



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

“How to Pray” I Timothy 2

Today, we sit again at the feet of the Apostle Paul as he writes to his apprentice, Timothy, who is—despite his youth—in charge of the house churches Paul had started in Ephesus. Apparently Tim got some questions to Paul, probably by letter, and Paul now writes to give advice to this young leader on particular issues. There is a much less of the scripture to read today compared with last week, but there is more controversy in these verses. We’re going to stay close to the text as Paul ranges over several subjects, including prayer; the text itself is our outline, so you’ll want to keep your Bibles open. Those of you who have attended our excellent Prayer Seminar this weekend, listen for the similarities and differences in what we get from Paul this morning

Please find “First Timothy” in your Bibles, toward the back of the New Testament. I’m going to read chapter 2, and since there are only 15 verses, and since I’m going to read from The New Living Translation, we’ll put up the text on the screen, with verse numbers, in case your Bible translation is different. First, we’ll hear verses 1-10, and then we’ll get to verses 11-15.
[text, verses 1-10]

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ²Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³This is good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. ⁵For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. ⁷And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I’m not exaggerating—just telling the truth.

⁸In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy.

⁹And I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes. ¹⁰For women who claim to be devoted to God should make themselves attractive by the good things they do.

Paul opened his letter with some of the usual greetings and encouragements. But as if in a real hurry, Paul moves quickly touches on people trying to win others’ approval by teaching about Jesus; the problem is, they have been teaching facts and views about Jesus that were wrong, and Paul urges Timothy to stop them. Then, Paul inserts a summary of his own conversion experience—he had himself been “so wrong”, before the Lord made him “so right”. The core of the good news is about God’s grace! Believe it! And then there is a brief bit about some of these young believers in Ephesus violating their consciences, which I take to mean they

continued to worship at the shrines of pagan gods and goddesses, as if Jesus was just one more god—one more stamp to add to their “spiritual passport”, one more charm for their religious charm bracelet. That’s a quick summary of chapter 1.

Here in chapter 2, Paul lifts up what is helpful for life with God. In a word, it’s “order”, or “peace and order”. First, he mentions orderly state affairs, which are the responsibility of the kings and rulers. The rest of the chapter focuses on order in the household, setting up the next chapter about order in the household of God. Hmmm. So, why do I call this message, “How to PRAY?”

The answer comes right away: “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people.” Paul is urge-ent; he’s “worked up” about this. First, pray. Pray FIRST.

There’s the story of a battle in World War II on a desert island in the Pacific. Marines are dug into foxholes, to avoid the withering enemy fire. After a couple hours of this, there’s a lull, and one Marine sprints from his foxhole and drops into another one, closer to his sergeant. Then, another sprint; and another. By now, the enemy gunners are zeroing in on him, but he really wants to get to the sergeant. He waits for a full 15 minutes, then makes his last sprint, bullets popping the sand around him, and drops into his sergeant’s foxhole, almost breaking the neck of two others crouched in there as well. When he turns around, the others in the foxhole see that he’s taken out a small New Testament from his jacket pocket. He flips through it randomly. Then he finds his sergeant with his eyes, and with a frantic look on his face, and says, “Sarge, I’m scared. I know you pray. Tell me, how do you work this thing?”

No, that’s not prayer. A quick request that God bless my football team with a win, is not a prayer. Prayer is conversation with the God you know from experience.

Yesterday in our seminar, God planted this image in my mind. Do we treat God like a firefighter from CDF or Consolidated, or Auburn Volunteer Fire? What kind of relationship do you really have with your local firefighter? With a firefighter, you expect to call them when you smell smoke, or the house is in flames, or the field around you is on fire. Do you know your firefighter? “No,” you would say, “of course not.” You don’t expect to know your firefighter. But isn’t that how most of us think of God, as well? That’s not a personal relationship. It’s all about me and my needs, especially when I am in trouble.

Prayer with God is talking and listening. And most of all, Paul says, pray FIRST. Not, “I guess praying about this problem wouldn’t hurt.” Pray first. Build that relationship with God; come to know God by experience. Only then will God be God in your life. Know God first. Pray first. First, pray.

