

Prayers for All

Beginning Paul's Instructions to the Church

1Tim 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all people**,

² for **kings and all who are in high positions**, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,

⁴ who desires **all people** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

⁶ who gave himself as a ransom **for all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

(1 Timothy 2:1-7)

Prayer in Church?

Many years ago, my wife and I took a two-thousand-mile **road tour of Britain**. We began in London, made our way up to York, crossed the border to Edinburgh, then to Glasgow. We came back across and on into Wales before turning to England's Windsor and back into London. On this trip we toured many of **the most famous cathedrals** on

the Isle of the Mighty. Something struck me as a life-long Baptist that stays with me to this day. No matter where we went, every hour on the hour, over the intercom system came about a minute long prayer.

The prayer was nearly always the same. I remember them praying for the people visiting, for the country, for the crown (particularly the Queen), and for the spread of the Gospel. And, without fail, they also made sure in an announcement either before or after, that all the visitors to these amazing archeological accomplishments remembered that these were not mere tourist destinations. They were active churches. Jesus, quoting from the words he long before told Isaiah said, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’” (Isa 56:7; Matt 21:13).

Many Baptists are proud of the fact that they never ever say rote prayers, written prayers, non-spontaneous prayers. I’m not really sure why that is. Perhaps it is because they believe if it doesn’t come from the heart, it can’t be a real prayer and then they assume that if it is something that someone else wrote or forces you to say together, it can’t come from your heart. Whatever the case, England was my first personal exposure to something like this. I found what they did meaningful. Not only did they pray regularly in

those churches, but they prayed, as Paul says, “for all who are in high positions” (1Ti 2:2).

As I’ve thought about this over the years, I’ve been struck by something. If saying rote prayers over and over is one end of a spectrum, not praying anything must be the other. A dozen years ago, Grant Osborne (prof. at TEDS) wrote a convicting article on the history of corporate prayer from Judaism to ancient Christianity on down to today.¹ At the end of a lengthy discussion where he demonstrates that corporate prayer was in many places the main staple of the service, he laments a troubling fact that you either already know far too well yourself or has never crossed your mind. “It is sad that in the average church today so little prayer is uttered in the service, and so little time is given over to corporate prayer in church life.”²

The churches I grew up in never prayed anything out loud together. This, despite the fact that the Lord’s Prayer, commanded by our Savior, is full of corporate rather than personal pronouns (“Our” Father, not “my” Father; give “us” not give “me;” lead “us” not lead “me;” etc.; we never

¹ Grant R. Osborne, “Moving Forward on Our Knees: Corporate Prayer in the New Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 2 (2010): 243-67.

² Ibid., 267. See also John Spina, “Corporate Prayer in the Book of Acts: Lessons for the American Church,” MAR Thesis to Reformed Theological Seminary (1976), <https://rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/201305-Spina-John.pdf>.

prayed the Lord's Prayer in a single service that I remember). They still had time for some kind of pastoral prayer, which usually lasted about a minute or two and often only asked God to heal a couple of sick people in the congregation and to help us understand the sermon. Rarely did we pray for other churches, missionaries, for governors or presidents. Never did we pray together confession of sin and prayers of repentance. Sadly, corporate prayer itself is altogether void in the worship of God in far too many American churches.

Compare this to the old Puritans. One biographer explains of one Dr. Lord of Norwich that he,

... always made a prayer which was one hour long; and an early Dutch traveller who visited New England asserted that he had heard there on Fast Day a prayer which was two hours long. These long prayers were universal and most highly esteemed,--a "poor gift in prayer" being a most deplored and even despised clerical short-coming. Had not the Puritans left the Church of England to escape "stinted prayers"? ... Everywhere in the Puritan Church, precatory eloquence as evinced in long prayers was felt to be the greatest glory of the minister, and the highest tribute to God.³

³ Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 79-80. Now consider that the entire congregation stood for at least half of the prayer!

What has happened? If, as some have said, “Worship is the only proper response to a sovereign God who is personally involved in our lives, and prayer is the primary means by which we respond in worship,”⁴ and if prayer is, “the central phenomenon of religion, the very hearthstone of all piety,”⁵ and if “Praying is the most important thing God’s people do,”⁶ and if, as our Lord himself commands, we are to pray corporate prayers together “like this” (Matt 6:9; Luke 11:2, “When you pray, say...”), what has gone wrong? I suspect a couple of things. First, we have a bad theology of prayer. Second, and more fundamentally, we have a bad theology of God.

“In nearly all the churches the assembled people stood during prayer-time (since kneeling and bowing the head savored of Romish idolatry) and in the middle of his petition the minister usually made a long pause in order that any who were infirm or ill might let down their slamming pew-seats and sit down; those who were merely weary stood patiently to the long and painfully deferred end. This custom of standing during prayer-time prevailed in the Congregational churches in New England until quite a recent date, and is not yet obsolete in isolated communities and in solitary cases. I have seen within a few years, in a country church, a feeble, white-haired old deacon rise tremblingly at the preacher's solemn words "Let us unite in prayer," and stand with bowed head throughout the long prayer; thus pathetically clinging to the reverent custom of the olden time, he rendered tender tribute to vanished youth, gave equal tribute to eternal hope and faith, and formed a beautiful emblem of patient readiness for the last solemn summons” (80)

⁴ Osborne, 267.

