

Prayer in Worship

Introduction:

So, where are we in relationship to the setting of 1 Timothy? We said last week that the traditional reading of 1 Timothy takes the narrative data at face value, that the letter represents some period in the lives of Paul and Timothy which doesn't fit into Luke's narrative timeline in Acts of the spread of the gospel in the Roman Empire. We stated that this text (along with the other Pastoral Epistles) was included in the final canon of the New Testament in the 4th century, because it had been recognized as Pauline for centuries already. The 18th century applied academic readings to this text and to its lack of inclusion in the "letters of Paul to the seven churches." Various literary factors could indicate not only a different scribe, but also a different author. As a result, speculation regarding who wrote the letters and when developed *ad nauseum*. Since no historic situation could be agreed upon, interpretation of the issues was done without ever considering that a specific situation was being addressed. No interpretation has been offered other than the traditional approach. That means that two aspects of the mid-1st century Greco-Roman society can be taken seriously when working with today's text: the Greek traditional understanding of "the household," and "the New Roman Woman" which was being introduced into society at the time.

1. The first approach to the situation: prayer. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Chapter 1 introduced us to some kind of false teaching that was plaguing the churches at Ephesus, which Paul was assigning Timothy to expel from the church. Paul recognized that this wouldn't be easy and that it would test both Timothy's resolve and his conscience.

Paul's first admonition is for Timothy to do a good job leading the church in prayer—covering what kinds of prayer to pray, what to pray for, how to pray, what prayer should look like, and the relationship between prayer and daily Christian living.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What relationship would there be between the church praying and dealing with the other kinds of issues Timothy would be dealing with?
2. What kinds of questions do you have in relationship to the goals of prayer or how to pray?

Paul lists four different words for prayer, which represent four different kinds of prayers. Sometimes, when biblical writers give us a list of words like this, they want us to consider what's alike about them, reminding us that even though nuances may be important, sometimes the basic point is more important. Other times, those same writers want us to hear and be aware of those differences, without forgetting the basic point.

3. What do you see as the point in this case?

What comes next in verses 2-4 are the things he calls on the church to pray for. **First** is the salvation of every human being. This language is seen by reading both vv. 2 and 4. **Second** is to pray for “kings and other persons in authority.” The plural in this verse (v. 2) seems to indicate that the text has in mind a broader audience than just Ephesus and the Province of Asia. Obviously, the emperor is involved, although that title isn’t given here. Paul appears to be thinking of any geographic area where the church may be already planted. Some had client kings in authority, others had governors or men of other titles.

The reason for this prayer is “so that we might live peaceful and quiet lives and live our lives in godliness and holiness.” I want to talk about the two words “godliness and holiness” in a few minutes, but I would prefer that we work out among us how to pray for our president and national leaders.

Here’s the problem: in our world today, there is a full spectrum of evaluation of the current president of the USA from ‘one of the greatest men of God to have ever lived’ on one end, to someone ‘filled with the spirit of antichrist’ on the other end. I seriously doubt that any of our Church members find ourselves at either end of the spectrum, but some of us are close to either end, whereas others of us may be somewhere in the middle or have no opinion at all. Most of us have the wisdom to not bring up the subject when we’re together. (What does that say about me, for pointing out the elephant in the room?) Our opinion of the president, however, is not the point of the question, but rather the following:

4. “How do we as a body of Christ pray for our president as well as for each other such that the result will be our living peacefully with one another and expressing both godliness and holiness toward each other as well as toward those outside the church?”

Rome was successful at squelching any riots or disturbances aimed at trying to rid Romans from a captive territory. On the other hand, we do find times, especially in Ephesus, where the church was causing disturbance to some of the industry of the city. Enough people were being freed from both idolatry and witchcraft, that the two industries of making silver idols of Artemis, and the publishing of magic books were hit seriously simply by the lack of customers.

Let’s look at these words ‘godliness and holiness’ here in v. 2. They are almost exclusive to the writer of the Pastoral Epistles. (NOTE: by ‘writer’ I mean the persons who puts ink to paper. That person may not be the author, who would be the one dictating what to write.) ‘Godliness’ is a word borrowed from Greek religious language having the sense of “respect and reverence that come from fearing one’s god.” For the Christian, it is the daily living out of one’s faith which reflects the character of Christ. This idea will become very important as we look into vv. 8-15. The word here translated as ‘holiness’ is not the word used elsewhere in the Bible. It is used only here in 1 & 2 Timothy. It is a word describing one’s character as reverent, authentic, and honest to the core and thus worthy of respect. The two words describe holiness as seen in action and lived out from one’s inner character. The standard word for “holiness” describes the inner nature itself as God works out His cleansing process of the believer’s heart & soul.

