

## “First Things *First!*” (1 Timothy 2:1–8)

Happy Father’s Day, men! I’m going to kill two birds with one stone. This sermon is both a Father’s Day message and the first installment in a summer series on the priorities of the local church. I can get away with this two-pronged approach because I believe that male leadership is essential to the local church. This doesn’t mean that I don’t value women; I certainly do. In fact, I esteem women to the highest degree. Many women in our church family serve as my heroes. But the Scriptures descriptively and prescriptively emphasize the great need for male leadership among God’s people. This is not only true biblically; it’s also the case experientially. When a husband/father begins attending church, 90% of the time his wife and children follow. In the case of a wife/mother, the odds are at 25% or less. Furthermore, men desire community with other men. Hence, if a church wants strong leadership, it must reach strong men. Often strong male leadership often makes the difference between a good church and a great church.

Paul writes 1 Timothy to his spiritual protégé. In the course of his letter, Paul tells Tim how to conduct oneself in the local church (3:15). In 2:1–8,<sup>1</sup> the apostle discusses prayer and the gospel—two critical elements to every local church. The key word in this section is the adjective “all” (*pas*), appearing seven times in eight verses. This repetition of “all” shows the extent of our prayers and God’s love. My conclusion is: “*Emmanuel needs ALL-in men.*”<sup>2</sup> Notice, I didn’t say, “*Emmanuel needs ALL or nothing men,*” for that would exclude many of you. Some of you aren’t prepared to lead. In fact, you’re not even sure you want to be in church this morning. Rather, I said, “*Emmanuel needs ALL-in men.*” By that I mean, I pray God’s Word drives you to say, “I’m going to test the waters. I’m going to get to know some other guys in this church. I’m going to read my Bible and pray. I’m going to share Christ. I’m all-in.” In these eight verses, I’d like to share with you, men, three direct exhortations from the apostle Paul to you.

**1. Men, pray for people (2:1-2).** Paul challenges us to pray for all types of people so that our lives might point others to Christ. Paul writes: “**First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.**” The phrase, “First of all” (*proton panton*) means what Paul is about to write is of the utmost of importance.<sup>3</sup> Frequently, when our family finishes a mealtime prayer, I like to give one of my children a high five and then extend my index finger in the air signifying #1. My child on cue clasps my hand and together we extend our fingers toward heaven. This simple tradition reminds us that prayer is our #1 responsibility and privilege because God is #1. This is further confirmed by Paul’s use of the conjunction “then” (*oun*), which ties back to the charge in 1:3 to stop false teachers,<sup>4</sup> which some scholars believe is the theme of the book. Regardless, stopping false teachers is very important, and so is prayer. The verb translated “I urge” (*parakalo*)<sup>5</sup> is the first word in the sentence (see the NIV: “I urge, then, first of all”). You can feel Paul’s sense of urgency in his use of “urge.” “Whereas many things are commanded and demanded in this letter, prayer is urged.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul urges that four types of prayers be made for all men.<sup>7</sup> These nouns are basically synonyms.<sup>8</sup> If any distinction should be made, “entreaties” (*deesis*)<sup>9</sup> refers to making requests for specific needs; “prayers” (*proseuche*)<sup>10</sup> to bringing those in view before God; “petitions” (*enteuxis*)<sup>11</sup> to appealing boldly on their behalf; and “thanksgivings” (*eucharistia*)<sup>12</sup> to thankfulness for them.<sup>13</sup> Prayer should always include thanksgiving.<sup>14</sup> In my dissertation writing, I have asked various New Testament scholars many questions. I often conclude my e-mail requests by saying, “Thank you in advance for any help you can provide.” Similarly, we must remember to thank God in advance for His answers to prayer. And when God does answer our prayers, we must also remember to express thanksgiving. Again, these prayers are to be made “on behalf of all men.” The noun “men” (*anthropon*) is used generically, referring to both men and women. Paul then singles out “kings and all who are in authority.”<sup>15</sup> His point in making this application is: Believers are to pray for everyone, even governing rulers like Nero who are killing Christians.<sup>16</sup> If we pray more for our government, we’ll be more thankful for our government.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose in these prayers is “so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” The word translated “tranquil” (*eremos*) is only used here in the New Testament. The only other New Testament usage of the word translated “quiet” (*hesuchios*) is found in 1 Pet 3:4 when speaking of a wife’s “gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.” The only Greek Old Testament occurrence is my favorite Old Testament verse Isaiah 66:2b: “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite (*hesuchios*) of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” We pray so that “we” might live godly lives. “Godliness” (*eusebeia*) refers to an attitude of reverence for God based on knowledge of Him.<sup>18</sup> “Dignity” (*semnoteti*) refers to the outward manifestation of that attitude in righteous behavior. We shouldn’t do so primarily for our personal ease and enjoyment but so we can carry out our purpose in the world as Christians (cf. 1 Tim 6:1).<sup>19</sup> Our purpose is to bring the message of reconciliation to all people and to glorify God in all our relationships.<sup>20</sup> Men, who is God leading you to pray for? Will you be committed to praying for those people whom God places upon your heart? Today, will you ask God to make you a man of prayer? *Emmanuel needs ALL-in men*. Will you be such a manly man?

