

1 TIM 2:1-10—THE CENTRALITY OF PRAYER

INTRO: One of the most interesting, if not mysterious, aspects of Christianity is prayer. I say “mysterious” because Jesus tells us in **Matt 6:8**, “**Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**” But in the next verses he tells us to pray for our needs. In **1 Thess 5:17** God commands us to pray continually. So if he knows everything anyway, why pray?

Then there is the fact that so often we pray and nothing seems to happen. You pray for healing, or for a loved one to come to know the Lord, or for some financial situation, or all kinds of other things—maybe for days or months or years—and see no answers or movement. So we wonder, “**Am I doing something wrong?**”

There are probably hundreds of verses in the Bible that deal with prayer. We are going through the book of **1 Timothy**. Right toward the beginning of the book, in **2:1-10**, Paul deals with the importance of prayer. Let me read it [**READ**] While this passage does not give us a comprehensive explanation of prayer, it is telling us:

PROP: Prayer affects everything—internally and externally.

O/S: We will see how prayer affects all of life as we consider: (1) prayer is of first importance to enable us to remain faithful; (2) prayer directly affects our relationship with God and others; (3) prayer affects our attitude and our behavior. In short, prayer affects everything—internally and externally. We will conclude with some important considerations concerning our understanding of God, ourselves, our relationship with Christ, and prayer.

I. Prayer is of first importance to enable us to remain faithful

The phrase which begins **2:1**—“**First of all, then**” (the NKJV has “**Therefore, I exhort first of all**”)—ties what Paul says in chapter 2 to what he has just said at the end of chapter 1. In **1:18-19** Paul was speaking of the importance of remaining faithful. He said [**READ 1:18-19**]. In **2:1**, the Greek word for “then” typically is translated “therefore.” What Paul is saying here is, “**Therefore, if you want to remain faithful, the matter of first importance is prayer.**” In fact, all of chapter 2 (indeed, the rest of the book) can be seen as a commentary about how to remain faithful, and what faithfulness looks like when it is applied by men and women.

So, right at the outset, what we are seeing is that prayer is intimately related to our faith and our faithfulness. It is not an “optional extra.” The reason is that the heart of Christianity—unlike every other religion—is having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Christianity is not just a long list of rules that one is supposed to follow. It is knowing God personally. Jesus said that he came so that we would have life and have it more abundantly. In **John 17:3** he defined what eternal life is. He said, “**This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**” That is why many people used to say that “**Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship.**”

The reason why this is so important is that the lifeblood of any relationship is COMMUNICATION. That is what prayer is: communication with God. Communication is a two-way street. It is not just talking *to* God but is also hearing *from* God. Our prayer life reflects our relationship with God. This means that, since we are constantly in God’s presence, we should always be in communication with him. Think of any human relationship—your marriage, a friendship, or anything else. If you never communicate, you will never know the other person, and you will have a shallow relationship at best. That is why Paul begins his discussion of prayer by showing us that it is intimately related to faith and faithfulness itself.

This leads us to the fact that:

II. Prayer directly affects our relationship with God and others

In **vv. 1-2** Paul says [**READ vv. 1-2**]. The different words he uses for prayer in **v. 1** suggest that *all types of prayers be made for all types of people*. Our prayers should include adoration and praise of God, confession of our sins, thanksgiving for what he has done and will do, as well as requests for ourselves and others. Therefore, in **1 Thess 5:16-18** Paul tells us to “**rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**”

There is a good acronym for prayer—which maybe you have heard of before—and it is ACTS (A-C-T-S). A stands for adoration, IOW, expressing our love and adoration for God—primarily for who and what he is. It is natural to praise that which is praiseworthy. If we never tell our spouse or kids how much we love them, that says something about our relationship with them. If that is true on the human level, how much more should be our love for God who gave us life, who gave us eternal life, who has blessed us in many ways, who is present

with us and helps us through the hard times.

C stands for confession. The apostle John said, **“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** We all sin in thought, word, and deed. Sin blocks or puts a wall up in between us and God. We know that is true on the human level: when someone offends or hurts you, the relationship suffers. The same is true in our relationship with God. But confession cleanses that channel of relationship. It restores full and free communication and restores the closeness of our relationship with God.

