

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 6:

“19 and [praying] for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; 22 whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts. 23 Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

I Timothy 2: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, 7 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”

"Peace to the Brethren"

The theme of our CREC Council and Presbytery meetings this year was, “Fight the Good Fight.” There were several Pastors who addressed this topic in various ways and I hope you will avail yourselves of the recordings that are available: You also get to hear Bach's "Magnificat in D Major performed by their youth choir just before the Christmas season as well as some hearty singing by the ministers and guests. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJU5AwyIe254wy4eOzUrVW57jRKUoMRvO>

- **This theme led me to another message from the closing portion of Ephesians, relating it to the Apostle Paul’s admonition to young Timothy that I read as our morning text.**

Some months ago we considered the troubled times in which we live before considering the importance of Paul’s practical instructions for husbands & wives, children & parents as well as servants and masters. We were then told to take up the full armor of God for our spiritual warfare.

Paul then tells the Ephesians he is sending Tychicus to them for comfort and leaves them with this benediction, “23 Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Last week we focused on how Prayer is an important weapon for our warfare and how the Apostle wanted us to pray for him and for all men, a theme we see here also in I Timothy chapter 2.

We find in Paul’s admonition to Timothy the Apostle’s fuller thoughts about the relationship between prayer and peace not only as individuals, in our families, in our churches, but also in our communities and as a nation.

We see this in the beginning of chapter two where Paul says: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”

- **Paul includes praying for kings as well as all those in authority so we can have peaceable lives and that the Gospel can be proclaimed and the Kingdom of Christ advanced.**

As we look at the broad picture of Church history, it is clear we have gotten this concept of having peace in the city, very wrong in two major ways.

In the east, the Orthodox Churches looked inward to so-called spiritual matters and did not much care what happened in the civil realm. Thus there was little resistance to the Muslim conquests of once great Christian lands in North Africa and the Middle East. And more recently, the Russian Orthodox Church offered little or no resistance to the cruelties of the communists for over seventy years.

In the West we mostly ran off into the other ditch: The Church became so entangled with the civil magistrates that it was often difficult to tell one from the other. From Emperor Constantine down to our own time kings and princes have carried out major military campaigns under religious banners or church leaders have acted like Kings & princes!

- **So what is the proper role of civil government and how do we avoid these two very dangerous ditches?**

On the one hand we have those who say we should not engage in the civil realm at all, and on the other, ones who argue that the church should run everything.

As with most issues, there is a Biblical balance and to find it we need to be very familiar with the wisdom the Scriptures provide for us so that our prayers can be properly informed. Thousands of volumes have been written to support both ditches & there are many Biblical truths within each:

- **God does advance His Kingdom through the Body of His Son, the Church, and we will not see any real progress without the power of the Gospel changing lives and bringing new life.**
- **However, these “new lives” must be lived in accordance with God’s Law-Word and the Bible gives us a LOT of information on why civil governments exist & how they should function!**
- **As we studied the life of the Apostle Paul in the Book of Acts, we found him to be rightly focused on the work that Jesus had called him to do as the Apostle to the Gentles.**
- **But he often did not shy away from his duties in the civil realm & in the end both worked well together.**
- **We can think of his holding the magistrates at Philippi accountable for his unjust arrest or appealing to his Roman citizenship for protection after his arrest in Jerusalem.**

We should see this same balance in our lives today... Pastors should be holding civil magistrates accountable in both word and deed, but this does not mean they should leave their pulpits to run for elected office. The Proverb’s woman supports her husband as he meets in the gates and instructs her children in the principles of civil government and their responsibility... But she should not leave her vital calling to run for political office when a magistrate fails to be faithful.

With almost twenty-five years of experience as a Christian working in the political arena, I have learned & experienced these lessons, but there are two passages I return to for the proper balance and the comfort we often need. The first is our morning text, but also the more famous one found in Romans chapter thirteen, where Paul writes:

“ Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

[Ask the children where these authorities come from]

2 “Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.”

- **Now, one could rightly ask here whether Paul violated his own admonition by resisting those magistrates in Philippi, right?**
- **Properly answering that question leads us to one of the greatest fruits from the Reformation where John Calvin explains how lesser magistrates should hold the greater magistrates accountable!**

When Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen he was functioning as a lesser magistrate: A citizen of Rome.

- Not unlike today when we exercise our vote or petition our government.

When European princes began to confront the abuses of certain Kings and even church leaders who were NOT good “civil rulers” they were functioning as lesser magistrates.

When our founding fathers declared their independence from England they did so as lesser magistrates holding an errant King accountable.

[that long list of grievances can be your homework, and it is OK to debate whether they were justified]

These lesser magistrates have the authority to hold the higher magistrates accountable because of what Paul goes on to say here in Romans 13:3 “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.”