⁵ Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), xi, cited in Dustin Bengel, “Origen on Prayer,” *Reformation21* (Sept 17, 2018), <https://www.reformation21.org/articles/origen-on-prayer.php>.

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 59.

1 Timothy 2:1-7: Context and Structure

Our passage begins **the meat of 1 Timothy**. Specifically, it begins his instructions that the pastor of the church at Ephesus is to communicate and **carry out in the church**. As such, it is especially focused on **corporate church life**.

We can ask a question as we begin. **Is prayer really the most important thing God's people do?** By this I mean “do *together*.” That's difficult to answer because there are so many important things. But it should be noticed that in his exhortation to the church corporate, the Apostle begins by saying, “*First of all..*” (1Tim 2:1) and then launches into at least eight verses dealing with **corporate prayer**. That would at least lend itself to making prayer at least a possible number one on the list.

I've chosen to look at **1 Timothy 2:1-7**, because **vs. 8**, while also dealing with prayer, is **transitional** with the next section. We can see this by noticing the way the chapter is organized. On one hand, **the entire chapter** is chiasmic:

- A. “Therefore,” “first,” “prayers,” “quiet,” “all godliness,” “saved” (2:1-3)
- B. “Truth” (4)
- C. “One God” (5a)
- C'. “One Mediator” (5a-6)
- B'. “Truth” (7)
- A'. “Therefore,” “pray,” “godliness,” “all,” “quietness,” “first,” “saved” (8-15)⁷

⁷ Jeon, Paul S., *1 Timothy: A Charge to God's Missional Household* vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), Kindle Edition. The Admin at *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* and Smith (see next note) see something very similar. It is also important to see the chiasmic relationship between 2:1-15 and

On the other hand, the ch, is easily divided into two halves:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. “Prayers” (2:1-3) B. “Truth” (4) C. “One God” (5a) C’. “One Mediator” (5a-6) B’. “Truth” (7) A’. “Pray” (8) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Women: proper adornment (2:9-10) B. Woman learn quietly (11) C. Woman/Man/authority (12a) B’. Woman remain quiet (12b) A’. Women/men/childbearing (13-15)⁸ |
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6:1-22 (this will have implications for how we interpret the whole chapter, see chart below from [Marko A. Nagasawa](http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/paul_1timothy-chiasm-&-women-as-elders.pdf), “The Implications of the Chiastic Structure of 1 Timothy on the Question of Women in Church Leadership,” *New Humanity Institute* [July 13, 2021], http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/paul_1timothy-chiasm-&-women-as-elders.pdf).

B. The Christian Household and Witness, Part 1 (2:1 – 15)	B.’ The Christian Household and Witness, Part 2 (6:1 – 11)
That we may lead a tranquil and quiet life (2:2)	That the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against (6:1)
<i>Respect authority:</i> for king and all who are in authority (2:1 – 2)	<i>Respect authority:</i> for masters (6:1 – 2)
Life in all godliness and dignity (2:2, 10)	Conforming to godliness... godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment (6:3 – 6)
Entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgiving (2:1)	Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (6:11)
God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved (2:3 – 4)	Foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction (6:9)
Knowledge of the truth... I was appointed... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth (2:4, 7)	Teach and preach... sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ... deprived of the truth (6:2, 3, 5)
I was appointed... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith (2:7)	Some by longing for [money] have wandered away from the faith (6:10)
<i>Materialism critiqued:</i> modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments (2:9)	<i>Materialism critiqued:</i> But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil... (6:6 – 11)
<i>Submissiveness:</i> A wife must quietly receive instructions with entire submissiveness (2:11)	<i>Service:</i> Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more (6:2)
<i>Deception:</i> And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression (2:14)	<i>Deception:</i> He... understands nothing... of depraved mind and deprived of the truth (6:3 – 6)
Childbearing (2:15)	We have brought nothing into the world (6:7)

⁸ Modified from [Christine Smith](https://www.alittleperspective.com/1-timothy-2-2016/), “1 Timothy 2,” *A Little Perspective* (Sept 26, 2016), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/1-timothy-2-2016/>.

Or put another way:

1. Corporate Prayer in the Church (1-8)
2. Men/man Women/woman (8-15)

... where men praying with holy hands (vs. 8) is the end of the first and beginning of the second half of the chapter.

Corporate Prayer

All Kinds of Prayers

As we move into our passage, we begin answering the first problem—a **bad theology of prayer**. Prayer is the first thing Timothy is told to urge his church to practice together. As such, a bad theology of prayer would put prayer down much lower on the “importance” scale.

A bad theology of prayer, I believe, would also include **a stunted understanding of the kinds of prayers** that there are and perhaps even more important, **the sorts of attitude** a person should have when offering them to God. Remember, the prayers of the saints are the spiritual equivalent of offering physical incense in the temple (**Rev 5:8; cf. Ps 141:2**). Therefore, clearly, the heart must be in a prayer.

