GOD WANTS ALL PEOPLE TO BE SAVED

1 Timothy 2:1–15

Key Verses: 2:3–4

“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

From chapter 1 we learned what Easter is ultimately all about. It’s about God sending his Son into this world to save sinners, even the worst ones. It’s about fully accepting God’s grace in my life. It’s about living my life not for my own glory, but as an example of the power and glory of God’s grace that’s available for anyone. When we fully accept God’s grace, we become teachers of the true faith.

Now in chapter 2 Paul encourages the believers in Ephesus to pray. He explains who and what we should pray for, why we should pray, and what happens when we do. He mentions men, and mainly women. May God open our hearts to learn more deeply about him in these verses. And may he help us to pray not just for all the things we want, but above all, for what’s really in his heart.

At the end of chapter 1 Paul mentions that some people don’t hold on to faith and a good conscience, and so suffer shipwreck with regard to the faith (1:19). They’re in a Christian fellowship for a while, but then they’re gone. It’s really painful, and kind of scary. Let’s read verse 1. Paul urges them and us first of all to pray for all people. Prayer should come “first of all.” It should be our top priority, and if possible, the first thing we do each day. It’s because only through prayer can we become spiritually awakened and alert. Only through prayer can we get connected with God. Only through prayer can we fend off Satan. “All people” seems to start with “all the Lord’s people” (Eph6:18). When we really pray for one another, we’re bringing God’s protection into one another’s lives.

In verse 1 Paul says there should be several dimensions to our prayers for others: “petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving.” A “petition” addresses something specific. To make a petition, we have to be aware of what the problem or need is. A petition is also a solemn and humble appeal. When we make a prayer petition, we’re solemnly and humbly addressing God himself, asking him to take care of a problem or need, aware that we’re helpless to do anything about it. “Prayers” can be for many things, great or small, and include all kinds of requests. “Intercession” means to intervene on behalf of others. It means to get involved in praying, especially when the other person really can’t help himself or herself, and may not even be trying. Intercession is needed at crucial times, kind of like crisis intervention. Through intercession people can be protected from going the wrong way; lives can be turned around. Through selfless intercession we show God’s love. “Thanksgiving” for others should also always be a part of our prayers. It doesn’t necessarily fix anything, but it certainly changes our attitude. It helps us to not always be focused on others’ problems, but to find their good aspects and see what God is doing in them.

But Paul has some unexpected people he says we should be praying for. Look at verse 2. He says we should be praying “for kings and all those in authority.” They may be leaders in society, at work, at school or at church. Often we don’t even think to pray for these people. Instead, we expect from them, and tend to resent them. We dig out their faults to justify our not submitting, rebelling or even overthrowing them. We like to complain about them and point out all that they’re doing wrong. But anyone in a position of leadership has weaknesses. Maybe, those who have more weaknesses we should pray for *more*. We should pray for them to know God, to have his wisdom to govern well, and to make an environment conducive to spreading the good news. Paul says that when we’re praying for our leaders, we end up living “peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” To some, that may seem really boring. Some thrive on being noisy. But to be peaceful and quiet, godly and holy has a powerful influence.

When we’re prayerful, and praying for the things that are on God’s heart, not only does it impact our practical lives, but also God is pleased. Let’s read verses 3–4. Here we can see an amazing truth about God. God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. God grieves when people are deceived and when their lives are ruined by wrongdoing and lies. Also, God isn’t indifferent to any people on earth. It’s because he’s the Creator who made us all. God cares for all people, even the wicked, because we’re all, in a sense, his children. God wants us to be praying for all people, even for those we strongly disagree with. Jesus taught us to pray even for those who mistreat us. Of course, if we took these verses literally, we would be praying 24/7 and still never finish, because there are so many people to pray for. Many of us feel superficial and incomplete even in our prayers for those in our own small church fellowship. So we wonder how could we possibly be praying for “all people”? We shouldn’t neglect praying for those closest to us, but God also definitely wants to broaden our scope. When we pray, we should try to remember the groups of people we usually don’t think about. We who are engaged in campus ministry should be praying not only for all the widely diverse kinds of students on campus, but also for the faculty, administrators and even the custodial staff. We should be praying for the community around the campus as well. We should be praying for all the different groups of people in our society, rich and poor, mainstream and marginalized, whatever their ethnic, moral or religious background. And we should be praying for all the peoples around the world. To do that, we need to spend at least some time learning who they are and becoming more aware of what they’re going through. We need to be praying especially for all those who’ve never heard of Jesus or don’t really know him. May God help each of us to make a commitment to be praying more for “all people.”

