

Standing in the Gap

1 Timothy 2:1-10 - *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷For 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. ⁸I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.*



Question: Why are we trying to avoid the inevitable? God has prophesied the end of this age to go a certain way. A one world order, the proliferation of evil, the demise of nations, an economic unifying of all the world powers, people will give up individual rights for security and comfort, a general malaise of discernment as people are ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth, a centralized federated religion, increase in lawlessness etc. And today it you might think you are seeing that day advance quickly upon us and so you ask: Should we not just concede to this reality instead of resisting the inevitable outcomes that God Himself has decreed? Should our focus not be instead to prepare ourselves to weather the storms that are now forming before us?

My answer to that question will come with observations from the first phrase in our text **verse 8**. *I desire then that in every place the men should pray...* There we are called upon to pray. The Holy Spirit is issuing His direction through the words of Paul to the church of Christ. That we should pray is communicated as Paul's desire. But what we must see first is that Paul is only revealing the desire of God's heart. The Holy Spirit is revealing to us through these words God's directive to the church and the Christian.

1st then God desires that in every place that men of faith should pray. Though the men are referred to here, we may see in the rest of the verses 9 and 10 that the women too are called to this work of prayer. Here all believing people are concerned. Paul is writing to Timothy. Timothy is leading a church in Ephesus and Paul is giving him direction on how to lead this church. Here is a message for the church. For those believers in Jesus Christ who claim a part among God's people — **God desires you to pray.** The force of the verb here is that of a command. Almost that of a decree. In

every place where the true church is found God wishes to find its members praying. In fact, this seems to be the central expression of the fellowship of God's people. We are to be a praying people.

The Lord Jesus told a parable in **Luke 18** regarding prayer. Luke introduces the parable with words explaining the intent of the parable in **verse 1**. *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.* The Lord Jesus desires us to pray and to not faint or give up in that praying. In part what is indicated in Christ's parable there in **Luke 18** is that we might not always see the answer as we conceive it to our prayers and the danger is that we will lose the heart of faith that prays and seeks God in the belief that God answers prayer and so we can quit in disappointment and stop pressing on in prayer and Jesus says, *"No. I don't want that. I want that we should persist in the prayer."* At the end of his parable Christ speaks a word of concern. In **Luke 18:8b** after a parable pressing the important to persist in prayer Jesus asks, *"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"* Here in the context of instruction on prayer Christ intimates a falling away of faith in the last days. A falling away that will be reflected in a prayerlessness or a prayerlessness that will result in a falling away from the faith. Now I do not think that we present wish to concede to this prophesied apostacy or falling from faith by being the generation that falls from this command to pray in every place.

2nd - We understand that the prayer God is calling us to is prayer pursuing the salvation of lost souls.

In **1 Timothy 2: 4** We see central consideration from about which all our prayers are to be strategically directed. "God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." And verse 5 declares the central truth that all men must come to know if they are to be saved. And so, it lays the foundation for all we pray for. We pray that people might come to Christ for Salvation for there is no other way they can come to God then through Him alone. There is one mediator between people and God... only one who can bridge the gap of separation... the one who gave himself to be the payment for our sins... Jesus Christ. Knowing this is the only way. And that this provision came from God who desires all people to be saved and come to know this truth, our prayers are to strategically pursue these ends. Verses 1-2 express that we are to pray for conditions that make it possible to make these truths known. We are to pray for those things that make for peace in our world and a quiet life which will then in turn help us to put our energy into the real work that God has given us to do. We can become distracted from our purpose and God's central passion and our energies can be miss-spent when the environment – the social setting of the church is in turmoil. When there is civil unrest it can create divisions among those who live with that negatively impacts our ability to proclaim the Gospel to them. So, we are to pray for peace. Peace with our neighbor and peace through our

leaders. We are to pray for those things which make for quietness in our communities and nation and among the nations. Note that this is not a prayer honed into specific political agendas. We are not commanded to pray for and concentrate our concerns on the specific matters of governance. It is a prayer for the most optimum setting for taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to as many as possible.

But more than this here is what I want you to see. The prayer being commanded in the church is a prayer that is wrestling with and seeking those outcomes in life that will lead to more and more coming to salvation through Jesus Christ. Whatever we pray for... whether it is for someone's health... for a child's success in a test... for protection for travelers or the settling of a person's nervous system... whatever it is the church and the Christian ought to be thinking about it and praying about these things with an eye on seeing the desire of God's heart realized. Which is the salvation of men and women and boys and girls. And along these lines, I am concerned that we have lost sight of this reason for our praying. We don't pray so that we may lay down a more comfortable life for ourselves and those we love. This is not Christian prayer. If we pray this way our prayers are no different than those the pagan prays before his gods. That is the prayer that takes place before idols but not before the mercy seat, sprinkled with the blood of Christ. Yes, we do pray for daily bread and for needs but again we must let it be drawn up into a more strategic direction and purpose or it is all for naught.

Transition: 1st God desires us the pray. 2nd this is prayer to God that is strategically aligned with God's desire to see men saved.

3rd we are called to pray, because God works through our prayers to establish an environment for a greater response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our world. Remember again we are to pray for peace and for quietness...

And here is the problem with this idea Paul is setting forward: A problem that goes back to our initial question about inevitabilities in the prophecies of God for the final outcomes of this world at the end of the age. This same Paul writes a second letter to Timothy in which he makes it clearly understood that the last days are coming when conditions will be adverse to the proclamation of that gospel. **2 Timothy 3:1-7** *But understand this in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.* What do we make of this? Here is an inevitability of the last days and a growing problem that will take hold and yet in

our passage of **1 Timothy 2**, Paul is calling us to pray against these inevitable conditions; for a different environment altogether. How do are we to understand this?