The Apostle mentions four terms: **supplications** (*deēseis*), **prayers** (*proseuchas*), **intercessions** (*enteuxeis*), and **thanksgivings** (*eucharistias*). Since I've mentioned this a couple of times already, it is worth beginning where Matthew Henry does. He notices, “**Paul does not send him any prescribed form of prayer, as we have reason to think he would if he had intended that ministers should be tied to that way of praying.**”⁹ Henry's point goes back to the earliest Reformers and it is worth thinking about. Philip Schaff wrote about **prayer in the Reformation liturgies** of Zwingli, Farel, and Calvin that they adopted,

... that simple and spiritual mode of worship which is well adapted for intelligent devotion, if it be animated by the quickening presence and power of the Spirit of God, but becomes ... barren, cold and chilly if that power is wanting ... [They] open[ed] the inexhaustible fountain of free prayer in public worship, with its endless possibilities of application to varying circumstances and wants ... [and] congregational singing, which is the true popular liturgy and more effective than the reading of written forms of prayer.¹⁰

⁹ **Matthew Henry**, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2352.

¹⁰ **Philip Schaff**, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII., p. 379, cited in Thomas Cary Johnson, *John Calvin and The Genevan Reformation: A Sketch*. (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1900), 38.

Earlier I said that many Baptists take pride in never saying rote prayers. The point seems to be that prayer that God desires should be spontaneous and from the heart. There is no question that liturgies with the same prayers every week *can become monotonous*, and people can lose their hearts as their lips merely mimic the words. God does not desire this.

However, a written or often recited prayer is not bad any more than the Lord's Prayer is somehow bad because it was written down for us and Jesus told us to pray it together. The problem is not the prayer, *but us*. In some ways, the liturgy forces you to pay attention and to care in ways that you often don't have to practice when everything is spontaneous. The true worship of God, including prayer, can only at best be modeled by others. It is you yourself who must put in the effort to worship the God who saved you.

That said, it is clear that these particular prayers are in fact *not written or memorized beforehand*. So what are they? My mind first goes to a modern acronym also containing four kinds of prayers, which I have used to help people learn the different types of prayer. **ACTS** stands for prayers of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and

Supplication. At least two of these overlap with the four given in our passage.

Many Christians are stuck on the first: **supplication**. It is not uncommon to go into a prayer meeting and hear almost exclusively, prayers of supplication. Supplication means to ask or beg for something earnestly or humbly. We can define this as “**making requests for specific needs,**”¹¹ “**a prayer offered with entreaty to get something a person lacks,**”¹² or “**a plea or petition made on account of present and past sin by someone who is moved by contrition to seek pardon.**”¹³ At its worst, this is treating God like **a genie in a bottle**, rub three times and get your wish. At its best, it is trusting God to intervene in any number of ways that are important to you. As Jesus told us in the parable of the persistent widow, keep going before the Father in heaven, “**pray and do not lose heart**” (**Luke 1:18ff**).

It seems that this kind of prayer is what comes most naturally to us. For we are all like little children who

¹¹ **George Knight**, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 115.

¹² **Origen**, *On Prayer* 14.2 in *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer; First Principles: Book IV; Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs; Homily XXVII on Numbers*, ed. Richard J. Payne, trans. Rowan A. Greer, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 109.

¹³ **John Cassian**, *Conferences* 1.9.11, in *John Cassian: Conferences*, ed. John Farina, trans. Colm Luibheid, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 108.

constantly want our dad to give us stuff. Long ago, [John Cassian](#) (360 – 453) wrote a wonderful treatise on prayer (*Conferences* 9). Whatever else you may think of them, hermits, friars, and monastics became such, in part, to master the art of prayer. The old monk made an astute observation about this verse, calling this first kind of prayer, “*especially appropriate for beginnings, for they are still goaded by the stings and by the memory of past sin.*”¹⁴ Isn’t that interesting? He attaches [confession](#) to supplication. I’ll return to this in a moment.

Moving on, he [sees a progression in growing in prayer](#) with each word. He calls the second type, “*appropriate for those who are making progress in the acquisition of virtue and in the exaltedness of their souls.*” In fact, he sees the next two as being even higher levels of prayer in ascending order, saying,

The third is suitable for those who live as they have promised to do, who see the frailty of others and who speak out for them because of the charity that moves them. The fourth suits those who have pulled the painful thorn of penitence out of their hearts and who in the quiet of their purified spirit contemplate the kindness and mercy that the Lord has shown

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.9.15.

them in the past, that He gives them now and that He makes ready for them in the future.¹⁵

This second kind of prayer, simply called “prayers,” is what he calls “offering or promising something to God.”¹⁶ Others have called it “something nobler offered by a person with praise and for greater objects,”¹⁷ and “bringing those in view before God.”¹⁸

Origen, who wrote the first true systematic treatise on prayer in church history, also saw an increasing order to prayer in this list, calling the next (“intercessions”), “a petition for certain things addressed to God by someone who has some *greater boldness*,”¹⁹ with particular emphasis on the Spirit’s interceding for us. More simply, they are “appealing boldly on [other’s] behalf,”²⁰ or as Cassian says, prayers “usually ma[d]e .. others when we ourselves are *deeply moved in spirit*.”²¹

Finally, “thanksgivings” (from which we derive the word Eucharist) are, as the word says, prayers of

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.9.15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1.9.12.

