

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity, October 1, 2023**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 578, 577, 459, 352, 584.

Lessons: Genesis 18:16-33, Acts 2:36-42, Matthew 7:7-12.

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Saint Paul here talks about prayer. The disciples of Christ should be praying people. Do you pray for everyone? Do your prayers often have a “bless everyone” flavor? Do you pray for many people by name? Well, today let’s consider what the apostle Paul writes to Timothy, a young pastor, and to us about prayer.

Paul has written two letters to Timothy about what he, as a servant of God, is to do. After an introduction, the first chapter tells Timothy – and us – to oppose those who teach falsely. These letters have been called ‘the pastoral epistles’ because they contain directions for servants of God.

Now, in chapter 2, Paul begins to give directions for Timothy to instruct and to guide God’s people in worship, faith, and life. What better place to start than prayer? ***“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.”*** In saying we should pray for all men; he gives four separate words related to prayer. And he gives an excellent reason for praying for everyone: ***“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.”*** Then Paul singles out some people for whom we should especially pray: ***“for kings and all those in authority.”*** And he gives a great reason: ***“that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”***

With that introduction, let’s consider today

**PRAYER FOR ALL**

- 1. Requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving are to be made for everyone.**
- 2. We are to pray especially for our leaders in government.**
- 3. Such prayer pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

Our catechism asks “what is prayer?” and scripture gives us this answer: Prayer is an act of worship in which we speak to God from our hearts. We learn that God hears only the prayers of believers – those who are acceptable to him by faith in Jesus. This is what it means to pray in Jesus’ name. We learn that a believer may bring prayers of request or thanksgiving to God about anyone or anything. We may pray using our own words, or words that are prepared by someone else, such as most of the prayers you hear in church, as well as praying for all things in the prayer our Lord Jesus himself taught us.

Paul begins by urging, encouraging, exhorting, begging Christians to pray for everyone.

In our text, we read ***“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.”*** Paul does not send Timothy any prescribed form of prayer but he gives him four separate words related to prayer. The first word ***“requests”*** pertains to approaching God with our needs. Other translations use the word ***“petitions”*** and the word ***“supplications”***. Of course God knows exactly what our needs are, but by going to God in prayer we acknowledge him as the one who alone will answer our prayers satisfactorily. This

first word means to request, to ask for something humbly and earnestly. These include prayers that God keep us from all evil or use any evil that comes near us for our good.

Then comes the word **“prayers”**. This is the most general of the four words. This word suggests the element of devotion and reverence as Christians approach their Lord and that we ask him for good things, but not just material things. This idea puts our prayers on a more formal or more earnest, more sincere basis. Of course, you know that you can approach God with any words or even thoughts of prayer at any time.

The third word **“intercessions”** is especially pleading and asking on behalf of someone else. We are not just to pray for ourselves. This includes the thought of child-like confidence. Luther speaks of addressing God as “our father” boldly and confidently as we bring our petitions before his throne of grace. You may remember the words from his explanation of the Lord’s Prayer that we are approaching our God “as dear children ask their dear father.”

The fourth word **“thanksgiving”** really doesn’t need an explanation. We are thanking God for everything we have already received. And while we may think first of all of earthly gifts and blessings, we surely want to thank God for all his spiritual blessings which will lead us to heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. But this does remind us always to approach our heavenly father with thankful hearts that keep in mind, as we read in James, **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”** James 1:17 (NIV)

We are to pray for **“everyone”**. Timothy was in Ephesus when Paul wrote this letter to him. Paul had written to the Christians in Ephesus directly: **“pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”** Ephesians 6:18 (NIV) The Christians in Ephesus were told to pray for fellow believers. But here, he expands that and tells us that we should pray for everyone.

That includes people you know as well as people you don’t know. No single human being is excluded. We often pray for someone whom we know is in difficulty, pain, suffering, or other distress. But God tells us to pray for everyone – people we know and people we don’t know. One writer gave this list, which is by no means totally inclusive: It “includes the sick and suffering in the congregation, the newly born infants and the dying. It reaches beyond the congregation, to ... the starving in [any country you can name], to fellow Christians throughout the world [whether we know them or not] as well as to the billions of people still without Christ and without God, and thus without hope in the world. We are to pray for friends and enemies alike.” **“For everyone”** – we will never run out of people to pray for.

