

Public Prayer in the Church: the Role of Men

1 Timothy 2:1-8

1 Timothy 2:1-8: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior,⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.⁵ For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,⁷ for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.⁸ I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (or dissension).”

Background Notes

One reason why the apostle Paul wrote this first epistle was to give Timothy instructions about the organization of the church at Ephesus. Paul had left Timothy at Ephesus to help pastor the church there. False teachers had to be silenced and church leadership and order had to be established. Thus the theme of 1 Timothy is “Church Order.”

In reference to Church Order, in chapter 2 the distinctive roles of men and women in the church are given. These distinctive directives and roles were not for the church at Ephesus alone, and they were not just for the early Church. We believe these directives are normative for the church today. 1 Timothy was never meant to be just a 1st century letter from the apostle Paul to Timothy - it is the Word of God for us today.

Doctrinal Points

The role of men in the church demands public praying.

Verses 1-8 described the role of men in the church. “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere...” (v8). In the Greek language, the word for “men” that is used here is not the word *anthropos*, meaning “mankind” (men and women). Paul used the word *anthropos* in verse 1 - that prayers be made for *all men*, or all mankind. However, in verse 8 the Greek word that Paul used is *aner*, meaning males only, and not females. So this verse definitely referred only to the men in the church.

Paul’s point was that men *should* be involved in public praying. And he was speaking of *public* praying, because this verse is given in the context of a chapter about order in the church. The context of this verse is not a teaching about private devotions or the importance of personal prayer. The context here is the proper order for men and women *in the church*.

Notice that Paul's point was not that women *cannot* pray – he was teaching that men *should* pray. The role of men in the church demands public praying.

Men - are you involved in public praying in the church? If you're walking with the Lord, you should be! The phrase that men are to pray *everywhere* means that they should pray in all meetings and functions of the church. The apostle then described more specific details of public prayers.

a. "Holy hands"

The phrase "*lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*" doesn't mean that we must raise our hands when we pray (although that's fine!). Paul was not emphasizing the **physical position** for public praying but rather on **spiritual conditions** for public praying. Men who are living in unconfessed sin, men who are doubters, or men who angrily refuse to straighten out their problems with fellow believers, should **not** be involved in public praying. Men who pray publicly in the church should be good models of Christian living.

b. Scope of public prayer

What should characterize the public prayers in the church? That's what verses 1-7 are all about. In verses 1-2, the scope of public prayer is universal: "*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority.*" In his emphasis on public prayer in the church, what kind of prayer was Paul talking about? "Supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks" – *all kinds of prayer* should be made, for *all mankind*.

Is there an emphasis on prayer for all mankind in your church? Is the public praying truly universal in scope? Notice that we should pray for kings and all who are in authority. That includes presidents, members of Congress, and Supreme Court justices. Think of the power that these people hold on the national level - in reference to the moral standards in our nation, for example. We should pray for those in authority at local levels, including mayors and school board members. Think of the influence these people have on the local level.

And we should pray for leaders in other countries, not just leaders in our own nation. When was the last time your church prayed for leaders in China and Cuba? And it shouldn't make any difference whether the foreign leaders are good guys or bad guys - we should pray for them, regardless. Remember, Nero was the Roman Emperor when Paul wrote this Scripture. So public prayer in the church should be universal in scope.

c. Focus of public prayer – for peace and quiet

What should we pray for in reference to those who are in authority? And what should we pray for in reference to all mankind in general? We should pray for peace and quiet (v2-3) and we should pray for salvation and knowledge of the truth (v4-7).

We should pray for those in authority so *“that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”* Notice that we should pray for peace and quiet not so that we can be lazy and enjoy the good life. No, we pray for peace and quiet so that we can live out our lives in **all godliness and reverence**. Do you see why this is important? Suppose we were living in an oppressive regime or under an oppressive foreign power. Imagine how difficult it would be to hold church services, or spend serious time in Bible study, or send out missionaries, or have retreats and Bible conferences, etc.

From other New Testament Scriptures, we know that the world is not going to get any better in the future. For example, 2 Timothy 3:1 says, *“But know this, that in the last days, perilous times will come.”* Believers will be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”* Notice it does not say **“may** suffer persecution” - it says **“will** suffer persecution.” Here’s the point: even though we know perilous times and persecution will come, we are not to pray for persecution. It will come, but we should not pray for it!

We are to pray for peace and quiet, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Verse 3 tells us that *“this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.”* Praying for peace and quiet is pleasing to God.

d. Focus of prayer – for salvation for all mankind

Verses 4-7 teach that we are to pray for the salvation and spiritual growth of people, because God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. There again in verse 4, the word used for “men” is *anthropos*, meaning *all people*.

2 Peter 3:9 says that *“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* In Ezekiel 33:11, God says, *“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”* We are to pray for the salvation and sanctification of everyone, because **all people**, of every race and nationality, are precious in God’s sight.

Verses 5-6 state the way of salvation for all mankind. *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”* The humanistic doctrine of multi-culturalism in our country today says we must be tolerant of all religions, because “all roads to God eventually lead up the same mountain.” However, verses 5-6 make it very clear that “all roads” **do not** “lead up the same mountain.” There is only **One Way**. There is only **One Mediator** between the **One true God** and mankind - the Man, Christ Jesus. Our Mediator is not a human priest who has a sinful nature himself. Our Mediator is the Lord Himself!

Notice how the full humanity of our Lord Jesus is brought out in this verse. The eternal Son of God had to become human in order to die for our sins, because the penalty of sin was death. And He had to be God in order to be our perfect, sinless Substitute. Anything less than perfection would not be acceptable as our ransom. Without that ransom, we would have remained as slaves under sin, and we would have remained under the wrath of God. But Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for **all** (v6). How amazing, and wonderful!

Notice that the word “all” does not mean that universal salvation is taught here. The preposition “for” means “on behalf of.” He gave Himself a ransom on behalf of all people. When Mark 10:45 says that “*He gave His life a ransom for many*” - that’s not a contradiction. There, the preposition “for” is different. It means “instead of,” or “in place of,” or “in substitution for.”

Do you see the difference? The Lord Jesus gave His life a ransom *on behalf of all* - but *as a substitute for many*. The Lord’s death on the cross is **sufficient** for the salvation for **all** mankind but it is only **effective** for those who believe. It is provisional for all, but the ransom is only **effective for those who believe**. This was the message that the apostle Paul was appointed to preach and teach (v7). This is our mission as well.

So there’s an emphasis in 1 Timothy 2 on the importance of public prayer in the church. The role of men in the church demands public praying.

Practical Application

Let’s pray more now, so that we will regret less in Heaven.

When I get to Heaven, I know I’m going to wish that I had prayed more during my lifetime here on earth. I’m sure I speak for all of you, too. We need to pray more now, so that we’ll regret less in Heaven.

So many things in our busy lives crowd in to take the place of prayer. Many times even Christian service keeps us from giving a good amount of time to prayer. But in spite of our busy lives, we need find the time to pray more.

The context of these verses, as we’ve seen, is public prayer in the church, but we can certainly apply it to our personal prayer lives.

- We need to confess our sin, so we can lift **holy** hands to the Lord in prayer.
- We need to pray for the salvation of all mankind.
- We need to broaden the scope of our prayers. So often our prayers revolve only around requests for ourselves and our immediate families and friends.
- We need to have a more universal scope to our prayers and concerns – for persecuted believers worldwide, and for freedom of worship for believers who live under repressive governments.

Let’s pray more now, so that we’ll regret less when we get to Heaven.