¹⁷ Origen, *On Prayer*, 14.2.

¹⁸ Knight, 115.

¹⁹ Origen, *On Prayer*, 14.2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cassian, *Conferences* 1.9.13.

“thankfulness” either “for them,”²² that is prayers answered, or when God holds out a future reward to those who love Him and the mind gives thanks.²³ There are all kinds of biblical examples of each word being used for prayer,²⁴ and I think that enough people at least understand the concepts that I need say little more about that.

However, I want to point out something that Cassian more than others focuses on. This is the attitude that accompanies these prayers. More than a bare list of ways to pray or types of prayer, is the disposition of the heart in the prayer.²⁵ He had said that supplications come from those “still goaded by the stings and by the memory of past sin.” He calls “prayers” promises that we offer or vows to God. In these we renounce this world, undertake to die to all the world’s deeds, to serve the Lord with all our heart’s zeal, to despise worldly glory and earth’s riches, to cling to the Lord with a contrite heart and spirit of poverty, to put on the purest bodily chastity and unswerving patience, to drag completely from our hearts the root of anger, our own laziness, our sinful ways. In intercessions we are “deeply

²² Knight, 115; also Origen.

²³ Cassian, 1.9.14.

²⁴ Origen gives a litany. See *On Prayer* 14.3-6.

²⁵ I was led to Cassian and to notice this in Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 106.

moved in spirit.” In thanksgivings, we are “unspeakably moved” by God’s past kindness or the vision of what he now grants or grants in the future to those who love him. Indeed, as all the Reformers later knew far too well, prayers, including those in your private life and especially those in church, must be done from each individual heart desiring to unite their minds and desires with that of Triune God.

All Kinds of People

If this is the kinds of prayers and dispositions the church must offer and have, the Apostle wants Timothy to focus on a very specific content that each of these prayers must have. This is the specific types of people to be prayed for. It is quite natural to supplicate and make intercession for family and friends—loved ones. Too many people stop here. There is a key word that begins our first verse. “First of all...” (1Tim 2:1). The Greek literally reads, “I beseech you, first of all...” All. “All” will become the dominating word of the passage. Of all the things Paul will talk about, this is the first.

The word appears again at the end of the verse. These kinds of prayers are to be made for “all people...” The meaning here is clear. If you can think of a person, you

cannot exclude them from these kinds of prayers. All people includes ... *all people*. God does not give you permission to not pray for someone with supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings. It was once communicated to me that a member of our church was angry at me. Someone else told her, “Why don’t you pray for him?” This particular woman used to pray for me very specifically in ways that I don’t remember many others ever doing. It was a blessing. But once she got angry, she told the other person, “I couldn’t do that!!!” This is a direct violation of Paul’s command here. She eventually ended up leaving the church. I pray she has gotten over her anger at this point.

There is one particular group of people that many really do not want to pray for, unless it is imprecatory curses: governors, politicians, kings, presidents, national leadership. Like much of the rest of this letter, we enter just now into a mine field that will not let up until we are finished with the passage. What are the hidden bombs here? Paul literally says to pray for “kings and all who are in high positions [*hyperochē*; lit. from *huper* meaning “above” and *echō* meaning “to have”]” (2:1). The first difficulty is peculiar to the modern world. In America, we have no kings. The second difficulty can be brought out by the NIV translation,

“... all those in *authority*.” In America, our **government officials are not our authority**, *unless they act in agreement and harmony with our Constitution*. Only to that end do they have any authority, legally. That’s just the way our government operates. Sadly, too many people are ignorant of their own countries inner-workings. Our governing officials are technically not authorities at all. They are *servants*. Our authority is a legal document that guarantees the rights of all citizens and sets the limitations on those servants.

Now is not the time to get too far afield and discuss the pertinent issues of the gross abuses of tyrannical presidents, senators, congressmen, governors, mayors, city council, and school board members as it regards their duties and usurpation of our rule of law, other than to say these things. **First**, our passage **does not give excuse** to tyrants. Nor does it limit the kinds of prayers we may offer, including imprecatory if need be. **Second**, our passage is not dealing specifically with ways we can combat tyrants while also praying for them, and still be acting faithfully to God’s word. It simply focuses on **praying for them**. **Finally**, no matter how bad things are or get with the abuses and current Color Revolution in our Republic, kings of old were no better.

Do not idolize the old days. Caesars and kings have been putting Christians to death for thousands of years. Calvin pointed out that in his day all the rulers in his time were “enemies of the Gospel, persecutors of the poor Christians, murderers, and wicked men.”²⁶ Due only to God’s kind hand of Providence and the incredible foresight of a lot of smart men, we have not historically been on that more common side of the persecution equation.

The point is, this made them people that were hard to pray for. Curiously, traditional prayers in Jewish synagogues did not include prayers for authority, especially Gentiles! This makes prayer for such rulers a peculiarly Christian trait! And yet, given all this, this is precisely the command given to Timothy. Ambrosiaster, who had just lived through the persecution of Emperor Julian (361-63), has a fascinating take on these four words as it relates to this.

“Supplications” are on behalf of secular rulers, that they may have obedient subjects ... “Prayers” are for those to whom power has been entrusted, that they may govern with justice and truth ... “Intercessions” are for those in dire necessity,

²⁶ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy & Titus* (London, 1579; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 129.²⁶

that they may find help. And “thanksgivings” refer to gratitude for God’s daily providences.