[When men pray for people, the church excels. Paul’s second exhortation is . . .]

**2. Men, proclaim the gospel (2:3-7).** If a man prays, he will eventually proclaim. Pray-ers become proclaimers.<sup>21</sup> In 2:3 Paul writes, “**This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.**”<sup>22</sup> The pronoun “this” (*touto*) refers back to prayers for all men (2:1).<sup>23</sup> Paul is saying God loves it when we pray for others. Verse four tells us why: God “**desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**”<sup>24</sup> This verse emphasizes human responsibility while other verses focus on divine sovereignty. I believe both of these scriptural teachings. In other words, God elects particular individuals unto salvation, yet He also desires all people to believe in Christ. This is an antinomy (i.e., two irreconcilable truths that cannot be solved in this lifetime).<sup>25</sup> In spite of this theological conundrum, we must attempt to properly balance divine sovereignty and human responsibility. It isn’t our responsibility or capability to solve the puzzle of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. It is our task to preach the gospel universally to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev 5:9; 7:9).

In 2:5–6, Paul cites three foundational truths of the gospel: **(1) God is one.** Paul writes, “**For there is one God**” (2:5a).<sup>26</sup> The false teachers in Ephesus were no doubt confused on the oneness of God. Nevertheless, Christianity has always believed that there is one God made up of three unique persons (i.e., the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit). Although we may never fully understand this doctrine, we must believe it and teach it.

**(2) Jesus Christ is the sole intermediary between God and humankind.** Paul writes, “[there is] **one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**” (2:5b). Most English versions render the Greek noun *mesites* “mediator,” but this conveys a wrong impression in contemporary English. Jesus was not a mediator who worked for compromise between opposing parties. Instead he was the only one able to go between man and God to enable them to have a relationship, but entirely on God’s terms. The better translation, therefore, is “intermediary” (NET).<sup>28</sup>

When you connect with the internet you must have a modem. It may be a phone modem, a cable modem, DSL, or even a wireless network, but without some kind of modem, you can’t connect. While there are several choices of modems to connect to the internet, the Bible makes it clear there is only *one* modem to connect to God—Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> Although Christianity may appear “narrow” or “intolerant,” it is willing to embrace everyone who believes.

**(3) Jesus offered Himself as a ransom for all.** Paul explains that Jesus “**gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.**”<sup>31</sup> The noun “ransom” (*antilutron*) means the exchange price for freeing a slave or redeeming a prisoner of war. It illustrates that Christ exchanged His life for ours. This is good theology, men. Believe it!