T stands for thanksgiving. Think of all God has done for you. We couldn’t draw one breath if it were not for him. We’ve all heard the phrase, **“Count your blessings.”** Sometimes that may be trite or a cliché, but it is true. We have been blessed in innumerable ways—both big and small. How mindful and thankful are we for this? Again, there is a human analogy here. If your spouse or a friend gives you a birthday present or a Christmas present and you just go **“Humpf, and toss it aside,”** that may show what you think of the present, but more importantly, it shows what you really think of the other person.

Our lack of thankfulness to God really reveals two things: (1) It reveals our extreme self-centeredness; and (2) It reveals that we really don’t think very much of God at all. You see, prayer is intimately related to, and reveals the nature of, our relationship with God.

S stands for supplication. IOW, petitioning God for things for ourselves and on behalf of others. This is where most of us tend to spend most of our time in prayer. There is nothing wrong with making supplication to God for ourselves and others. In **Phil 4:6** Paul says, **“In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”**

Again, however, the issue is relationship. For many of us—and we would never say this—the way we tend to view prayer is that prayer is a way of trying to manipulate God to get him to give us what we really want. And then we get angry when he doesn’t come through. None of us consciously thinks that or says that, but look at what we spend most of our time in prayer actually doing, and what is our reaction or our feelings when we don’t get what we have asked for. This really reveals the nature of our relationship with God. I will have more to say about this later when we look at some important considerations concerning God, ourselves, our relationship with Christ, and prayer.

The fact that prayer affects our relationship with God and others is indicated in vv. 2-4. In those verses, Paul points out that we should pray for those who are in authority. Christianity and society mutually affect and influence each other. Paul goes on to say we should pray for those in authority **“so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”** IOW, Christians need to be above reproach in how we live so that the government and the non-Christians in society will have no reason to attack the church. To be able to live **“a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity”** will do much to help the spread of the gospel—and living out and spreading the gospel should always be our primary concern.

That is exactly what he goes on to talk about in vv. 3-7. There he points out that God’s desire is for people’s salvation. Our lives are a witness for Christ. The way we live is a reflection of Christ and the gospel. If we live lives of **“godliness and dignity”** we will draw people to Christ. Therefore, our prayers for all people, especially for leaders, so that we may live godly lives, are ultimately based on the goal of spreading the gospel.

I should add two things about vv. 4-6, which says God’s desire is for all people to be saved and Christ is the mediator who gave himself as a ransom for all. These verses must not be taken out of the larger biblical context of God’s plan for salvation. The Bible indicates that, although it is God’s “desire” that all people be saved, *not* all people will, in fact, be saved. There are two essential ways to deal with this difference between what God “desires” and what actually happens. One way is to say that *“all men”* referred to in **v. 4** means “all kinds of people”—in other words, *“all men without distinction”* (as to race, tribe, language, economic status, etc; it does *not* mean *“all men without exception”* (IOW, every single person in the world).

The other way to deal with this is to acknowledge that, in some sense, there are “two wills” in God. We must distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does ordain to happen. Both of these things can be spoken of as God’s will. There is an excellent article about this by John Piper entitled **“The Two Wills of God”**; it is available online if you are interested. Much has been written on this, but that is all I will say about it, because to go further would take us far from the main point of this passage.

Regarding Christ as the mediator, this highlights what we talked about two weeks ago concerning “grace, mercy, and peace” in 1:2. The reference to Christ here in **vv. 5-6** are pointing out that there is a great gap between God and humanity. Only Jesus Christ is able to “bridge that gap,” because only Christ is both fully God and fully man who never sinned. As I’m sure you know, a “mediator” is someone who brings together and reconciles two parties who are opposed to each other. A mediator has to be able to relate to both sides. In the case of God and humanity, Jesus is fully God. He can therefore fully relate to God. Jesus is also fully man. He

can therefore fully relate to us. Unlike all other people, Jesus was without sin. He can therefore fully represent God to man and can also appeal to God *as man*. Therefore, only Jesus is capable of being a mediator between holy God and sinful man. He alone is capable of giving people everlasting life and reuniting God and mankind. That brings us to the fact that:

III. Prayer affects our attitude and our behavior

In **vv. 8-10** Paul *applies* what he has been saying about prayer, first to *men* and then to *women*. One commentator says this, “The main goal of the instruction in **vv. 8-10** is not to command the *act* of prayer (the specific command to pray was already given in **vv. 1-2**). Instead, the focus of **vv. 8-10** is the *demeanor* of both men and women *while* praying and worshiping . . . Paul is insisting that men’s and women’s outward behavior and appearance should not be in conflict with their inner character.”