(**Ambrosiaster**, *Commentary on the First Letter to Timothy*)²⁷

If I might restate, half of those prayers are for those unlovable leaders. The other half *is for us*, so that we might learn to pray for them!

An example of a very early prayer obeying this very command is **Clement of Rome** (d. 99 AD)²⁸ who prayed perhaps as early as just prior to 70 AD,

Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, harmony and stability, that they may blamelessly administer the government which you have given them ... Lord, direct their plans according to what is good and pleasing in your sight, so that by devoutly administering in peace and gentleness the authority which you have given them they may experience your mercy.

(1 Clement 61).

And yet, Ryken, and I think rightly so, says that “**the kind of prayer the apostle Paul especially has in mind is evangelistic**

²⁷ In **Peter Gorday**, *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 9. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 152–153.

²⁸ While I do not believe Peter founded the church at Rome, he could have become Bishop there. Rome itself puts Clement as the fourth Bishop of that church, behind only Anacletus, Linus, and Peter. That’s how early Clement is.

prayer. It is intercession for the salvation of souls. This is clear from the rest of the passage, which is about God’s plan for the salvation of the world” [emphasis added].²⁹ We’ll come to that mine-field in a moment.

But first, the Apostle gives us a reason. If we must pray for those we want to curse, **it had better be a good one!** “That we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior...” (1Tim 2:2b-3). This was exactly Ambrosiaster’s point, for he said, “‘Supplications’ are on behalf of secular rulers, that they may have obedient subjects, *and thus peace and tranquility*. ‘Prayers’ are for those to whom power has been entrusted, that they may govern with justice and truth, *so that all may prosper...*”

What an interesting and **very powerful enticement** to obey. It is *for your own well-being* that you offer up such prayers. Someone might call this inherently selfish. Oh well. The law (Lev 19:18), and Jesus (Matt 19:19) teach us to **love our neighbor as we love ourselves** (the pronoun is singular). If you didn’t love yourself, you would do terrible things to yourself. Self-esteem was not an invention of secular

²⁹ Ryken, 59.

psychology. It is part of the proper understanding of the inherent dignity of man.

Peaceful and quiet lives is put in context of godly and dignified lives. Here comes [another potential mine](#). Ryken's comments are worth hearing,

Christians are not always known as peacemakers. This was true already during Paul's lifetime, when Christians were blamed for the burning of Rome.^[30] It was also true during the Reformation. Calvin first wrote his *Institutes* (1536) to show that the [Reformers were not trying to undermine the social order](#). The church's reputation is in need of almost continual defense, for Christian involvement in public life is often greeted with skepticism, even hostility. This is partly because the gospel is so radical that Christians are always potential revolutionaries. Yet in the face of opposition, God wants his people to keep it quiet. He wants them to lead orderly, dignified, reverent lives in all tranquility and serenity. In the words of the New English Bible, Christians are to maintain "full observance of religion and high standards of morality." They are to be respectful and respectable.³¹

³⁰ I believe this was a false flag made up by Nero so that he could justify burning the city and rebuilding his own palace in its center. See [Douglas Van Dorn](#), *Conspiracy Theory: A Christian Evaluation of a Taboo Subject* (Dacono, Colorado: Waters of Creation pub., 2020), 31-33

³¹ [Ryken](#), 61–62.

I'll make **two needed qualifications** here. **First**, Paul's is a comment on church worship, not the individual obligations to justice in the face of tyranny. The Reformers did plenty of standing up to evil. Paul is writing to the church, not to individual Christians and their involvement in the world. **Second**, as the church carries out its quiet, dignified, orderly life, praying in such ways, part of that job is to speak God's truth when a society endangers its people because of gross sin. We are even to pray against it. Those are not in opposition. Zwingli understood the balance,

If the two brightest luminaries of our faith, Jeremiah and Paul, both command us to pray to the Lord for the powers that be, that we may be enabled to live a godly life, how much more is it the duty of all people in the different kingdoms and peoples to attempt and accomplish all that they can to safeguard Christian quietness. We teach, therefore, that tributes, taxes, dues, tithes, pledges, loans, and all kinds of obligations should be paid and that the common laws *should generally be obeyed* in such matters. [Emphasis mine]

(**Huldrych Zwingli**, *Exposition of the Faith*)³²

³² Cited in **Gatiss**, 133.

Ryken continues,

The reason Paul insisted on good deportment is that it is essential to the witness of the church. Christians who do not pray for their political leaders tend to disturb the peace. They are cynical about their political opponents and rejoice when they fall into disgrace ... [But] as **John Chrysostom** rightly claimed, “no one can feel hatred towards those for whom he prays.”³³ Prayer replaces hostility with compassion.

The point is, anyone, be it a king or an elected official, or a school board official, **anyone** who has been charged with the duty to make and carry out law and to govern a land, **is to be prayed for**. Not just with lips, but *with the heart*. You are to be fervently interceding for them. Not just the ones you love, but those you don't. Not only for those who obey, but for those who do not. Not just imprecatory psalms, but psalms for their salvation, wisdom, well-being, obedience to God, and care for those they lead. This is for your good!

