

A Praying People

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments" Volume #19, Nu 20 May 16, 2004GG

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour. {1Ti 2:1-3}

Our passage covers some interesting questions. How do you distinguish the various words used to refer to prayer? Apparently there must be some difference between them. Let's take a brief survey of the words.

1. Supplications. Need, indigence, want, privation, penury; a seeking, asking, entreating, entreaty to God or to man.
2. Prayers. Prayer addressed to God.
3. Intercessions. A falling in with, meeting with, an interview, a coming together, to visit, converse or for any other cause, that for which an interview is held, a conference or conversation, a petition, supplication.
4. Thanksgiving. Thankfulness, the giving of thanks.

Don't miss any of the nuances of meaning between each word. Especially think of the words in terms of your prayers for others, particularly those in civil authority. The objective of the prayers in this context is "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

Frequently the casual Bible reader will become detracted by seemingly universal sounding words, in this case "all men." As Paul expands and defines his intent, he specifically mentions governmental leaders. One might ask, "Does this mean that I am to pray, intercede with God for, and thank God for Saddam Hussein or other evil world leaders?" I believe the answer is no. Paul is quite specific in the objective for these prayers. We are not to pray for one political party over another unless one party forsakes Biblical morality (In most cases both do so.). The objective goes beyond the party spirit. Our prayers are for divine intervention with one purpose in mind, that we may live our lives quietly, peaceably, and to the honor of our God. Secondly, the term "all men" can mean more than one thing. It can mean all men without exception, brown, yellow, black, and white; rich or poor; powerful or irrelevant to our lives altogether. This idea makes no sense when compared with Paul's stated objective for our prayers. A second meaning, and more consistent with the context of this passage, refers to all kinds of men. This idea means that you pray for the President, Senators, U. S. Congressmen, judges, governors, policemen, local governmental officials, etc. (and regardless of their political party affiliation!). With the stated objective of an orderly civil government that enables believers to live their lives peacefully to the honor of God, this meaning fits the context and appears logically appropriate to the passage.

The second question that the passage sets before us is this. Does Paul intend to teach us that believers' prayers will actually change the course of civil government? And to this question I answer an emphatic yes. That is precisely Paul's point. There is no Biblical assurance of answered prayer when we pray selfishly. If you pray for one political candidate to win the election because he is handsome and charismatic, don't expect your prayer to be answered. If you pray for one candidate because he belongs to your favorite political party, regardless of his moral character or ethical conduct, don't expect God to answer your prayer. God does not bend His moral character because of the personality or political party affiliation of anyone. Moral failure is sin before God, whether committed by the President, the Speaker

of the House, or the local vagrant. God will not bless any person who practices sin, regardless of their social or political standing. If we truly expect and believe that God will hear and answer our prayers to bless civil leaders for the benefit of godly people, we must pray in harmony with that objective. If we want God to impose an "other worldly" high character onto our culture, we must start by living, and praying, in keeping with that moral high ground.

Our culture presently stands on the threshold of a crucial need for just such prayers. We may face the time when civil authorities will enact laws that require churches to treat gay and heterosexual people alike on the premise of "alternate" lifestyles that should not be "discriminated against." Our political culture is morally blind. It sees no moral issue whatever in the way a person lives. Would you be content to have a gay pastor (or woman if gender discrimination is forced upon churches) preach to you on Sunday morning? Would you like to hear a sermon on Sunday morning that tells you that we should fiercely defend the rights of women to have an abortion on demand? We have enjoyed an unusual liberty in this country for centuries because a group of people in the seventeenth century approached the task of setting up a civil government from their knees. They prayed earnestly for God's direction in the process of setting up our country. Many of the "founding fathers" were actually pastors of various churches in their communities. We are already seeing many of the speeches and writings of the founding fathers subjected to fierce revision to eliminate any reference to God, despite the undeniable evidence of what they said and wrote regarding their dependence on God for their decisions.

We need to regularly engage in just such prayers as Paul urged in this lesson for our country. If Christian people of all stripe were to start a wide program of regular prayer for godly leaders and godly decisions and laws to be enacted, I truly believe that we would see a transformation in our national government.

We quickly shine the spotlight on the moral derelicts in high political office. We must not forget that our national and local governments also have many devout Christian men and women in positions of authority. They need all the prayer support that we can give them to make their influence felt in our government. Yes indeed, a host of praying people can change the face of government overnight.

In the Old Testament God established both civil government and a system of worship under His direction and authority. The hygienic rules that God gave to Israel were literally centuries ahead of medical science at the time. God instituted just laws regarding care and protection for the downtrodden and the poor. He did all of this without a federal bureaucracy and countless administrative layers, much less an endless supply of funds. His civil government to Israel was every bit as successful as His form of worship was to their survival and anticipation of our Lord Jesus in human flesh.

I do not advocate that we abandon our form of government and adopt a theocratic form of government. I offer the fact of Old Testament civil government as an example of God's institution of civil government as part of His creative and supreme governmental rule over the world that He created. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will". {Pr 21:1} Is God weaker-less God-today than in Solomon's time? Has He in some way restricted or limited His sovereignty over humanity, including civil government, compared with His rule over it then? The answer must be no. The God of the Bible is immutable, unchangeable. He is the same God that He was on the first day of creation in Ge 1. The collapse of moral fiber in our culture cannot be laid to His charge. We have marginalized our faith by limiting God in our minds, by habitual refusal to pray for God to show His rule in civil government, and by voting for candidates for civil office based on political party or personality instead of based on their respect for God and moral integrity. We sowed the wind, to borrow from Scripture, and we have reaped the whirlwind. {Ho 8:7} God seldom intervenes against the law of sowing and reaping. He allows us to make our choices, but He also allows us to reap the consequences of our foolish and immoral decisions, no less in civil government than in our private life of faith.

Despite frightening erosion in the moral fiber of our nation, our political leaders, and governmental institutions, I truly believe that the prayers of godly people can profoundly change our country for the better. Are you willing to start the habit of regular prayer today with this objective in mind?

Elder Joe Holder