

Praying to Accomplish God's Purposes

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Introduction: I once heard a preacher say that “If we spent as much time actually praying as we do talking about praying, we would be amazed what we would see God do in our midst.” He’s probably right, but I want to be careful when talking about prayer and make sure you know that prayer does not change God or get him to change his mind. Prayer does not tell God what he should do, he knows what he should do. Nor should prayer be the tool by which we ask God to validate the decisions we have made and the visions we have that we have developed without his input. Prayer is where we ask God to pour out his grace and his mercy to enable us to do what he has said he wants to do and where we ask him to accomplish what he has promised to do and what he has said he will accomplish.

Do the work of the ministry through prayer.

I. Pray for all people by all means (2:1-3).

- A. The “therefore” reminds us of this passage’s connection to the preceding charge. This is how Timothy is to carry out the charge in this church (1a).
- B. The meaning of “all men” (all people, everyone) and its use throughout the passage (and in the PE) emphasizes the comprehensive scope of God’s salvation purpose. It is not intended as a statement of universalism or unlimited redemption (1c, 2a).
- C. The four elements or types of prayer listed have significant overlap in meaning but subtle differences in meaning; Paul’s purpose in using these terms is to comprehend all manner of prayer (1b).
- D. The purpose for these prayers is to enable believers (“we”) to be free and unencumbered from the fear of oppression that might hinder their spiritual growth and their growth in fearing God and walking with him (2b).
- E. The reason given for this continuous exercise is because it is pleasing to God for the church to engage in this (3).

Application: Prayer is to be a central element in the life of the church. The church must learn that plans and strategies and ministry models may each have their place, but everything done in the service of the Lord must be accomplished through prayer. If the church as a whole and each of her members focused on serving, worshipping, giving, and loving in the context of prayer, there would be a lot less complaining and a lot more being accomplished. When we minister like this we see not what we can do, but what God can do.

II. Pray for all people because of God’s comprehensive purpose (2:4-6a).

- A. *Must address two words in this verse to understand properly the meaning of the verse and the passage: “desires” and “all.”*
 1. The word “desire” used here is not expressing any truth regarding God’s decrees.
 2. The expression “all men” is used in the same way it is used in v. 1. There is no reason in the text to change its meaning now.
- B. *The meaning of the word “saved” is informed by the explanation given here in the latter part of the verse and in 2 Tim. 1:9.*
 1. It means to come to “come to the knowledge of the truth.” This is why those who are saved are known as “believers.” This is the human side of salvation.
 2. It means to have been called as a result of God’s eternal purpose of grace. This is why we are sometimes referred to as “the elect.” This view of salvation is from the divine perspective.
- C. *Though God’s purpose is broad in scope, it is narrow in means (5-6b).*
 1. There is only one God and he demands to be recognized as such (5a).
 2. God has appointed only one way for humanity to approach him, namely, through Jesus Christ, the God-Man (5b).
 3. Jesus Christ has opened the way for humanity to approach God through his redemptive work (6a).

Application: God’s purpose is limited in terms of who will see his salvation, but the scope of it is very broad. God’s grace is not limited to the Jews or to first-century Christians; it is as broad as the nations and as

deep as history. God's grace is not just for white, middle-class suburbanites, or just for Americans, or even for those who vote a certain way. God's grace extends to those whom he has chosen from any and all walks of life. Likewise, the message goes out to and through people of all walks and backgrounds and extends, as the Psalmist said, to all generations. God didn't just work in early church, or in the Reformation, or in the fifties or the sixties or the seventies, he works today and he will continue to work through his chosen vessels until his purpose is accomplished.

III. See the results of prayer by seeing the spread of the Gospel (6b-7).

- A. *Notice again the interplay between the divine and the human: Paul spells out God's work in vv. 5-6a and then moves to the work of God through him, the human agent, in vv. 6b-7.*
- B. *This age has come so that the testimony of Christ may be spread to the nations (6b).*
 - 1. Jesus' sacrifice of himself for all bears witness to God's intention to show his grace to the nations (6a).
 - 2. The call of Paul as apostle to the Gentiles (7) bear further witness to God's intention to show his grace in a broad manner (2 Tim. 1:9-11).
- C. *God's concern for "all people" is worked out in Paul's ministry to "the nations" (the "Gentiles" in most translations (7)).*
- D. *Paul's ministry is summed up in three words: preacher, apostle, and teacher and his field of ministry is at the end: the Gentiles. Much like the four words used in v. 1 for prayer, these three reveal different aspects of Paul's ministry.*
 - 1. The first and last terms emphasize the two main aspects of the Great Commission: to proclaim the Gospel and to teach or instruct those who come to faith. This is the same task we have today: to proclaim and to instruct, not to give therapy or to entertain.
 - 2. The middle term, "apostle" speaks of his being the authoritative eyewitness and spokesman. We minister under this authority by preaching Scripture, which is God's Word revealed through and to men for our salvation and instruction.
- E. *The expression "in faith and truth" is not a statement regarding the integrity of Paul's ministry, but what he proclaims and in what he instructs the Gentiles.*
 - 1. The term "faith" is connected to "saved" in v. 4a while "truth" is connected to "knowledge of the truth" in v. 4b.

Application: God has ordained the ends, the salvation of the nations, and the means, the sacrifice of Christ and the continuing apostolic witness to the work of Jesus Christ. The result of prayer is to see God accomplish what it is that he has purposed to do. One might ask, "Why then do we pray?" We pray not only because God has commanded it, but because he has ordained it as the means by which he accomplishes his purpose. I think God has chosen to accomplish his work in response to our prayers not because he needs the motivation or because he doesn't know what to do or because he is waiting on us to decide what he must do, but to teach us humility and submission and dependence on him in our work. When we see things happen as a result of prayer, we should not be filled with pride at our power of prayer, but filled with awe and the grace and sovereignty of our God who moves as he chooses but who allows us to be a part of his great work of redemption.