³³ **John Chrysostom**, “Homilies on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon,” trans. and ed. **Philip Schaff**, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, 14 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 13:426.

God Desires All to be Saved

But there is a deeper motivation that is given, and in it we move from potential bad theology about prayer, to potential bad theology about God. Now we enter into a second major mine-field. It isn't just that it is pleasing in God's sight that we ourselves be dignified and godly in our conduct towards authority. No. These prayers are directed at these people because it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (4).

Note our word "all" again. This is its fourth appearance in four verses. It means the same thing in every instance. "All without exception." We are to pray for all people without exception. We don't get to say, "No, God told me not to pray for him." This includes all kings and all in high positions of authority, no exceptions. We aren't allowed to say, "Well, he committed a coup and isn't duly elected, so I'm off the hook." In like manner, God desires all people, without exception, to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.³⁴

³⁴ The following list is a partial one of Reformed theologians who have taught this: Simon Kistemaker, Asahal Nettleton, William Brenton Greene, Thomas Manton, Richard Baxter, Robert Murray McCheyne, William Strong, Patrick Fairbairn, Robert Baron, Joseph Hacon, Edward Polhill, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Nathaniel Appleton, Herman Bavinck, Thomas

Let's think about **several different problems** that bring deep confusion to people as they read this. The first involves **God's will**. There may be no more badly misunderstood topic in the entire Bible than this one. The word "**desires**" (*thelō*) is the same word that is often used for God's *will*. The problem is, the Bible speaks of God's will or desire in more than one sense. But it only uses one word to do it. Consider these examples:

- **I will return to you if God wills** (**Acts 18:21**).
- **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God** (**Col 1:1**)

In these instances, God's will is a sovereign decree that cannot fail to come to pass. Theologians have referred to this as **God's sovereign will** or **will of decree**. Whenever God wills something in this sense, *it happens*. As Nebuchadnezzar said, "**None can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'**" (**Dan 4:35**).

But now consider these:

Wilcox, Ralph Venning, Bh. H. Carroll, J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, J. Gresham Machen, Thomas Ball, Richard Maden, Andrew Willet, Anthony Burgess, Cornelis P. Venema, Heinrich Bullinger, John Mayer, Benjamin Grosvenor, George Walker, Robert Jenison, J. C. Ryle, Bruce Ware, Maurice Roberts, Erroll Hulse, Thomas Lamb, John Thornbury, William Prynne, John Humfrey, Jonathan Edwards, A. H. Strong, Curt Daniel, John MacArthur, Edward Polhill, Charles Hodge, James P. Boyce, J. I. Packer, Donald J. Westblade, John Howe, Ch. H. Spurgeon, John Frame. These are listed in the order blogged from primary sources here: <http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/search/label/1%20Tim.%20%3A1-6>.

Whoever does *the will of God* abides forever (1Jn 2:17)

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is *the will of God* in Christ Jesus for you (1Th 5:18).

This time, God's will can be and **very often is thwarted**. People do not obey God's law as he wills. The Bible is not contradictory. It is speaking in different senses. This does not refer to God's sovereign will, but rather to his **prescriptive will**, his will of command, his revealed will, his law.

If you read our passage as teaching God's sovereign will to actually save whom he wills, then you will be confused because you know that not all people are or will be saved. It is not teaching this. But if you do, this in turn might cause you to become a **Universalist** (if God really wills such a thing, then everyone WILL be saved), or you might **deny that God actually wants all people to be saved** (If God wills all to be saved and they are saved, then clearly "all" does not mean "all without exception"), or you may **deny** the biblical truth that God's sovereign will is simply **not thwartable** (obviously, people are thwarting it if he wills it but they aren't beings saved). None of those are good options.

But this minefield is very easily avoided. Paul is not talking about God's decree here, but *his desire that men obey him*. We pray for their salvation. But **how can they believe if they have not heard?** Hear what? The Gospel. God desires that all men without exception hear the Gospel and believe it, just like he desires that all Christians hear the law and obey it. Very often, both of those are thwarted, not because God's sovereign will is thwarted, but because it isn't talking about that; it is talking about his will that people obey him and be holy and know forgiveness. **"I do not delight in the death of the wicked,"** says the Lord (**Ezek 18:23**). **"Turn from your sin and live"** (**33:11**).³⁵

A Ransom for All: The Glory of Christ Jesus

We now turn to **a second bomb** in this minefield. This is the parallel in **vs. 6**. **"... who gave himself as a ransom for all."** Before getting into this, I want you to remember the

³⁵ No one believed in sovereign predestination more than Martin Luther. Yet he understood this passage rightly to say, **"Prayer for all people is acceptable, because he desires all people to be saved. Paul is not speaking about God's incomprehensible will—a topic forever secret, as here regarding the will of his command. There is a will that is hidden and reserved for himself. This he points out to us in word and deed. His other will he reveals with many signs. Therefore we take this passage to refer to the will of his command or work, not to his hidden will"** (Luther, *Lectures on 1 Timothy*). Catholic theologian **François Carrière** (d. 1665) takes the identical position as Luther (*Commentary on the Whole of Scripture*), and notes that this two-will distinction goes back to at least **John of Damascus** (675-749 AD) (*The Orthodox Faith* 2.29).

structure. The center of our passage is **vs. 5**. It is composed of two halves. 1. **There is one God**. 2. Parallel to it is, **there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**. In typical Apostolic fashion, the chiasm **centers on God and his work in Christ**. As confusing or as much as people want to argue over some of the doctrines before us, Paul's focus is on God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as mediator. This is so that God alone might be glorified, and **any doctrine that does not do that misses the point and falls woefully short of the truth**.