With respect to men, v. 8 says [READ]. The word “Therefore” links **v. 8** with what Paul has just been talking about. As we have seen, the context is that we may live godly lives so that the gospel may spread and people will become saved. Christian men are to set the example. Prayer is not limited to an activity that occurs only on Sundays in church. Rather, prayer reflects our relationship with Christ. Since we are always with him, and since prayer is the matter of first importance to enable us to remain faithful, we should have an attitude of prayer at all times and **“in every place.”**

“Lifting up holy hands” is not a requirement about how we have to position our physical hands when we are praying. We can pray in any position: bowing the head; lying on the ground; kneeling; lifting the hands. You could pray while standing on your head. The position of the body is not important; the condition of the heart is.

“Lifting up holy hands” is a metaphor for praying out of a holy life. We know this because: The context of prayer is that we can live godly lives. We can therefore expect that when Paul makes a specific application to men, what he says will relate to the context of living a godly life. Also, “holy” is a spiritual term, not a physical term. Washing one’s physical hands does not make them holy if the person is living a sinful life—think of Pontius Pilate washing his hands; that did not relieve him of his guilt of condemning an innocent man to death.

The next phrase is “without wrath and dissension.” That relates to and qualifies **“lifting up holy hands.”** These phrases indicate that what matters is the quality of our life. **“Without wrath and dissension”** is an *example* of a *typical sin of men* that prevents them from praying out of a holy life, IOW, it prevents them from **“lifting up holy hands.”** Anger, arguing, fighting, and disputing are typical male attitudes of self-promotion and self-centeredness [ME MAN!]. Men who act like that or who have that attitude are drawing attention to themselves and away from the Lord. Their attitude and demeanor are the exact opposite of the attitude that puts God and his will first. Consequently, men who pray while in an attitude of **“wrath and dissension”** should not expect God to look favorably on them or their prayers.

In vv. 9-10 Paul then applies what he has been saying about the demeanor of prayer to women [READ]. The word “likewise” places Paul’s discussion concerning women in the same context as his discussion concerning men: namely, prayer to live godly lives and prayer out of a holy life. In **v. 8** Paul talked about sins that are characteristic of men; in **v. 9** he does the same thing regarding women. Although women get angry and argue, such behavior is not as characteristic of women as it is of men. Far more typical of women is concern over their appearance and flaunting their beauty and sexuality.

Paul is using an example from his own culture here. In ancient Greece, and still in Paul’s day, lavish dress, hair style, and jewelry were considered inconsistent with moral uprightness and true piety. Prostitutes and immoral women would spend hours making elaborate braided hair-dos, basically to advertise who they were. Christian women who dressed that way because they felt that **“I am free in Christ, so I can dress however I like”** would be drawing attention to themselves and away from the Lord, and would be giving a very wrong indication of what Christian morality is like. The reference to **“gold, pearls, and costly garments”** also shows concern about self-promotion. That indicates an attitude of **“Look at me, how rich I am!”** How would the poorer sisters in the congregation feel?

So he says women should dress “modestly and discreetly.” He is not saying that women have to wear gunny sacks. There is no dress code in the Bible. What is “modest and discreet” varies from culture to culture and changes over time. If Paul were writing this letter today, he would not mention braided hair, since braided hair connoted something in his culture that it does not connote today. I can give a good example from East Africa [CAROL ARNOLD EXAMPLE]. The point is, we need to be aware of the messages our behavior and dress may be conveying and the effect they may be having on others. We should not put any stumbling blocks that would prevent people from hearing the gospel and seeing our good character.

Paul is saying that the typical sinful behaviors of both men and women will draw people's attention to themselves and away from the Lord. He is asking us to consider why we are doing what we are doing. He is asking us to be mindful of our attitudes, looks, and demeanor, because all these things reflect our relationship with God and may adversely affect other people. We may not think of these things as having anything to do with **“loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself,”** but they do.