Pray what? Pray for all people. All believers should pray for all people. Why? Verse 4: God wants all people to be saved and know the truth (intellectually and personally by experience). All. All. All. “All” includes us, of course, but goes ‘way beyond us, also.

Such a picture of an arms-wide-open God is at odds with the picture many people have, of a god who is poised on tip-toe, waiting to catch people in sin so he can send them to hell. That is so wrong. But then some people make the other error—if God wants all people to be saved, then He can get anything He wants, and everyone is “in”. But as the men on Friday mornings have discovered, from the very beginning, God has bound Himself to us and our free choices, even when we choose to ignore Him and go our own way. This causes God great grief, but He has chosen to suffer seemingly endless grief, rather than to wipe us out and replace us

with wooden puppets. God wants everyone to be saved, but every one will make their own decisions about God. And it's up to us—we who have been given the experience of God in our lives—to persuade others to meet God, love God, serve God, and take up their own mission with Jesus. Responsibility for helping with others' salvation has been put in our hands. Whoa!

God knows it's a very inefficient system, wouldn't you agree? But God also knows—no freedom, no deep love. And it's this love relationship that God seeks with you, and with me.

Pray first, pray for every one, and pray especially for those in authority who can impact our lives in powerful ways. Paul is saying here, an orderly nation or city allows us to pursue our ministries of the God who is love. Chaos, persecution, corruption—these destroy the social network and make living a Christian life really hard. So pray for those in authority, too.

The core of our faith is that Jesus died to purchase freedom for ALL. (There's that “all” again!) The God who wants all to be saved could not hope to wait for people like us to “get it”, and turn to Him. He had to act; He had to take the initiative to overcome this vast chasm we have created between us and God. So he took the penalty for ALL people's sin on himself, so that they way is open-- to ALL who will receive Him. Again, people make the decision, and God respects that—a scary thought. We are his “angels” to show His love, and to bring people to the Source. Paul was appointed God's ambassador to those who don't know God (as Eugene Peterson translates it in *The Message Bible*).

Since Paul has been talking about prayer, it's easy for him to move next to instructions about worship. Men, he says, should lift “holy hands to God”, without rancor or arguments. The word for men here is “males”. Why is it—is it our testosterone, our social programming, or what?—that leads us men to have only one emotion, and that's anger. When we're depressed, we can come across as angry. When we're focused on a specific goal and going for it, it can look like scary aggression. When we're hurt, we get mad, not sad. Or, “we get even”...! You can't worship God and be holding a grudge against your brother, Jesus told us in Matthew 18, Luke 17, and other places in the gospels. Rather than raise a fist, holding on to discord and disagreement with another person, if you want to pray, you've got to open up your fist, let the anger abate, and lift open hands toward God.

This posture, it makes a lot of mainline Christians nervous. But what does it remind you of? It reminds me of a little child, straining to get the attention of Dad or Mom, urgently asking to be picked up and held close, to see their face close-up. That's the kind of relationship God is after, and a posture like this might help you act out a desire for God. Who knows—your feelings might follow your body!

And as for women—if men are often distracted by anger, women can be preoccupied by a desire to get a reaction of approval, especially from men. Paul is saying, to worship God in your homes (house churches, remember!) is not like a going to a singles' bar for attracting male attention; worship in your homes is an offering of good deeds to thank God for your redemption from sin's control.

Now we get to a tough passage. Listen again for God's Word as I read verses 11-15 of First Timothy, chapter 2. *[text]*

¹¹ Women should learn quietly and submissively. ¹² I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly. ¹³ For God made Adam first, and afterward he made Eve. ¹⁴ And it was not Adam who was deceived by Satan. The

woman was deceived, and sin was the result. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing, assuming they continue to live in faith, love, holiness, and modesty.

It's crucial to understand how this passage fits in Paul's letter, and to understand the culture of Timothy and others in the Greco-Roman world. In that world, the man was *paterfamilias*—head of the family. That was the order of the day. Paul doesn't want Christians to be understood as undermining marriage by preaching some sort of chaos or rebellion on the home front. Not at all. Just as Paul urges prayer for leaders so we can have order in the state and city, so Paul urges people to maintain order in the household.

