

MATTERS OF CHURCH AND STATE

1 Timothy 2.1-7

In Chapter 1, Paul charged Timothy to guard the church against false teaching. Chapter 2 begins Paul's instruction on how the church should be conformed to God's ideal.

We must see that prayer is "first of all" (1 Timothy 2.1; Cf. Acts 1.14).

Martin Luther, elaborating on the work of Gelasius, a 5th century bishop of Rome, made what would become a famous distinction between the State and the Church. God created the State to protect the upright and punish the wicked. States possess "the power of the sword" to enforce laws and create territorial peace. God created the Church to bear witness to Christ. In this sense, the church holds "the power of the keys", proclaiming the Gospel message that saves.

Government: The Power of the Sword.

In charging the Ephesians to pray, why does Paul add "kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Timothy 2.2)? Surely they were included in "all people". Given Ephesus' cultic atmosphere, the command for the small group of Christians to pray for the controlling majority would have made an impact.

At the time of writing, the Roman Emperor was almost certainly Nero (AD 54-68). He was mentally unstable and responsible for a savage persecution of Christians in Rome (recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus). Jesus' followers were practicing His example of loving their enemies (Cf Matthew 5.43-48).

Paul understood that God placed people in certain positions to exercise particular authority. The decisions of leaders have a disproportionate impact on how churches operate.

As Christians pray for the government, it is never for the State to assume the role of the Church, but to allow the Church to be true to its calling.

Church: The Power of the Keys.

Christians focus on godliness and soul-winning (1 Timothy 2.2-3).

Let's look at the big picture of ministry.

- i. Christians pray for *all* people (1 Timothy 2.1), because:
- ii. God desires *all* people to be saved (1 Timothy 2.4), so then:

- Error 1: If God desires all to be saved, He must lack the power to bring about what He wants.
 - Error 2: All people will be saved = universalism, but what about 1 Timothy 1.19-20, 4.1, 5.24, 6.9-10?
 - Paul is charging the local church to be about God's business of proclaiming the truth without favoritism.
- iii. Christ died for *all* (1 Timothy 2.6; Cf. 1.15), so then,
 - iv. The Church proclaims "the knowledge of the truth" to *all* (1 Timothy 2.4, 7).

When a church is narrowly focused (sidetracked by "genealogies and myths"), it fails to stress the love of God and the work of Christ.

Key Ideas:

A local church gets in trouble when we see a Church-State overlap as the goal.

We are to be politically engaged while understanding that political outcomes are not our ultimate aim.

This distinction between Church and State does not mean that Christians should avoid politics. It is a good thing for Christians to live-out their faith in the public square.

The Christian understands Jesus, our mediator, as the only source of true and lasting peace (1 Timothy 2.5).

Application Questions:

How does this passage inform the way we pray?

Based on this passage, what kind of living pleases God (1 Timothy 2.3)?

What truths emerge around the word "all" in this passage?

Why does Paul stress the oneness of God and the one mediator (1 Timothy 2.5)? How might this be a liberating truth in our own time?