Paul says, “This is good, and pleases God our Savior.” He says that God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. A “knowledge of the truth” means to grasp the truth of the gospel. Paul goes on to explain what this “truth” is in verse 5. In history people have created many “gods.” In Asia Minor, the area where the city of Ephesus was, where Timothy was living, there were so many stories of gods, stories that existed for hundreds and hundreds of years. New gods were constantly being discovered and introduced. People’s spiritual confusion was very real. People really needed to know the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent (Jn17:3). Today people are just as confused spiritually. Even totally secular people are worshiping all kinds of things or people as their idol or security or source of happiness. They don’t realize how much in error they are.

Jesus, God’s Son, became fully human, so that he might be the mediator between all people and God our Creator. This term “mediator” has deep meaning. In the Bible it kind of means “priest.” The Book of Hebrews calls Jesus “our great high priest” and “mediator of a new covenant.” Why is it that Jesus is qualified to be our great high priest and our mediator? Because, as God’s Son, he is fully God, he understands God so well. And because he’s also fully human, he understands all people so well, too. He doesn’t judge us; he empathizes with us. He fully understands all our griefs, all our wounds, all our limitations and all our temptations, because he himself experienced them all firsthand. As our great high priest and our mediator, he’s able to bring God to us, and us to God.

By using the word “mediator,” Paul was implying that God is holy, and that we human beings are all sinful. In this situation we need a mediator. Sinful people try to find many ways back to God. They create stories or rituals or moralities or philosophies to help them reconnect to God or to feel holy. But only Jesus can truly bring us back to God. How is that? Read verse 6. Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all people. The word “ransom” implies that we were kidnapped or held hostage. Our kidnapper/evil oppressor/slaveholder was Satan. Without dealing with Satan, there’s no way for us human beings to really come back to God. Satan will keep us deceived and in his clutches and will never let us go. But Jesus gave himself as a ransom sacrifice. He willingly gave his life and shed his own blood as the ransom to get us out of there and bring us back to God and his holy, eternal kingdom (Rev5:9). For him, it was not too great a price to pay. Jesus can still ransom people. It says Jesus gave himself as a ransom “for all people.” Apostle Paul deeply believed this, and this was why he was working so hard to spread the good news. Read verse 7. Like Paul, we need to deeply realize that Jesus gave himself as ransom for all people. On this basis, we should be praying earnestly for them all.

God’s desire to save all people, and his giving his own Son as a ransom for them all, should make us all praying people, people who pray not just selfishly, but for all people. And our prayers should not be schizophrenic. We should not be praying earnestly in a closest somewhere, and then fighting with roommates or our spouse or living for our own vanity or sinful desires. Paul first addresses Christian men. Read verse 8. Men are generally not known for prayer; they’re known for fighting and competing. But men who know God need to use their hands in holy living, and then lift up such holy hands in prayer to God, not literally but spiritually. How can we be praying for all people in one breath, but be angry or disputing with people near us in the next? When we really pray, we can get rid of all our behind-the-scenes anger and disputing.

In encouraging people to pray, Paul spends the most time talking to women, in verses 9–15. These verses at first seem controversial. But when we understand the context of the city of Ephesus, they make perfect sense. Ephesus contained one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World—the Temple of Artemis. Artemis was a fertility goddess. The Ephesians believed her image fell to their city from heaven (Ac19:35). The cult of Artemis was a very ancient practice that seems to have started with the ancient Amazon women who lived in that area. The worship of Artemis made women in Ephesus very powerful, rich and immoral. In the Temple of Artemis men were used as sex slaves. This cult influenced all the other women from the Roman Empire who would go to shop in the world-famous stores in Ephesus, including Cleopatra. In this context Apostle Paul gave some strong teachings for Christian women living in Ephesus. He wanted them to be modest, decent, full of good deeds, and worshipers of God. He wanted them to study the Bible quietly and with full submission to its teachings. He wanted them to make an environment in the church where the men could focus on God and really step up to be the leaders. Finally, he wanted Christian women to remember God’s grace, to be orderly, good mothers, and to “continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” All these teachings still apply.

In this chapter we saw how God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. This should be at the heart of our prayers. We also saw how God sent Jesus as our mediator, and how he gave himself as a ransom for all people. May God help us come to Jesus our mediator and have a right relationship with him, and in Jesus, right relationships with each other. May God also forgive all our superficial, selfish prayers. May God help us really commit ourselves to praying for one another, and for all people.