

Session 1

PRAYING FOR OUR NATION AND TRUSTING GOD

1 Timothy 2:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14,17

Memory Verse

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

– 1 PETER 2:13-14, CSB



The Gospel and Politics

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Those redeemed by the King of all kings and Lord of all lords are called to live as citizens of His Kingdom by orienting their lives around the purposes of the Kingdom.

 If you were going on a five-day hike through snow-covered terrain, what would you wear?

 What kind of footwear would you choose? Why?

If you were leading a group of people on a difficult hike and a young lady showed up in a prom dress and high heels, what would you do? The group would probably think that outfit was comical for the setting, and they would be right. But the situation is actually much more serious than that. This young lady is in real danger if she tries to make her way through the forest, over rocks, through creeks, and over mountains in that attire. Her fancy clothes will actually hinder her. They aren't made for the kind of journey that she is embarking on.

Christians are on a journey not unlike an arduous trek through the wilderness. Christians are pilgrims in a strange land. They are citizens of a Kingdom that is not of this world, and their treasure and hope is not found in the things that this world can offer.

When Christians seek to make money, careers, property, popularity, comfort, success, or politics their hope and security, they are like a hiker in inappropriate footwear. The cares of this world will only serve to slow down their progress on the straight path toward the narrow gate. They will only cause them to become distracted from the plans and purposes of the King in their lives and in the world.

Session Summary

Our passage today makes up part of Paul's first letter to his young protégé, Timothy. During that time, Rome ruled the world, and the Roman emperor was considered to be divine and demanded homage. Furthermore, local magistrates were Romans and pagans and were interested in the advancement of Roman interests, and not primarily the security and well being of Christians.

In this passage Paul's purpose was to give a general description of how Christians should live and what their orientation toward the realities of this present life ought to be. Paul's counsel is especially relevant to Christians today who seek to live faithfully in their interaction with government. First, Paul explained what Christians ought to do, then he explained why they ought to do it.

1. Oriented Toward the Kingdom (1 Tim. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17)



What was Paul's exhortation in 1 Timothy 2:1-2? What is noteworthy about this?

Paul told Timothy that the Christians in Ephesus should pray for those who rule over them. No doubt, Paul intended that they pray for all people, but he especially named "kings and all those who are in authority." This is a striking exhortation if we take time to consider it, as this isn't well fitted with what our modern Western culture holds in high regard.

Paul's counsel here made several things clear. First, prayer is powerful and effective. Paul exhorted Timothy to pray because he believed that it would bring about a result ("so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity"). Prayer is powerful and

effective only insofar as it is made by those who are in Christ and as it is in accordance with the will of God. Furthermore, prayer is powerful and effective because He who is being petitioned is mighty and able, not because there is inherent power in the petitioner.

Secondly, Christians are instructed that their primary involvement with government and politics is to be through the practice of prayer. This isn't to say that Christians shouldn't run for office or vote. To the contrary, Christians should contribute to the well being of their communities in practical and legitimate ways. However, to do so without prayer is to act in one's own strength. A Christian who doesn't pray is an impotent, prideful, misguided Christian. Those who claim Christ yet lean on their own understanding and do what is right in their own eyes would be better off not to claim the name of Christ at all.

Thirdly, Christians are to be oriented toward Kingdom purposes as they consider how they might interact with governing authorities.



What does it mean to be oriented toward the Kingdom of God as a citizen of the United States (or any other country)?

Christians cherish and pledge allegiance to the Kingdom of God above all. This means that they look to the priorities and values that accompany their citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20-21) in order to determine how they live as temporary citizens of an earthly kingdom.

Notice that Paul instructed that prayers be made for rulers so that the Christians in Ephesus might live godly and dignified lives. This served two purposes. First, the believers would live in accordance with God's Word, thus pleasing their true King. Secondly, their godly and dignified lives would prepare the way for an unbelieving world to hear the gospel message. Diligent prayer and personal godliness are integral to the faithful preaching of the gospel.

To be a Kingdom-oriented citizen of the United States (or any other country) means that Christians pray for open doors for the advancement of the gospel even through pagan rulers. It also means that Christians' most important political activism takes place in their prayer closets through agonizing prayer.

? According to 1 Peter 2:13-17, what counsel did Peter give in regards to a Christian's posture toward governing authorities?

Peter instructed Christians to "submit to" and "honor" governing authorities. He reasoned that Christians would "silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good." In other words, Christians who honor and live in godly submission to the mayor of their town, the governor of their state, and the president of the country will silence ignorant people. Submission to governing authorities is tied to the advancement of the gospel.

? Application: If you placed one marble in a jar for every 30-minute period you spent praying for the government and did the same for every 30-minute period you spent talking about, watching, or reading about politics, how would those two jars compare? How are you challenged by this picture?

2. The King of the Kingdom (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

? According to verses 3-4, why did Paul want the believers in Ephesus to pray with a focus on gospel conversations?