But now look. Of whom is Christ the mediator in this verse? "**Men**." He is the mediator between God and men. Jesus came as a man. Therefore, he mediates for men. Not *some* men. Just men, humans. This is yet another bomb with the dust just covering the surface, waiting to be stepped on and blow. This verse **not talking about subjective, personal salvation**. It is talking about the office of Christ as priest—*Intercessor*. He is the Second *Adam*. He is the Great High Priest. His intercession is not for types of men, as Jews thought. It is for *the class of created beings called men*. Any man or woman or child that would be saved, they must come through Christ. Whether or not anyone wants to is a different question. Here, the question is through whom is

salvation mediated? Jesus is the only Mediator, because he alone has offered the acceptable sacrifice and was himself that sacrifice pleasing to God on the cross. *Men* deserved death, not some men, all men. Jesus died, taking that curse that men deserve. Hence, he is the mediator of men.

Now that we have noted this hidden mine, let's consider how [the structure helps us avoid the next one](#). If God and Christ is the center, the "alls" on either side are parallel.

A. God desires **all** people to be saved

B. For there is one God

B'. And there is one mediator ... Christ Jesus

A'. Who gave himself as a ransom for **all**

As before, so now. [The "alls" have not changed meaning](#). Christ is still the ransom for all *without exception*.³⁶ But you must understand properly what this means. Arminians have an easy time accepting "all without exception," but that's because they jettison the sovereign decree of God and don't care. They believe Jesus is a ransom for all, but all do not use their freewill to come to Christ.³⁷ But this is not biblical on several counts. First, it

³⁶ For a list of scores of Reformers and Puritans who took this view go to calvinandcalvinism.com (down at the present moment, but should be up again soon) and theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com.

³⁷ My brother just showed me this hilarious meme which fit the subject too well not to share:

presupposes too much about human nature. It presupposes that we are basically good and want to come to Christ. If they were right about how we are saved, it wouldn't be some who do not use their freewill to come to Christ. It would literally be everyone and no one would ever be saved. **Arminius** himself uses this very passage to “prove” that the sovereign will of God, predestination, can be thwarted.³⁸ But he isn't thinking clearly. This passage isn't talking about God's sovereign decree to save, as we have already seen.

But in like manner, **many confuse** this objective work of Christ on the cross as a ransom with the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. They are not identical. Jesus'

I choose God
with my free
will

You can't even
motivate
yourself to go
to the gym



³⁸ “This predestination is in open hostility to the ministry of the gospel ... because it hinders public prayers from being offered to God in a becoming and suitable manner, that is, with faith, and in confidence that they will be profitable to all the hearers of the word; when there are many among them, whom God is not only unwilling to save, but whom by his absolute, eternal, and immutable will (which is antecedent to all things and causes whatever) it is his will and pleasure to damn. In the meantime, when the apostle commands prayers and supplications to be made for all people, he adds this reason, ‘for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our savior; who will have all people to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth’” (**Jacob Arminius**, *Declaration of Sentiments*).

work on the cross is not identical to your being saved by faith. This ransom happened outside of you, 2000 years ago, not in your heart. You need to think of this like we just did with God's will for all to be saved. Christ's ransoming work on the cross is parallel this in that both are in relation *to the law* (the revealed will), not the decree of God (the secret will). That is, **the law demands a ransom for guilty sinners**. That ransom is a sacrifice that appeases God. If that ransom is given, then *the law* has been satisfied. Justice has been served. The due punishment the law requires for sin, be it the sin of one man or all men, has been met. The sacrifice died. Nothing more could be done than what was done.

This is not about you. *It is about Christ's work in satisfying the law of God*. It's about justice being satisfied, not for sins (individual), but for sin (any violation of the law). God desires all people to be saved, that is, to hear the Gospel and not die, but believe. That doesn't mean he decrees the same thing. Jesus died as a ransom for all, but that doesn't mean he decrees all to be saved. For reasons that are often inscrutable and beyond our understanding, as a friend of mine says, **"God often wills what he nills."** Parents can understand this. We always want our children to be protected and safe. But we do not decree this, otherwise,

they would never grow up and flee the nest. We will what we will. The reasons are his and his alone. That he would save anyone is a miracle of absolute grace. Too many think God owed us that. He didn't.

So, Christ's death is a ransom that the law demands, and as such, it is **wholly sufficient** to save anyone who would believe in it. Sufficiently, it is for everyone.³⁹ God didn't need another sacrifice to save those who won't come to him. Efficiently, God works that sufficient work of the cross in his elect and thank God, for that work causes them to be saved. Unfortunately, there has been so much bad teaching about these things since Arminius and the Reformed knee-jerked to his heresy, that there is almost no end of the confusion that it has caused many people. It isn't easy to think through this, but it is important.