Paul is making clear that all aspects of our lives—our emotional lives, insisting on getting our own way, and even how we dress—ultimately demonstrate what we really think about Jesus and other people. Prayer—and having a good prayer life—therefore should affect both our attitudes and our behavior. We have seen how prayer arises out of and reflects our relationship with God. We have also seen that prayer affects all of our relationships—with God and others, and affects all areas of life, both internally and externally. In light of this, let me mention some:

IV. Important considerations concerning our understanding of God, ourselves, our relationship with Christ, and prayer

First, we need an adequate understanding of God to have an adequate understanding of prayer. We have seen that prayer is linked to faith. Some people talk about **“the power of prayer.”** I would not put it that way. To talk that way implies that prayer itself has some kind of power; in effect, it turns prayer into a kind of magic. We are praying to *God*. God is sovereign over all things and has a plan for everything. *He* has the power, not the prayer. Prayer cannot manipulate him, because prayer ultimately is not about us. It is about him, his will, and his glory. He uses everything—including us and our prayers—to bring his will to ultimate fruition. Nothing and no one can thwart his ultimate will, although we may act contrary to his revealed will.

Second, we need to have a clear view of ourselves. Our flesh wants to make God smaller and us bigger and thereby shrink the difference between us. We tend to think that God exists for “me” and “my needs,” to satisfy “my desires,” and to help me in times of trouble. We tend to want a god who will give us what we want, without being accountable to him. IOW, we want to be in control. We need to come to grips with the issue: **“If Jesus really is God, how then am I going to live my life?”** The question is not, **“What can God do for me?”** But **“What can I be for him?”**

Third, we need to have a right understanding of Christ and our relationship with him. Prayer is communication, and communication is the lifeblood of any relationship. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, moves us to pray largely in order to deepen the relationship between him and us. As we give him more and more access to us, that relationship will grow. As we grow in our relationship with him, the more he will reveal his heart and his will to us. As a result, I will be content with whatever he gives me, because now I see that he is more precious to me than anything else in the world. So we need to ask ourselves, **“What price am I willing to pay, and what time and effort am I willing to spend, to become like Christ and foster a deep relationship with him?”**

Fourth, we need to have a clearer understanding of prayer itself. It is not our ability to articulate our needs or even the fervency of our prayer that causes our prayers to be heard and answered. If that were true, then we would get the glory. Rather, it is our *helplessness* and our *dependency* on him. God uses that to demonstrate that it is *his* power that provides the answer so that *he* may be glorified. And *that* is a key factor: **Is he really the one we want to glorify, or ourselves?** Are we willing simply to bring the matter that concerns us to him and then rest in, and be content with, whatever answer he gives? Do we trust him?

Ultimately, the issue is: Are we willing to die to ourselves that he may be magnified in our lives? Are we willing to say, **“I want your will done in this matter.”** Would we rather have him get us out of a tough situation, or can we truly say, **“If you will be glorified by my remaining in this tough situation, then that is what I truly desire?”** When we can come to the point of really accepting *what* God does, *how* he does it, and *when* he does it—**“not as I will but as he wills”**—leaving the answers entirely to him, then (and only then) are we truly praying **“in Jesus’ name”** and **“according to his will.”**

CONCL: Prayer is a deep subject, because God is a deep God. Prayer is of first importance to enable us to remain faithful. Prayer directly affects our relationship with God and others. And prayer affects our attitude and our behavior. In short, prayer affects everything—internally and externally.

Ultimately, as we have seen, prayer is not primarily about us and our needs and desires; it is about God, his will, his plan, and his glory. He *allows* us to come to him in prayer and *desires* that we come to him in prayer, because prayer is based on our relationship with him. He desires to have a deep relationship with us.

But all the things we have talked about suggest that many of us (and I am speaking to myself here) should probably reevaluate our attitude toward prayer. We should spend more time in prayer, and probably change the way we pray—because prayer reveals and exposes the true nature of our relationship with God. Because it does that, if we want our relationship with him to be closer than the closest human relationship ever could be, then the best way to achieve that is through prayer.