And this is not a text about subjugation of women. Here's why:

First, the words usually translated as “men” and “women” here, can also be translated as “husbands” and “wives”. “Husbands and wives” is the choice that makes sense in this context—so this is about order in the household, not broad general rules about “men” and “women”.

Second, many of the same behaviors urged on men earlier and later in this letter are applied to women here. But because those verses addressed to “men” or “husbands” don't appear in this same place, it seems as though there are different standards for husbands and wives. Paul prescribes similar behaviors for all.

Third, the exegesis (the Scripture interpretation) in verses 13-14 is questionable because it puts more blame for sin on the woman than on the man. You might want to open your Bible to Genesis 3 to check this out. The serpent talks to Eve, inviting her to abandon her trust in God's good intentions. She bites the bait--the bait of making her own decisions--then she bites the forbidden fruit. So far, the analysis in Timothy is right on.

BUT WHERE IS ADAM? He's right there. He says—*nothing*—(not even, “Yes, Dear”) as his wife talks with the serpent; he says nothing as she makes her decision and acts. He says *nothing* even when she gives him the other half of the fruit. Neither the man nor the woman think of checking with God, or asking God's opinion or advice—media today feel obligated to get both sides, but not Adam and Eve. Adam could have stopped this terrible blunder; he did nothing. No, the Genesis text says Adam and Eve are Eve-en when it comes to guilt in making their decisions based on their judgment of their best interests, not their Designer's. The woman's sin was of “commission”, the man's sin was of “omission”; and there is no moral difference. To go along with evil is to share in committing the crime.

Fourth, the tense of the verb, “I do not permit” (women to teach or have authority over men) in verse 12 is present tense. There are two ways to translate a present tense verb into English. You could say, “I do not permit”, or you could say, “I am not permitting”. The first sounds like a permanent injunction; the second sounds like a temporary measure to re-establish order. Which is the better translation? In Corinth, from his letters to those congregations, Paul clearly wants to re-establish an orderliness in worship that has been lost. It seems to me that's what Paul wants in Ephesus, too. In Ephesus, the problem was more about conflict and arguing. We've got to have peace if we're going to pursue a love relationship with God. So the prohibition that Paul imposes in Corinth and in Ephesus was probably temporary.

Fifth, the very next topic Paul takes up as chapter 3 starts is, “order in the household of God”. Again—good house churches were modeled on good households. So “order in the household” must be the previous subject in Paul's letter, to make an easy transition to his “order in the household of God” subject.

For all these reasons, plus other texts from Paul that stress the equality of women and men, I am convinced the meaning of verses 11-15 is in support of order in the household between husbands and wives; it's not in support of a status difference between men and women.

Now we've finished our exposition of the text; the text as our outline as Paul runs over a variety of topics. Is there a way to sum this up?

Let me offer this. First, pray first. Before engaging our reason, intuition, or emotions to solve a problem, start by talking with God, and keep a "listening ear" open to Him as you go. That's how to pray. Pray first. Do you pray first, and listen?

Second, we need peace and order, to develop the kind of relationship with God that God has always wanted, the kind of relationship that we deeply need but often don't trust. That's true whether we look at the government, the household of our family, or the household of our church family. Can you leave behind your anger? Can you make peace with people who may be holding a grudge against you, or you against them, before you try to worship God?

Third, we have been called to life by a great God, a God who wants all people to be saved, not just we who have responded (so far). Are we going to put ourselves on God's Team to work for what God wants? Or, like Adam, are we going to keep silent when we should speak up?

God longs to increase His forever family! He could do it without you and me. But just as God has chosen to suffer pain even as we turn our backs on Him, so God has chosen to enlist us—and depend on us—to take on this greatest cause: bringing people to God, for God to fan a flame of faith into fire!

Next week we finish our study of First Timothy, and hear Paul's blessing of this young apprentice. When we also devote ourselves to God as apprentice missionaries, Paul's blessing also falls on us. Or, not.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on August 26, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]