Just as Church leaders are given certain responsibilities to care for the sheep entrusted to our care, just as parents have a responsibility to the children God blesses them with & just as masters or employers have responsibilities to those who work for them...

- In the same way, a civil magistrate does not get to do whatever they want to do!

-- We have Church councils and denominations to hold church leaders accountable.

-- We have Church leaders and civil magistrates to hold parents and masters or employers accountable.

- And it is the responsibility of Church leaders and lesser magistrates to hold civil leaders accountable.

As the Spirit has advanced the Kingdom of Jesus that accountability has expanded more and more.

- It took centuries before even the powerful princes of England came to hold the King responsible for his actions with the Magna Carta.

Our American revolution was carried out by even lesser magistrates and today we have been empowered with the ability to cast votes in order to hold our elected officials accountable.

As I have often told people down through the years, IF the Apostle Paul could take the time out of his busy and important missionary journey to hold certain civil magistrates accountable...

- Then surely we have time to register to vote and cast informed votes whenever elections occur.

I can tell you from firsthand experience, that if the Christians of our land took that responsibility more seriously, our governments would be very different!

The womb would not be the most dangerous place in childhood and more and more perverted sexual practices would not be treated as “normal.”

- Our money would be sound and our nation would be secure if we had elected officials who followed the wisdom given to civil leaders in the Bible.

Now sadly, we have NOT taken that responsibility seriously and thus we now have a great deal of wicked government in our land!

Today we have taxes that are obscene, the government has more control over our property than we do, there is no fear of God and there is little that Washington or Sacramento have done that should be honored.

- Thus our “Kings” need our prayers and our nation needs us to practice all those practical lessons we just learned from Ephesians: That is how we are to pray for and work for the peace of the city!

- That concept was also what we found in Jeremiah 29, which we have often turned to in these troubled times as a reminder that God is in control.

While we can point to some very wicked leaders & BIG problems today, they have NOT reached the same level as King Nebuchadnezzar and the evil Babylonians, whom God called a “bitter and hasty nation.”

However, it was a nation that was to be God’s instrument for judgment...

So God sends His exiled people a message and actually has the wicked King deliver it to them! In that letter, God told the exiles to do things that sound like our practical lessons here in Ephesians:

“Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters--that you may be increased there, and not diminished.

7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.”

- Why on earth would God command them to pray for the peace of their oppressors?

Well, for starters it brought forth the conversion of King Nebuchadnezzar!

And we know from the Scriptures & from history, that Babylon, the Persian Empire, the Greeks and finally the Romans, who still ruled as Paul penned this Epistle, all played important roles in the history of salvation, protecting God’s people until Messiah had come...

- For example, they provided a worldwide network of roads and languages so Paul & Silas could go on missionary journeys!

We studied those events in some detail during our journey through the Book of Acts, but for this morning we should remember that the principle of praying for the peace of our civil leaders did not cease with the end of the Babylonian captivity, nor even with the fall of the Roman empire.

This brings us back to our text for this morning...

I Timothy 2:1 “ Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,...

Now this qualifies as the second most popular verse to quote only partially: “Judge not” being the first!

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority,...

- And even those who do manage to get that much [or even quote the second part in a truncated form] still do not usually complete Paul’s sentence and certainly not his thought:

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”

There was a purpose behind those instructions to the captives in Babylon. AND there is a purpose behind Paul’s call to pray for those in authority:

- So we can have peace in the land.

Now it is important for us to realize, especially in our comfort filled world here in America, that we are not just to be praying for personal peace and affluence.

➤ Paul has a specific reason in mind and it reveals God's heart and the Spirit's mission:

3 "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

➤ Thus, we are to pray for the leaders of our land, our state and our cities.

Our desire is that they would rule well, that there would be peace as a result so that the Gospel can be preached and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in.

➤ The Apostle Paul asks the Saints at Ephesus to pray for him so he could boldly preach the good news!

He sent them word about His work and said, "23 Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Apostle is not speaking about some inner peace we get through Eastern meditation or drugs, but the real peace that is brought by the Power of the Gospel: Peace given to an individual heart, peace for families & churches and yes even peace for the city!

Thus we read very encouraging words as Paul writes his epistle to the Saints here at Philippi some years later: [also another model prayer!]

Philippians 1:3 "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

➤ Thus, may we rightly remember how to pray for and properly confront the civil magistrates of our day, so there can be peace that allows preaching of the Gospel!

➤ We as Christians are not here to assimilate into the culture of the world's city, but rather to bring peace to the city and evangelize the lost, bringing forth the new city... the Heavenly Jerusalem!

Communion Meditation: II Chronicles 30

"17 For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to the Lord. 18 For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone 19 who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." 20 And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people."