When a man is prayed up and is sold out to the gospel, He becomes a preacher. In 2:7, Paul writes, **“For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”** Paul uses three titles to describe himself.<sup>32</sup> While these titles are unique to the apostle Paul, they are also relevant to men called by God. We too are sent out to preach and teach. We must not be intimidated; we must be full of grace and truth. God is looking for a few committed pray-ers and proclaimers. Will you examine your prayer list and prepare to proclaim the good news of the gospel to those on your list? Will you be an answer to your own prayers? *Emmanuel needs ALL-in men.*

[Paul wants men to pray and to proclaim. His third and final exhortation is . . .]

**3. Men, lead by example (2:8).**<sup>33</sup> In 2:8, Paul resumes and concludes the section about prayer begun in 2:1–2. Paul writes, **“Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.”**<sup>34</sup> The use of “therefore” (*oun*) ties 2:8 back into 2:1–7. (This important conjunction has been unfortunately omitted by the NIV.) However, this conjunction is a hinge verse that also opens up 2:9–15. For our purposes, I am using including it with 2:1–7. In this important verse, Paul expresses an apostolic demand in the language of personal desire (“I want”).<sup>35</sup> The phrase “in every place”<sup>36</sup> could refer to one’s neighborhood, workplace, or community, but it most likely refers to local churches. Paul wants men to take the lead in their respective local churches.

Here, Paul may assume that the church will adopt the Old Testament posture of prayer. Ps 28:2 says: “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You for help, When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, Paul did not command the men to pray with upraised hands. He simply described public praying as the Christians practiced it commonly in his day.<sup>38</sup> Commonly they raised their palms upward and open to heaven evidently to symbolize their inner openness to God and their desire to offer praise to God and to obtain a gift from Him.<sup>39</sup> If Paul had meant the men were to lift up their physical hands when they prayed he probably would not have described the hands as holy. “Holy,” “wrath,” and “dissension” all point to a metaphorical use of “hands.” Our hands symbolize what we do. Paul wanted the men to pray as they practiced holiness in their everyday lives.<sup>40</sup> Posture in prayer does not render the prayer more or less effective, but it often reflects the inner attitude of the person praying. It is more likely that Paul has in mind Ps 24:3–4a: “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.” So Paul’s words may be an open, symbolic declaration of a clean life.<sup>41</sup> In any case, Paul’s emphasis is upon holiness rather than on hands.<sup>42</sup> Hands stand for the whole, the body, one’s very life

In 1 Tim 2:8 “wrath and dissension” are inconsistent with the life of holiness that God requires of those who pray publicly, but they are also counter to effective praying.<sup>43</sup> One of the besetting sins of men is anger directed toward family. 1 Peter 3:7: “You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.” Eph 6:4: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (cf. Col 3:21). If we are to be men who lead our church well, we must ensure that we are not out of fellowship with those who are close to us. This will render our prayers ineffective.

So, men, this is where the rubber meets the road. Will you pray for all people and lead the body? You can join our “power hour” on Sunday mornings (8:30–9:15). You can pray during one of our two worship services. Call it: “Worship at one; serve at the other.” You can request our church prayer email prayer list and begin praying for others. You can reach out to at least one person every Sunday and ask that person for prayer requests and then pray. Additionally, you can and should preach the gospel to those who desperately need to hear from God. As you do so, lives will change. Will you step up today and be an “all-in” man? God wants to use you to transform our church and community.

