

Instructions About Worship

Lesson Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-6; 3:14-16

Background Scripture: 1 Timothy 2 & 3

Devotional Reading: John 4:23,24

1 Timothy 2:1-6

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

1 Timothy 3:14-16

¹⁴ Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

TODAY'S AIM

- **Facts:** to study the instructions that Paul gave Timothy and the church about how to worship.
- **Principle:** to see how one should truly worship our God.
- **Application:** to help us see that following a biblical pattern is important to authentic worship.

INTRODUCTION

This quarter the focus of our lessons is worship. Both Greek and Hebrew words translated "worship" emphasize prostration and reverence before a superior being.

While many think of worship only as a public expression of adoration, it should be seen as an attitude we manifest in every circumstance of life, whether public or private. It is an attitude that sees our entire existence as lived for the exaltation of our Creator and Redeemer.

Family Resemblance

Look at a family portrait and what do you notice? Usually, we see ways that the family members resemble each other. Today's text reminds us of the Christian family resemblance. Followers of Jesus are part of God's family. Their membership in that family should be reflected in the way that they live. The resemblance should be most obvious when the family is gathered together, as we do for worship.

What makes us members of God's family is God's saving message, the good news of Jesus. The family resemblance means putting that message into practice. That is what today's text will tell us to do.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are known as the *Pastoral Epistles*.

These are letters that the apostle Paul wrote to two of his younger associates in ministry. The letters provided those church leaders instructions on dealing with the problems that arose day to day in their churches. Probably written near the end of Paul's ministry, the letters reflect the challenges of leading the church in a sinful world.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy to his son in the faith Timothy, who began working with Paul during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:1–3). About 13 years after that journey began, Paul wrote this letter as Timothy was ministering in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul had taken the gospel to that city on his third missionary journey (Acts 19).

The church faced the challenge of life in a large city that was dominated by a popular pagan religious cult. We recall that the city of Ephesus was home to the great pagan Temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul's actions in Ephesus threatened some of Diana's devotees, and a riot resulted (Acts 19:23–41). But every church, no matter its setting, faces the difficulty of its members living and working together in ways that reflect the new life in Christ instead of the life of sin. All those issues are reflected in this letter.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CHURCH (1 Timothy 2:1-6)

Paul's exhortations regarding public worship are set in the context of a volatile situation at Ephesus. Timothy, a young church leader, found himself amid problems—self-appointed teachers pretending to be experts on the law (1:3-7) and believers failing to fulfill the moral dictates of their faith (vs. 19,20).

Having warned against false teaching and having offered thanks to God for His saving mercy in chapter 1, Paul now begins his instructions to the church about its life together. The false teachers might insist that an elite class has special privileges before God. But Paul insists otherwise, since prayers are to be offered on behalf of everyone. Those who know God through Jesus Christ will offer prayers not just for themselves or a few others.

To emphasize this point, Paul uses several different words for prayer.

Supplications are prayers that ask God for a blessing or help of some kind.

Intercessions translates a word that indicates a request offered to a superior, a picture of the believer addressing almighty God. *Giving of thanks* refers to the other side of prayer: expressing gratitude to God for help and blessings received. In the middle of the list is the general term *prayers*, which can stand for every kind of communication with God. The combination of terms gives extraordinary emphasis to this command to pray.

In the last part of verse 1 Paul reminded Timothy that the church's prayer responsibility is universal. Prayers must not be limited to the needs of our own group; they must extend around the world, petitioning God to work in the hearts of all mankind. If He releases His power in response to prayer, how often we fall short in our narrow outlook!

1) What were the circumstances at Ephesus when Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:1)?

Respect for authority runs throughout Scripture. Responsibility to pray for those in authority is also the Christian's obligation.

Paul emphasized one special group for whom believers should pray—kings and all others who hold positions of authority. This is important, for rulers hold the destinies of vast numbers of people in their hands, and their policies toward the gospel especially affect those destinies. This reminder is also important because Christians are apt to ignore political leaders when they pray.