We might say that Paul instructed the believers to pray in that way because there were many lost people in Ephesus who needed to be saved, which would be true. Or, we might say that they should have prayed that way so that the church in Ephesus, which Timothy led, would grow larger. We may even say that Paul wanted to see that Kingdom of God expanded.

Paul gave the reason in verse 4: God desired for people to be saved. Remember, those Christians in Ephesus were citizens of Rome, yes, but they were foremost citizens of the Kingdom of heaven. Further, the King of that Kingdom desired that more people in Ephesus would repent of sin and place their faith in Christ. Remember, citizens of the Kingdom of heaven live in a way that is oriented toward the purposes of their eternal King, regardless of their own desires or the purposes of the temporal, earthly kingdom in which they live.



How can citizens of the Kingdom of God know how to live in accord with the will of their Sovereign?

Citizens of the United States look to and cherish their founding documents as a means by which they may structure and govern society. The Constitution, of course, is the primary of these writings. This document has been preserved so that the mind of the founders might be preserved in regard to the ways in which the government of the United States should be carried out today.

Similarly, the King of Christians has preserved for them a founding document by which they might know the mind of their King and how to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. Here we see “it pleases God our Savior” that people would “be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The Scriptures are a lamp to the feet of Christians and a light to their path (Ps. 119:105). It is for this reason that Christians cling to and cherish the Bible, their founding document. In it they find all that they need for all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. The Scriptures are sufficient and inerrant.

? Application: If you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God, do you cherish and pour over the Scriptures? What hindrances prevent you from reading the Scriptures as you should? What habits have you developed that help you be attentive to God's Word?

3. The Key to the Kingdom (1 Tim. 2:5-7)

Finally, Paul explained the motivation for praying toward gospel conversations.

? Would you say that Paul described a gospel that is inclusive or exclusive in verses 5-6? Why do you answer as you do?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is exclusive in that the only way to be reconciled to God the Father is through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). And John wrote, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11-12).

The Bible teaches that only those who have been justified by faith in the shed blood of Christ on the cross will spend eternity with God in heaven. The Scriptures are clear that Christ is the exclusive way to the Father. This exclusivity compels Christians to tell others about Christ. If heaven is so good and Jesus' sacrifice is the only means to be reconciled to the Father, then the gospel message should be on the lips of Christians at every opportunity.

? What does the exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ have to do with preaching the gospel?

Let's consider an illustration: Suppose you come upon a house that is in flames and you can see on the second-floor balcony that there is a young woman trying to escape. Furthermore, you can see that the inside of the house is consumed with flames, and there is no way for her to escape except by jumping from the balcony. She, on the other hand, can't see what you see and she is about to try to make her way through the house looking for an escape. You, of course, will call to her pleading with her to jump. You would try to communicate to her that there is no other escape, even if she thinks differently.

Heralds of the gospel, as Paul was and as every Christian is called to be, are like the person calling to the woman on the balcony. Christians know that there is no escape from the punishment and condemnation of sin except through Christ. Every other door is locked. All other avenues are dead-ends.

This is the reason that Jesus' final teaching to His disciples was, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" and "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Matt. 28:19 and Acts 1:8).



Application: Are you a herald of the gospel? How might you share the gospel with someone this week? Today even? What hinders you from being a witness about Jesus Christ? Why must the gospel be primary in our conversation with others over all things including political discourse?

Conclusion

To be a Kingdom-oriented citizen of the United States (or any other country) means that Christians pray for open doors for the advancement of the gospel even through pagan rulers. It also means that Christians' most important political activism takes place through prayer.

Furthermore, Christians seek to please their eternal King and live according to His purposes before submitting to the purposes of the earthly kingdom in which they find themselves. This means that they are people of the Book.

Finally, citizens of the Kingdom are to be about the business of announcing the good news of the Kingdom to all those within their sphere.

? What effect does politics have upon your soul? Do you spend as much time praying about those matters as you do watching the news or fretting about them?

? What are some practical steps you can take to be a person of prayer in matters of government and politics? Which citizenship is more important to you, your earthly or eternal citizenship?

? How often do you have gospel conversations others? What contributes to this reality? What needs to change?

CHRIST CONNECTION: In Christ, God has redeemed and will continue to redeem people from all of the families of the earth.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Until the return of Christ, Christians are to conduct their affairs on earth as citizens of His kingdom. This means that all of their lives are shaped and informed by the gospel. The advancement of the gospel (and with it, the Kingdom) is to be their primary concern.



FOR NEXT WEEK

The Church: Better Together

Main Passages

- 1 Peter 2:1-10

Session Outline

1. Fitting Living (1 Pet. 2:1-3)
3. Real Identity (1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10)
4. A Stone in Zion (1 Pet. 2:6-8)

Memorize

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

- 1 Peter 2:13-14, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 Timothy 2:1-7
- Tuesday - 1 Peter 2:13-14, 17
- Wednesday - Romans 13:1-7
- Thursday - Proverbs 21:1
- Friday - Matthew 22:17-22
- Saturday - Psalm 33:10-12