### **Scripture References**

1 Timothy 2:1–8

Mark 11:15–18

Luke 18:9–12

Ezekiel 22:30

Ephesians 6:10–18

Acts 6:1–4

James 5:13–18

### **Study Questions**

1. Is prayer the top priority in my personal, family, and church life (1 Tim 2:1)? Why or why not? Am I committed to encouraging and leading my church in prayer? What tangible steps will I take this week to ensure that I stretch myself in prayer individually and corporately?
2. Do I pray for kings and all who are in authority (1 Tim 2:2)? How do my prayers accomplish Paul's purpose statement of my being able to lead a "tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity?" Why is this so important to Paul? How could my tranquil and quiet life make a difference in my neighborhood and workplace? What if my fellow church members exuded such lifestyles? How would my county be changed?
3. Do I desire the salvation of all people (1 Tim 2:4)? Does my prayer life reflect God's pleasure to save all people? How can I intensify my burden for lost people? Are there some people in my sphere of influence whom I need to share my faith with?
4. What is the good news of the gospel (1 Tim 2:5–6)? How does Paul express the unique aspects of Christianity in these verses? What is his response to these theological truths (2:7)? Why should we be committed to a similar job description?
5. What problem among the men of the congregation is Paul referring to in this verse (1 Tim 2:8)? What is so serious about worshipping with the opposite of love in your heart? Who will help me to grow in my commitment to pray? How can I encourage other men to pray and lead?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Baugh also sees 1 Tim 2:1–8 as a section and entitles it, “Instructions on Corporate Prayer.” See Steven M. Baugh, “1 Timothy” in *Zondervan Illustrated Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 453. See also Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*. TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 84 and George William Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 113.

<sup>2</sup> The church I pastor is Emmanuel Bible Fellowship in Olympia, WA.

<sup>3</sup> BDAG s.v. *protos* 2b: “in the first place, above all, especially.” E.g., Matt 6:33; Rom 1:16; cp. 2:9f.—Acts 3:26; 2 Cor 8:5; 2 Pet 1:20; 3:3.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, [1984], 1993), 62 and John R.W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*. The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 59.

<sup>5</sup> See Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 2 Cor 2:8; 10:1; Eph 4:1; Phil 4:2; Phlm 1:9–10.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 213.

<sup>7</sup> Phil 4:6 has three of them and Eph 6:18 has two of them. Eph 6:18 this same emphasis on praying for all is limited to believers but here it is universalized.

<sup>8</sup> In the NT there are seven different Greek nouns used for prayer. Four of them occur in 1 Tim 2:1. By using these synonyms Paul was emphasizing the importance of praying all kinds of prayers for all people as well as distinguishing its varieties. See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995; reprint ed., Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 21–45.

<sup>9</sup> See Luke 1:13; 2:37; 5:33; Rom 10:1; 2 Cor 1:11; 9:14; Eph 6:18; Phil 1:4, 19; 4:6; 1 Tim 5:5; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 5:7; Jas 5:16; 1 Pet 3:12.

<sup>10</sup> See Matt 21:13, 22; Mark 9:29; 11:17; Luke 6:12; 19:46; 22:45; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 10:4, 31; 12:5; 16:13, 16; Rom 1:10; 12:12; 15:30; 1 Cor 7:5; Eph 1:16; 6:18; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2, 12; 1 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 5:5; Phlm 1:4, 22; Jas 5:17; 1 Pet 3:7; 4:7; Rev 5:8; 8:3–4.

<sup>11</sup> Only other NT usage is 1 Tim 4:5.

<sup>12</sup> See Acts 24:3; 1 Cor 14:16; 2 Cor 4:15; 9:11–12; Eph 5:4; Phil 4:6; Col 2:7; 4:2; 1 Thess 3:9; 1 Tim 4:3–4; Rev 4:9; 7:12.

<sup>13</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 115.

<sup>14</sup> See Rom 1:8–10; Eph 1:15–16; Phil 1:3–6; 4:6.

<sup>15</sup> Baugh, “1 Timothy,” 454: “The people ‘in authority’ in Ephesus at the time were both the Roman provincial governor and the local city officials, the latter of which included the Secretary of the People (Acts 19:35), city councilors, the market director, and others with official or semi-official powers.”

<sup>16</sup> Many well-meaning Christians have assumed that Paul’s entire focus in this section is on praying for governing authorities. However, Paul’s purpose is most likely to broaden the possibilities for prayer rather than narrowing them. With that said, if you’re interested in praying more effectively for governing authorities see [www.presidentialprayerteam.org](http://www.presidentialprayerteam.org).

