

Making Use of Our Resources: Pray for Our Government

I Timothy 2:1-8 (NIV)

¹ I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. ⁷ And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

In polite conversation, there is an unwritten rule: Never discuss religion or politics in public. I have no idea as to who first taught that or who came up with the saying, but we all treat it like gospel truth. It's an immutable law of social interaction. Now, we say you can't discuss religion or politics in public, but we are here right now breaking half of the rule by talking about religion at church. And what is consuming the news right now? What do you hear about on late night talk shows, memes on Facebook and Twitter? It's all presidential election talk. It started last year and we are still talking about it, and we are going to keep talking about it well after the election is over and through all four years of the next presidential term and then into the next election cycle.

Everyone has an opinion about politics, even if it's not always the strongest. So, how do you talk about politics? Are you actively consuming as much political news as you can to be completely informed? Do you frequently bring it up with friends and family and engage in political conversations? Do you read the news, but keep your opinions to yourself? Do you make your complaints about the state of our government known to anyone who will listen to you or are you on the opposite side that when someone brings up politics you instantly change the subject or stare awkwardly down at your coffee or tea while the other person talks, trying to bury your head in the sand until November 8th?

As a citizen of this country, we have a voice in our government. We are guaranteed by the Constitution freedom of speech, and that includes opinions over how things are run in our country and what we think of our leaders. Now, while we have the freedom to think and say what we want, we know that this particular right does not also guarantee that anyone will agree with our opinions. In fact, we know that as people disagree with what we think politically, it can become rather heated. Thus, the guide to proper social etiquette: "Never discuss religion or politics in public."

When everything is going well politically, it's not that hard to keep our opinions to ourselves and to avoid talking about politics in public. But what about when things are going wrong? What do we do when our leaders and our government makes decrees and laws that go counter to our Christian faith, that go counter to our morals? What do we do when our leaders are not making godly decisions? There are plenty of examples to talk about: the recent redefinition of marriage; the continued allowance of abortions; the immoral behavior of politicians; potential leaders of our nation that do not share your morals or values. And the list can go on.

What should you do about our current state of politics? Should you abstain from voting? Complain about your government and its leaders? Practically speaking, what good is that going to do? If you "protest" by not voting, you are giving up your voice to influence and guide our political leaders. Yes, you are only one vote, one voice, but you have been given the right to make your voice guided by your Christian faith heard by how you vote. Will you abdicate that right? You can complain for the next two months about your choices as Election Day steadily draws nigh, but what will that accomplish? What does complaining ever accomplish? It makes you feel better to not bottle up your opinions, but it doesn't change what's going on. It just makes you feel more miserable. If only we could do something to actually change the current state of politics.

God has not left you powerless to the authorities of this world. He has given them to us to serve as his representatives. They are only in power because he allowed it. But because God has brought you to the knowledge of the truth, that Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all people, paying the price of a perfect life and his innocent blood shed in order to free us from the captivity of evil and thus saved you, God has also given you a resource to deal appropriately with our government.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, a pastor, he knew that Timothy's people, his congregation, were wrestling with what to do when it came to talking about politics, how to live peacefully under the leaders that God had placed over their lives. Consider for a moment the government that Paul and Timothy and their fellow believers lived under. At about the time that Paul was writing this letter, Emperor Nero was in charge of the Roman Empire. It was under Nero's rule that the city of Rome caught on fire, a fire that

devastated upwards of ¼ of the city. The citizens were ready to demand Nero's head, but Nero pointed the finger of blame at this newly established religious sect called Christianity. Nero began to arrest Christians, torture them, cover them in animal hides and feed them to dogs, crucify them, and even light them on fire to illumine Rome at night. What could people of Timothy's congregation do?

Amazingly, Paul did not tell Timothy, "I want men everywhere to lift up their holy hands for rebellion, to take up arms, and stop the bloody tyranny of Nero against Christians"? No, his instructions were to use the God-given resource of prayer: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (verses 1-2) Paul instructed Timothy's congregation to pray for these unchristian, immoral leaders that they had. Prayer is your God-given resource for talking politics.

Paul urged that "petitions" be made in regards to politics. These are urgent requests made to meet a need. As you are unhappy to see the country make laws and regulations against your Christian mindset, then petition God for these changes. Petition him that he would protect his institution of marriage, that it would not become subject to the world's desires and opinions of what it is. Pray that our leaders would help mothers choose life for their unborn children, to lead them to adoption or foster care if they are not able to care for that child or if they don't want that child. Petition the Almighty to bring peace to the world, that wars and hostilities would cease. Pray that God would lead you to make wise and good decisions in electing our next political leaders. Pray that God would protect our freedom not only to speak our opinions and vote in the way we see is best, but also that we would continue to have the freedom to worship the one and only true God, that the government would never hinder us from living for God.

Just as we have many urgent requests that need met politically speaking, Paul also urges us to "intercede," which means to pray for other people. Pray for those who currently hold office and those who will come to hold positions of authority that they make God-pleasing and wise decisions. Pray that our justice system would serve justice and protect people. And don't hesitate to pray that our political leaders would come to the knowledge of the truth, like we have, to know their Savior and thus be saved.

In your prayers, give thanks for all people – for kings and all those in authority. Give thanks that God has provided us with leaders and has not left us in a state of anarchy. Give thanks that we still have the freedom of religion, that we can still meet freely in this building to praise God and learn about him without having to come here secretly or worrying that police will barricade off the building not allowing anyone to enter. Give thanks to God that people are not burning down your house or burning your Bible, but instead we are allowed to freely proclaim the knowledge of the truth. Give thanks to God that we can worship him in peace.

Why does Paul urge us to pray for all political leaders, including those who are ungodly and actually want to suppress Christians? Because when we pray, we are invoking the only being in all of existence who controls even the government – God our Savior. He wants us to pray. He wants us to ask him to act upon the government on our behalf. He knows that there will always be godless people that he allows into positions of authority, but he wants us to pray for a good government will allow us to "live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (verse 2)

When we pray, Jesus Christ acts as our mediator, our go between, who prays on our behalf to God the Father so that our prayers are acceptable and pleasing to him, so that our prayers are made in accordance with his will. Because Christ sits at the right hand of God, that position of power and authority over all governments, he can and does affect governments and controls them for our good, so that we can worship him, so that his name may be spread. The Roman government of Paul's day gave Christians a stable government that allowed for ease of travel. It allowed for the dominance of a common language which the Christians used to share the knowledge of the truth, of Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all people – including those in our government - who freed all people from the tyranny of sin, from the chains of everlasting death in hell, and from servitude to Satan. This is the message of truth that we have come to know.

With our government today we have the opportunity to go out and preach that same message that saved us. We have a government that does not threaten the Christian with torture or imprisonment or death. So, make use of your God-given resource of prayer. Make your prayers, petitions, intercessions, and thanksgiving for all people – especially for kings and all those in authority. Regardless of what you say or don't say about politics or whether or not you vote, pray for our government and our political leaders. Do this with the confidence that our God will act on our behalf that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness to share this message of truth. Pray so that God's Gospel truth may spread in our country and others so that many more may come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved just as God wants. Amen.