Our lesson writers point out the four prospective results of the kind of prayer life the church and its members should lead: 1) living peaceful and quiet lives; 2) godliness and holiness; 3) it pleases God (v. 3), a rare idea that comes from the idea of a sacrifice which is pleasing to God; 4) the goal of the salvation of all people. The New Testament does not defend either a universalist view of salvation, or a selectionist view. It is the will of God that all persons be saved, but by His very nature, God honors the final choice people make, while doing His best to shape that decision. Prayer sets the Holy Spirit into action to do his convicting work, as well as providing sending the right laborers into the harvest wherever it be.

II. Qualities for effective praying. 1 Tim. 2:8-10

David Ackermann, the author of the New Beacon Bible Commentary on 1st Timothy says, Paul tells the “men” how to pray, and he tells the “women” how to dress. Of course, that isn’t all that’s going on in these three verses. The “how to” isn’t the point in either case. He’s talking about what actually makes prayer effective. There’s no “how to” involved in effective praying, whether we’re talking about men leading prayer out loud in worship or women praying silently at the same time during prayer time in the worship service. It would appear that the public aspects of the worship service follow the Jewish synagogue practices, or Greco-Roman public meeting practices, or both. In either case, they would be male dominated without being misogynistic. It reflected the traditional household roles of the husband, wife, children, servants and guests of the family, with the husband being the public figure of the family, and the wife being behind-the-scenes. What was emerging in the broader society, however, was the “new Roman woman,” a rich aristocrat who paraded her wealth in public and used it to exercise social power which the society previously had not granted to women. Many levels of society, and many groups, frowned on this emerging phenomenon.

What Paul appears to be doing is saying that effective prayer is based on how one lives out his or her faith in their daily life. For the man to be standing and extending his hands when praying was the understood visible practice. However, Paul was saying, “let’s look at those hands: where have they been; what have they been doing; to whom do they belong?” The position of the hands has nothing to do with effective prayer. The daily lived-out holiness of the one offering those hands is what determines his prayers’ effectiveness, living each day in a context of public dialogue that doesn’t end in attack or arguing based on some form of anger.

For women, Paul is saying something quite similar. The key phrase in this presentation is the last clause in v. 10, which the NIV translates euphemistically.

A euphemism is, of course, statement that provides appropriate descriptive terms for words which would otherwise be considered inappropriate.

The language of the original text is not “for women who profess to worship God,” but rather, “for women who promise to offer godliness.” The list of clothing and adornments given in v. 9 were often worn by women who ‘promised’ something other than godliness. Paul’s point is for those women to dress according to what they should be conveying with their witness; to live the godly life they confess, so that their prayers would be effective, too.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Does this explanation of these three verses make sense?
2. How should Timothy go about working with the women in the congregation on this point?
3. How should Timothy work with the men in presenting this position about women?

III. The hard saying: 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

I couldn't stop the lesson at v. 10, even though the editors of the lesson did so. I understand completely. There are as many interpretations of these verses as there are about the anti-Christ and/or the second coming of Christ. Each is held with some serious prejudice or another. And to base a particular interpretation on a specific biblical text will, of necessity, overlook other just-as-valid passages of Scripture. Furthermore, nobody really knows what to do with v. 15. When it comes to the first sin as described in v. 14, in Romans 5, Paul blames the sinful condition of humanity totally on Adam, never even mentioning Eve. 1 Timothy 2:13-14 is one of those texts that causes many biblical interpreters to say that the book wasn't written by Paul, since it disagrees with what Paul said in his principal presentation on original sin.

Many of us remember the Feminist Revolution of the 60's, which appears to be one of the results of women's participation in the American workforce during WW II. Many women had experienced an unprecedented, vital participation in the development of post-war America, and were not ready to give up their contribution to community life outside the home, as important as they understood their role in the home to be. The church, in its historic response to social change has, from the 1st century on, always responded to such change with serious caution as to how the change would affect its witness for Christ in the broader society. The church has always said, at best, "slow down, see where this is going." It is possible that the best reading of this text is one such caution in the light of the "New Roman Women" who was not being well received in the broader society. Proverbs 31, an obvious socialization tool for Jewish teenage girls several centuries before Jesus, offered a much more acceptable view of the industrious female who works both in and outside the home.

What most critics of this text don't bother to point out is that in this text, Paul makes it clear twice that he wants believing women to be avid learners, which was, in most cases, a counter-cultural idea.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION:

Why would Paul propose such a counter-cultural goal on women, amid lines which strongly defended other cultural ideals?

Conclusion:

Thursday's devotional presented Romans 12:1-5 as the day's reading. The writer of the devotional compared 'a living sacrifice' with a 'lifeless one.' I, on the other hand thought of the cost involved in sacrifice. The cost of a sacrifice for either a man or a woman is that of giving up what is most valuable to you in order to be a follower of Christ. Getting it back, is up to Him.