³⁹ **Going Deeper.** One of the absolute best thinkers in Church History on this is **John Davenant**, the most prominent English delegate to the Synod of Dort—a full blooded Calvinist. He makes the older distinction, “**That Christ died for all sufficiently, but for the predestinated effectually.**” Commenting on our text he says that “**The sacred Scriptures speak of the death of Christ so as to refer to its universal efficacy not to the mere dignity of the sacrifice offered [that is, it is not universal in terms of its actually being applied to everyone in the decree of God], but to the act and intention of the offering. 1 Tim. ii. 6, Who gave himself a ransom for all. The Apostle does not say, “This ransom in itself, and in its own intrinsic value, is sufficient for the redemption of all [which would necessitate universal salvation as all Calvinists rightly note], but in reality was given for a few, not for all;” but he “gave himself for all.” Therefore, the intention and act of Christ in giving himself includes all mankind, in like manner as that of the Father in sending his Son; “God so loved the world, etc. (John iii.16).” See **John Davenant**, “A Dissertation on the Death of Christ,” in *Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians* Vol. II, trans. Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1832), 409-11. 313-558; available from <http://archive.org/stream/expositionofepis02dave#page/310/mode/2up>;**

Arminius badly misunderstood this passage and taught because of it that “Predestination is in open hostility to the ministry of the gospel ... because it hinders public prayers from being offered to God.” I disagree completely. In reality, because God predestines, we may know that our prayers will be effectual to actually save sinners, because God is gracious and works these prayers together with his sovereign will to be effectual.

Others have just as badly misunderstood it on the other side and have justified anything from changing the plain meaning of the words to not praying for whomever they feel like not praying for. None of this is necessary. We do not need to change “all” to mean “not all.” But neither do we need to destroy God’s sovereignty over his creatures by denying predestination.

Look at the last verse. For this is Paul’s own experience. “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (1Tim 2:7). Paul was so full of hatred for Gentiles being converted that he started to kill as many as he could in his former life. But God changed his heart. God chose him (Acts 9:15), appointed him, predestined him. He knows without this he would have continued in blindness

forever. But now he pleads before the throne day and night for the salvation of everyone he can think of. Then, he goes out and does everything he can to be God's chosen instrument in making their salvation effectual through His Gospel, leaving the final act of grace to God that he might get all the glory.

Truth here is key. He wants them to **come to a knowledge of the truth (4)**. He **is telling the truth (7)**. They are parallel. **Only the truth can set a person free**. Only the truth can cause them to desire the salvation of even their worst enemy. Only the truth can cause someone to pray not only for people like that, but to grow in their prayer life such that it becomes the inseparable link between them and the God who has saved them. That truth comes through Truth incarnated, the Lord Jesus Christ. Whom we worship and pray would change his church in days like ours.

Yes, **there are two things that hamper our prayer lives**. Bad theology about prayer and bad theology about God. Together, these have caused people to come up with **other excuses in prayer**, and those excuses often become corporate and work their way out in the churches. D. A. Carson lists several reasons people often give. I am **too busy** to pray; I feel **too spiritually dry** to pray; I **feel no need** to pray; I am

too bitter to pray; I am too ashamed to pray; I am content with mediocrity.⁴⁰ These all have bad theology at their heart.

Alice Earle, who wrote about that two-hour long Puritan prayer made an observation 130 years ago about something that is perhaps even more dangerous than these excuses. Noting the changing times and lessening of prayers she writes,

At last, when other means of entertainment and recreation than church-going became common, and other forms of public addresses than sermons were frequently given, New England church-goers became so restless and rebellious under the regime of hour-long prayers and indefinitely protracted sermons that the long services were gradually condensed and curtailed, to the relief of both preacher and hearers.

It is good to understand that in Puritan times, even they their motives could be easily distracted. Entertainment is nothing new, and it is a great bane to the true worship of God, including how we pray. I suspect few of us would be any more thrilled with two-hour prayers than they were. Is this a good thing?

⁴⁰ D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Academic, 2008), 111-122.

Consider the words of [E. M. Bounds](#) who said, “Spiritual work is taxing work, and men are loath to do it. Praying, true praying, costs an outlay of serious attention and of time, which flesh and blood do not relish. Few persons are made of such strong fiber that they will make a costly outlay when surface work will pass as well in the market.”⁴¹

Far too many Christians want cotton candy worship and think it should be immediately easy and without much of anything that it demands on me. Same goes for prayer. This is not so, and it is time now for us to grow up into maturity. [Leonard Ravenhill](#), speaking of revival, but which could just as easily be said to be true of praying more generally, especially in church and for our enemies said, “We live in a generation that has never known revival God’s way. True revival changes the moral climate of an area or a nation. Without exception, all true revivals of the past began after years of agonizing, hell-robbing, earth-shaking, heaven-sent intercession. The secret to true revival in our own day is still the same. But where, oh, where, are the intercessors?”⁴²

⁴¹ [Edward M. Bounds](#), *Power through Prayer* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1910, 1999).

⁴² [Leonard Ravenhill](#), *Revival God’s Way* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1986) 102, cited in [Osborne](#), 267.

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