<sup>17</sup> A few great questions to ask are: Do you pray for leaders of both parties in government? Do you pray for the leaders of the Gay Rights movement or other proponents of issues you oppose? Do you pray for local government and educational leaders?

<sup>18</sup> Ten of the fifteen times that “godliness” (*eusebeia*) occurs in the NT are in the Pastoral Letters. Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy. NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 86.

<sup>19</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 63.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Constable, “Notes on 1 Timothy” (2010 ed.): [www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1timothy.pdf](http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1timothy.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Tony Evans, *God’s Glorious Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 147.

<sup>22</sup> God the Father is also called “our Savior” in Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4).

<sup>23</sup> Paul was certainly not a Universalist: “‘Some will ‘fall under the same judgment as the devil’ (3:6), and sooner or later all sin will be judged (5:24), while the covetous will fall into harmful desires ‘that plunge men into ruin and destruction’ (6:9).” Stott, *Guard the Truth*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Paul uses the phrase “the knowledge of the truth” in 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1; cf. Heb 10:26.

<sup>25</sup> Stott, *Guard the Truth*, 66: “Wherever we look in Scripture we see this antinomy: divine sovereignty and human responsibility, universal offer and electing purpose, the all and the some, the cannot and the will not. The right response to this phenomenon is neither to seek a superficial harmonization (by manipulating some part of the evidence), nor to declare that Jesus and Paul contradicted themselves, but to affirm both parts of the antinomy as

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true, while humbly confessing that at present our little minds are unable to resolve it.”

<sup>26</sup> See Deut 6:4–9 and 1 Cor 8:4.

<sup>27</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 65. Lit. this reads, “One also is the mediator between God and man.”

<sup>28</sup> See NET study notes.

<sup>29</sup> David O. Dykes, “Connected to Your Creator” (1 Tim 2:1–6): <http://www.gabc.org/assets/1002/s010404.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> The word “ransom” (*antilutron*, 1 Tim 2:6) is not used elsewhere in NT.

<sup>31</sup> Lit. “a testimony at the proper time” may allude to testimony about Christ’s atoning work given by Paul and others. But it seems more likely to identify Christ’s death itself as a testimony to God’s gracious character (as 2:3–4 describe). This testimony was planned from all eternity, but now has come to light at the time God intended, in the work of Christ. See 2 Tim 1:9–10; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7 for similar ideas.

<sup>32</sup> The same three titles used in 1 Tim 2:7 appear again in 2 Tim 1:11.

<sup>33</sup> Men are specified here because it is their particular responsibility to lead the church and its corporate worship services. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 128. See 1 Tim 2:12; 3:2, 4; 4:11–16; 5:17.

<sup>34</sup> Most commentators include 1 Tim 2:8 with 2:9–15; however, it is better to understand 2:8 as a transitional verse (cf. Eph 5:21). See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 128.

<sup>36</sup> Paul uses this phrase, “in every place,” often (cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:14; 1 Thess 1:8; 1 Tim 2:8).

<sup>37</sup> Baugh, “1 Timothy,” 456.

<sup>38</sup> 1 Kgs 8:22, 54; 2 Chron 6:13; Ezra 9:5; Ps 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; Isa 1:15; Lam 2:19; 3:41.

<sup>39</sup> If you study the various postures for prayer mentioned in the Bible, you’ll find standing, kneeling, and falling prostrate; sitting is only mentioned once, to my knowledge (2 Sam 7:18). You’ll find the hands lifted heavenward and spread out, but never folded. You will find the head both bowed and lifted up with the eyes looking heavenward.

<sup>40</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 129.

<sup>41</sup> Stott, *Guard the Truth*, 82.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. James 4:8: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. *Cleanse your hands*, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (my emphasis).

<sup>43</sup> Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy*, 93.