

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy

Lesson 3: Prayer, Roles, and Order in Worship -- 1 Timothy 2:1-15

Imagine the church at Ephesus gathered on the first day of the week. The room is full of ordinary people, fishermen and merchants, freed slaves and Roman citizens, mothers and grandfathers, some of them rescued out of the temple of Artemis that towered over their city. And the very first thing Paul wants them to do when they come together is not to argue, not to organize, not even to study, but to pray. "First of all," he writes, before anything else, "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people." The church that prays for everyone, even for the emperor who could have them killed, is a church that has learned the heart of God.

And what is the heart of God? Paul tells us in one of the most beautiful sentences in the letter: God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Not some people. Not a select few quietly chosen and the rest passed by. All people. The God who flung the stars into space and named each one wants your neighbor saved, wants the stranger across the world saved, wants the difficult relative and the hostile coworker saved. And He has made one way for it to happen, one bridge across the great chasm: "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."

From this great vision of a praying church and a saving God, Paul turns to the actual ordering of the assembly, and here he speaks plainly about how men and women are to conduct themselves when the church gathers. The men are to lead in public prayer, lifting holy hands, without anger and quarreling. The women are to adorn themselves not chiefly with outward show but with modesty and good works, and they are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the assembly. To our ears, shaped by our own age, some of this sounds strange or even uncomfortable. But Paul does not ground it in the customs of Ephesus. He grounds it in creation itself, in how God made man and woman in the beginning.

So this chapter asks us to come humbly, ready to be taught rather than to teach God how things ought to be. It holds together two things our culture often pulls apart: the breathtaking truth that God loves all people and Christ died for all, and the ordered, dignified pattern of worship that God has given His church. There is nothing harsh here, and nothing demeaning. There is a God who wants everyone saved, a Savior who gave Himself for everyone, and a church arranged with such care that men and women each have an honored place. Come and see how a healthy church prays, and how it gathers.

Group Discussion: Paul opens by urging that prayers be made "for all people," even for kings and those in authority. Why do you think a praying church, one that genuinely lifts up everyone, including its enemies, is so central to the health and witness of God's people?

Personal Reflection: Paul says God “desires all people to be saved.” Is there someone in your life you have quietly given up on, someone you no longer pray for or expect God to reach? What would it mean to begin praying for that person again this week, sharing God’s own desire for their salvation?

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-15

Study Questions

1. Paul urges that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (vv. 1-2). Why does Paul place prayer “first of all,” and what does it reveal about the heart and mission of a healthy church that it prays even for kings and those in authority?
2. Paul wants the church to pray for all people, even for governing authorities who may be hostile to the faith (vv. 1-2). Who are the people, or kinds of people, you find it hardest to pray for, and what would it look like to begin lifting them up before God?
3. Paul says it is “good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (vv. 3-4). What does this teach us about God’s heart toward the lost, and why does Paul tie God’s desire to save to the church’s call to pray?
4. Paul says God desires “all people” to be saved and to come to “the knowledge of the truth” (v. 4). How does knowing that God genuinely desires the salvation of everyone shape the way you see the people around you, and the urgency of sharing the gospel?
5. Paul writes, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (vv. 5-6). What does this passage teach about how a person comes to God, and what does it mean that Christ gave Himself as a ransom “for all”?
6. If there is only “one mediator” between God and men (v. 5), then we cannot come to the Father except through Jesus. Where are you tempted to approach God on some other basis, your own goodness, your religious effort, or a substitute mediator, and how does resting in Christ alone change that?
7. Paul gives instructions for the assembly: men are to lead in prayer “lifting holy hands, without anger or quarreling,” and women are to adorn themselves “with modesty” and good works, and not “to teach or to exercise authority over a man” (vv. 8-12). What does this passage teach about God’s design for order and roles when the church gathers?
8. Paul links worship with the heart: men praying without anger, women adorned with good works and modesty rather than outward show (vv. 8-10). What does your own outward presentation and inner attitude in worship reveal about your heart, and where might God be inviting you to grow?
9. Paul grounds his teaching in creation: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve,” and points to God’s design from the beginning (vv. 13-14), even as he affirms that Christ is the one ransom for all (vv. 5-6). How do these verses hold together God’s universal desire to save everyone

and His ordered design for roles in the church, and how does this stand against the ideas that Christ died for only a chosen few or that the roles are merely cultural?

10. Look back across this whole chapter, from the call to pray for all people, to the one Mediator who ransomed all, to God's ordered design for worship. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this passage, and one concrete step you will take because of it.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 3:16-17, God so loved the world that He gave His Son; 2 Peter 3:9, the Lord not willing that any should perish; Acts 4:12, salvation in no other name; 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, God a God of order in the assembly; Genesis 2:18-23, the creation of man and woman.