I think we can only conclude that God is revealing to us by Paul that He is willing to respond to our prayers and change the environment and even delay some of the negative effects that will set in during these last days.

Our prayers and our lives of obedience can positively change outcomes in history and our lack of prayer and unresponsiveness to God's do the opposite. For better or worse the world is impacted when we pray and when we don't pray strategically for the salvation of men.

Read **2 Chronicles 7:12-14** ¹² *Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³ When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, ¹⁴ if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. **7:17-22** And as for you, if you will walk before me as David your father walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my rules, ¹⁸ then I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to rule Israel.' ¹⁹ "But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰ then I will pluck you up from my land that I have given you, and this house that I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. ²¹ And at this house, which was exalted, everyone passing by will be astonished and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' ²² Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore he has brought all this disaster on them.'"*

What seems obvious here is that there are options in what will take place and become our history based upon our responses to God. Again, there are things God has decreed as inevitable outcomes coming upon the ages. But as we approach those times this same dynamic seems to be in play. **We can delay judgment, just as salt delays putrefaction, and we can display light into darkness in that time of delay. Therefore**, we don't just concede to the sure events of judgment that will come upon this world though we will accept their appearance when God brings them about trusting in Him.

Now if we are alive when the final days of judgment unfold it we will more readily submit to the hand of God if we enter into those times having been at prayer, having been submitting to God's will leading up to that time and God's will is that we should be at prayer for the salvation of the unsaved.

Therefore, again the decree of God to the people of God is... *“I desire that in every place the men should pray...”*

4th I want to emphasize that we are being called to do something that activates the hand of God Almighty to those causes He Himself holds dear. Prayer is not a superfluous act to make us feel spiritual or even to simply aid us in a growing spirituality. This is not a divine game of Simon says that God is playing with us when he calls upon us to pray. These prayers, which God mysteriously and sovereignly commands us to offer, go out to move His hand to do things beyond us; in the world around us and on the communities and world we live. God has willed that our prayers move His hand. It is as if in prayer God brings us into the counsels of His purposes and we are given a voice to speak. God is commanding upon us a dignity of causality. We effectually influence the outcomes of His working through our prayers. God has all power. He is the all powerful God and He exercise full control over what he does and how He works but we can see here that God has determined to direct that power in response to our prayers... prayers He forms on the lips of those surrendered and obedient to His Spirit. And when we obey in this way God intervenes to withhold judgment in some cases and pour out judgments according to our prayers in other cases. **Your prayer... if we could see this and believe it... does impact real changes by God’s hand in your world.** God has given us prayer so that we don’t just fatalistically stand by and passively watch the world and life play out before us. We are engaged by prayer in cultivating the outcomes. And this by the will of the Sovereign all Powerful God.

Along these lines the prophet Ezekiel addresses the calamity that has come upon Israel. They have been taken into captivity in Babylon and their nation has been left in ruins at the hand of the Babylonians. The rebellion of the people and its leaders against the will of God had mounted to a point in which the inevitable judgment had fallen but another reason is given for this calamity. God speaks through Ezekiel and explains. **Ezekiel 22:30-31** *And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore, have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God.*

Shortly before this great calamity took place Jeremiah had spoken. God had commanded him to seek out those who would be agents to avert judgment upon Judah. Jeremiah is instructed to look for them in every level of his society in Jerusalem but they were not found. **Jeremiah 5:1-6** *Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. ²Though they say, “As the Lord lives,” yet they swear falsely. (instead of finding people at prayer he finds people at pretense... playing the game of religion) ³O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you*

have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent. (Instead of broken and contrite hearts at the corrections of God they are presenting hard hearts unmoved by God's corrections. Such heart can never pray or intercede) ⁴*Then I said, "These are only the poor; they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God. ⁵I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God."*— *But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds. ⁶Therefore a lion from the forest shall strike them down; a wolf from the desert shall devastate them. A leopard is watching their cities; everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great.* Jeremiah sees it coming. Ezekiel looks back upon the devastation once it came. Both note the final cause. **No one was there to stand for righteousness and to intercede in the land.**

Remember that what God has declared will happen, will happen. But also remember that God has given us influence on the timeline. We may, from our perspective, delay the execution of God's final judgments, we may interrupt the full climax of mounting judgment and even draw ourselves and society back into times of extended favor and so extend the time of opportunity for grace and mercy.

But we must believe this and accept the commanded responsibility from God to pray; to stand in the gap; to weep over our world and seek God's intervention for times of fruitful labor still. This is God's desire for us and we are to submit to His sovereign purpose in this and so in every place, we must pray.

In **Exodus 17** the Amalekites come out to battle the people of Israel. Moses sent Joshua out to lead the Israelites into a battle for their very existence. Moses explained that he would go up on a hill above them with the staff of God. Moses interceded for the army with that staff raised up in his hand. In the battle when Moses hands were raised in prayer the Israelites won and when his arms wearied and fell the tide of battle would turn against the Israelites. The story is preserved by the God for us. We are called upon to raise our hands in prayer and with those hands the tides of spiritual battle in heavenly places and upon our earth turn. This story is not told of for our entertainment. It was told for our instruction. Battles are won in prayer. Tides of good and evil turn on our prayers or lack thereof. Key moments of national rescue will one day be plainly viewed as God's glorious responses to the humble and holy prayers of his people. Key moments of national upheaval and destruction may reveal that no man was standing in the gap. And so the lion and the wolf and the leopard descended upon the land tooth and claw. If this is the hour when God determines not to stay His hand of judgment and wrath then let it not be said it happened because He did not us holding faith on the earth; that he did not find us at the watch of prayer for the lost in our nation and among the nations.

I desire that in every place men should pray...