Saint Paul gives an excellent reason for praying for everyone: **“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.”**

If you think about why humans do some of the things we do, there is often the reason of wanting to do it for the approval of someone. We Christians want to please someone with our prayers, as fruits of our faith. There is no mistaking who is pleased by the prayers of his believing children: This is the true God, the father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And without him, without Jesus Christ, everyone is condemned to eternal damnation because of their sins. But by faith in what Jesus Christ did for you, you have the assurance of eternal life. He lived a sinless life but was punished for sins – for your sins. God tells us **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.”** Acts 16:3.

Then Paul singles out some people for whom we should especially pray: **“for kings and all those in authority.”** Especially today, right now in history we should pray for our leaders – and for those who want to be our leaders. We hear so many who want to lead our country speaking ideas that are contrary to the will of God as he records it in the holy Bible. In praying for all people, we include everyone in our nation. We are to pray for all people, but especially for those who are leading our nation and our state and our communities. Saint Paul uses the word **“kings”**. That is a reference to the supreme earthly authority. And he then gives a reason: **“that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”** We know that when laws are not enforced that we are just not safe. We are praying here that our leaders, who have that role by God’s permission, enforce laws.

Even though the kings at the time these words were written were heathens, enemies to Christianity, and persecutors of Christians, yet Christians were told that they must pray for them, because this is God's will. It is for the public good that there should be civil government, and God is responsible for who is governing us. We are to pray for our leaders in government, "***For kings, and all that are in authority***"; that is, for all our government leaders, administrators and officers even though we ourselves may suffer under them. We must pray for them, and we must give thanks for them. We must pray for their welfare and for the welfare of their jurisdictions.

We are to give thanks for government and for all the benefits we have under our government, that "***we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty***". One writer said "Here see what we must desire for kings, that God will so turn their hearts, and direct them and make use of them, that we under them may lead a quiet and peaceable life. He does not say, 'that we may get preferments under them, grow rich, and be in honor and power under them;' no, the highest ambition of a good Christian is to lead a quiet and peaceable life, to get through the world unmolested in a low private station. We should desire that we and others may lead a peaceable life '***in all godliness and honesty.***' Let us mind our duty, and then we may expect to be taken under the protection both of God and the government. '***In all godliness and honesty.***' Here we have our duty as Christians summed up in two words: godliness, that is, the right worshiping of God [as well as living as God's children]; and honesty, that is, a good conduct towards all men. These two must go together; we are not truly honest if we are not godly, and do not render to God his due; and we are not truly godly if we are not honest."

Christians are to abound in prayer. We are to pray for others as well as for ourselves. Even kings and all others in government need our prayers. If we want to lead a peaceable and quiet life, we must live in all godliness and honesty; we must do our duty to God and man, and that includes praying for our leaders.

One very important reason why all men are to be prayed for is because there is one God, and that God bears good will to all mankind. There is one God, and one only, there is no other. This one true God "***will have all men to be saved.***" He wants all men to be saved. He does not desire the eternal death and destruction of anyone but the welfare and eternal salvation of everyone. The prophet Ezekiel tells us. "***As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!***" Ezekiel 33:11 (NIV) That is what God wants, but it is man's fault if he perishes eternally. No one perishes in hell except that it is their own fault. Jesus told the Jews: "***You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.***" John 5:39-40 (NIV)

God wants all people to be saved, "***and to come to the knowledge of the truth,***" There is only one way to be saved, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ whom the Father has sent to live a sinless life and then be punished for sin so that we may live in heaven forever. God wants men to be saved in the way that he has appointed, through faith in his only Son Jesus Christ.

And so we pray for all men. We want men to hear and receive the knowledge of the truth about Jesus Christ, because that is the only way to be saved; Christ is the way and the truth, and the life.

May all your prayers be God-pleasing prayers, prayers in Jesus' name for all men! Amen.

Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, October 4, 2009