When Paul wrote this letter, there were no Christian rulers. The church was probably uneasy over the increasing persecution in the Roman provinces. It would not be long before Paul himself would be executed for his faith by Nero. Believers were to pray that the heavenly King would overrule pagan rulers toward good ends.

We should pray for rulers so "*that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*" (1 Tim. 2:2). A stable society breeds a tranquil setting in which the church's work can proceed. And in this atmosphere, Christians can cultivate the virtues that please God and bear witness to men. Despite the fact that persecution has often brought out the best in the church, it is still proper to pray for stable, peaceful conditions.

2) Why did Paul urge the church to pray especially for rulers (v. 2)?

Paul shows a connection between our attitude and God's attitude toward prayer. Why should we pray for all men and especially for rulers? We do so because "*this is good and pleases God our Savior; who wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.*" The word for "good" here means "honorable." Prayer is honorable to God and pleases Him. This is because He is "our Savior," who has provided salvation not just for us but for all who believe. Thus, He is interested in our prayers that rulers foster conditions favorable to evangelism.

As Savior, God "*wants all men to be saved*" (1 Tim. 2:4). Note the connection between "all men" here and in verse 1. We are to pray for all because God's love and mercy extend to all. Our heart's desire should be as inclusive as God's.

Does this statement mean that God will eventually save everyone? No, for that would contradict Jesus' statements that many would be left out of His kingdom because of unbelief. The word "will" refers to God's desire. But each individual has the moral responsibility to accept or reject salvation. Paul's point here is simply that through prayer, the church is God's instrument to bring into the fold those He desires to be saved.

3) *If God has power to bring salvation, why are some not saved (vs. 3,4)?*

In a world with many rulers and many gods, it is easy to imagine many paths to a good life. But Paul now explains why there can be only one way of salvation. "For" connects the statement that "there is one God" to the preceding statements. Paul stressed the oneness of God here because he had made universal statements that require explanation. Why are we to pray for all men (v. 1)? It is because all must answer to the same God. Why do all need salvation (v. 4)? It is because the one God has judged all to be sinners (cf. Rom. 3:23).

Furthermore, unsaved persons need to come to the knowledge of the truth. But how do we know that there is such a thing as truth or what this truth is? We know because there is one God who has spoken.

Monotheism was at the heart of the faith of Old Testament saints (Deut. 6:4). Their one God declared that He would permit no rivals (Isa. 42:8). Whoever wanted salvation had to embrace Him (45:22). Paul continued to stress this theme in his writings (cf. Rom. 3:29,30; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6). The worldwide application of his message rested on the exclusiveness of his God.

4) *Is belief in one God sufficient for salvation (v. 5)? Explain.*

There is also "*one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. 2:5). Monotheism itself is not sufficient for either salvation or prayer, for in their sinfulness humans are alienated from the only God. They need a mediator to stand between them and God to bring reconciliation. In His grace, God has provided such a Person. But Paul makes it clear that there is only one Mediator. No one but Christ can fulfill this role, and that is because His Person and work are unique.

Christ became the one and only mediator through His death on the cross (v. 6), which provided the payment that brought freedom—the *ransom*—to sinners (compare Mark 10:45). He gave himself willingly as a sacrificial offering that satisfies God's wrath against sin and so makes peace between God and sinners who have rebelled against Him (Romans 3:21–26).

The phrase *testimony given in its proper time* emphasizes that salvation through Christ is to be announced to all people. That is God's plan. That "proper time" is now, Paul implies. Now is the time to unite in prayer that the church can fulfill God's will to make the truth of Christ known to all.

5) *What qualified Jesus to be the perfect Mediator between God and man?*

WORSHIP'S ESSENTIAL TRUTHS (1 Timothy 3:14-16)

After writing of the worldwide outreach of prayer, Paul gave instruction about the proper conduct of worship in the church. This includes a section on the qualifications of church officials (3:1-13). He concluded by stating why these matters are important.

