon this message. God is one and there is one Mediator.

III. How should we pray?

When he's through with that digression he gets back to prayer. You can understand how Paul can be a long-winded speaker. He gets off track. But he comes back. He says, "I desire that in every place the men should pray lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling." Obviously, this is referring to public prayer. Lifting holy hands was a common Jewish practice in the synagogue, and was among many of the pagans as well. It was a traditional position of posture in prayer. The apostle is saying, "I would that men would do this—lift holy hands."

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What's meant by having holy hands? What source of activity can the hands be directly engaged in which would cause them to be unholy? Look through the Ten Commandments. The commandments I can break with my hands are the commandments which will make me unholy. Don't make any graven images. Don't touch anything that is an idol. Don't have any participation in its making. Don't have anything to do with the occult or anything that smacks of religion that's not of God. Do not murder—and Jesus says it's not only the act of murder but the spirit of murder and therefore anything that would cause injury to another person would make my hands unholy. Do not commit adultery. The whole aspect of immorality in which the hands are vital parts of the body used in sexual stimulation, used right or wrong—wrongly in homosexuality, fornication, adultery—those cause the hands to become unholy. And not only that, with my hands I can steal.

So the apostle says when you pray, pray with holy hands. How do you get holy hands? Through effort? No. It's first of all coming to Jesus for His forgiveness and cleansing and then living as a Christian. And abstaining from those kinds of things which defile our hands.

Lift holy hands without anger and without quarreling. There are two words in the Greek for "anger." One is when you get red-hot mad for a short period of time, just blaze up and then it goes away. Over as quick as it came up. The other type of anger is one which is long-seated and deep, lasting. Both, in Scripture, we're to put away. But in this particular passage it's the long deep-seated anger which is being spoken of.

Paul is saying that you cannot pray if you're in enmity with your brother in anger. Then he says, "Lift up your hands without quarreling." One way you can quarrel is to go to the Lord and ask Him to prove your argument for you. But the Lord says there's a milder way, out of humility—open eyes of understanding. Another way of quarreling, from the word we derive "dialogue." It

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can mean inner conflicting doubts and skepticism, which on the one hand you come to God in prayer and on the other hand say, “I don’t believe You can do it, God. I don’t trust You at this point. I’m coming in verbiage but not in conviction.” The apostle Paul is saying for the men, and I believe it can apply to all of us, we’re to pray with holy hands without anger or without quarreling.

From that, Paul goes on to tell about the role of women, where we’ll pick up next week.

As we prepare for Communion, who in that photographic gallery is there who you don’t really want to pray for. Who you may have never prayed for and the Lord is saying, “Pray for kings and those in high positions. That person may be in a high position in your life. Pray for them.