Paul intended to visit Timothy at Ephesus shortly (1 Tim. 3:14). When he came, he would assert his apostolic authority and establish order in the church. But if he were delayed, his written instructions would provide sufficient guidance on personal conduct "in the house of God" (v. 15). Paul was not referring to behavior at services, for "house of God" is never used of a church building.

Rather, in this context, "house" means "household" (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4,5,12). The church is a household where all God's children stand before Him equally in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28,29; Col. 3:11). Wherever local households of faith exist, the

principles of conduct Paul has enunciated will apply to their life.

6) What did Paul mean when he called the church "the house of God" (1 Timothy 3:15)?

Paul emphasized the importance of the church as the church of the living God.

Christians worship the only true God, who, unlike the lifeless images of the pagans, is alive. This living God has chosen to live among His people, whether gathered or scattered. But His presence is especially felt when churches convene for public worship.

The importance of the church is also seen in that it is "*the pillar and foundation of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15). As a pillar, the church is to hold the truth high so that the whole world will witness it.

7) What is the role of the church in regard to God's truth?

What is this truth the church is expected to uphold and preserve? It is really a cluster of truths centering on Jesus Christ. Paul asserted that "*beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great*". By common confession, all believers accept the mystery Paul introduced as great in its significance.

A "mystery" to Paul was a truth previously kept secret by God but now revealed to the spiritually discerning (cf. Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26,27). Here it is associated with godliness because it is the basis for true godliness. Those who bear a transcendent message ought to live a transcendent life.

This mystery focuses on Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 3:16). Paul chooses those things about Him that changed the hidden mystery into a revealed one. First, He "*appeared in body*" This is a reference to His incarnation—not just His birth but His entire life on earth (cf. John 1:14).

Christ the eternal Son became flesh, to provide salvation which was to be both preached and believed. No wonder it is called "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3).

Justified in the Spirit. The flesh refers to His humanity and Spirit refers to His deity. He proved to be all He claimed. Seen of angels. The holy angels witnessed His every move, such as His birth (Luke 2:9), temptation (Matthew 1:13), Gethsemane (26:53), resurrection (28:2), and ascension (Acts 1:10). Preached unto the Gentiles. This good news is to go to all the world (Mt 28:19). This is the Christian's responsibility after Christ performed the work of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:29). Believed. Man's responsibility is to respond to these great truths and believe. This was the ultimate purpose for which God revealed His mystery. Finally, while this mystery was being unfolded on earth, He was received up into glory.

Paul's instructions to Timothy concerning worship are not arbitrary or personal preferences. They are focused on glorifying God through the church as it continues to unfold the mystery of Christ in the world.

8) In what sense are truths about Jesus a mystery (v. 16)?

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1) Prayer transcends all classes; no one is too low or too high to be its subject (1 Tim. 2:1).
- 2) It pleases God when we pray for those in authority, and it is also to our benefit (vs. 2,3).
- 3) The heart of God desires salvation for every individual without exception (v. 4).
- 4) There is only one God and one Savior, but the gospel is for all the world (vs. 5,6).
- 5) The church is God's holy tool for spreading the message of salvation throughout the earth (3:14,15).
- 6) The gospel is a holy mystery; it should never cease to inspire awe in us (v. 16).

CONCLUSION

Whom Do You Resemble?

Paul paints a picture of a gathered church as God's family. As God's family, the church should obviously resemble the family's head. We have been saved by Christ, who gave His life for unworthy sinners. If our worship displays modesty, humility, and concern for others instead of ourselves, it shows the family resemblance. If not, we resemble something—or someone—else.

PRAYER

O God, make us less concerned with ourselves, our rights, and our preferences when we gather. Teach us to pursue what You have called us to do. In the name of Jesus, who became a man to serve us, amen!

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Take your place in the family portrait.