

Study Two - The Church at Prayer

1 Timothy 2:1-15

Prayer Thank you Lord, that we have the privilege of gathering around your word and openly discussing issues that affect our faith and lives. We remember those around the world who are forced to meet behind closed doors, and risk punishment or worse for meeting as a fellowship of believers as we do today. Bless this time together, and may we leave this place knowing that we have met with you, in the reading of your word, through prayer and the fellowship that we enjoy. Amen.

Comment Equality is a big issue in the political, working and religious life of most Western countries, and campaign groups take issue where individual groups are seemingly discriminated against. For women in particular there has been much discussion within the various denominations as to their role in ministry, with more conservative elements not keen to go against what they see as Biblical teaching, particularly as found in this chapter. There are also countries where women are not allowed to take a full part in public life - in Saudi Arabia for example men and women are not allowed to mix in public spaces, women (though well educated) cannot open a bank account without their husband's agreement, go anywhere without a chaperone, drive a car, wear clothes that 'show off their beauty', try on clothes whilst shopping or go swimming.

Culture and religion play a big part in this situation, which is very slowly beginning to change, but they also played a big part in the life of women in Paul's day. Women were valued highly within the home, but essentially classed alongside children and slaves under the demands of the Law. A woman was at the disposal of her father or husband, forbidden to learn the law, take part in synagogue services, or teach in a school. Greek culture, a big influence at the time, was no help either, as even here a woman's position was very lowly. The Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth had many priestesses, but they were essentially sacred prostitutes plying their trade in the evening. The respectable Greek lady stayed at home in her own rooms, where only her husband would enter!

So this is the culture into which Paul is instructing his assistant, Timothy, and it may well be a much different one to that in which you are living!

Discuss

Is society made more equal by legislation or by education? Are there dangers inherent in trying to change society too quickly (over any type of discrimination) or is it better to seize the moment and go all out for change now?

Key Verse

'I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone' (1 Timothy 2:1)

Discussion

Q1 Methodist teaching is sometimes summed up in four particular ideas known as the four 'alls' - All need to be saved, all can be saved, all can know themselves to be saved, and all can be saved to the uttermost. There are echoes of those 'alls' in this passage (vv. 1,3,4).

Is this a good starting point for evangelism, and from Paul's words (vv. 1,2) how inclusive does his mission statement seem to be, bearing in mind that the particular heresy that Timothy must address might well be Gnosticism, which held that truth is only understandable by a chosen few?

Q2 How does the way in which prayer is used within your style of worship fit with verse 1, and how important is a continuity between the ancient and the present?

Q3 How easy is it to pray for all people (v1) if that should include those of other religions and cultures, the good and the bad, the moral and the corrupt, those we like and those we do not?

Q4 Paul begins his order of prayer with 'requests'. Does that seem selfish, or is there a deeper meaning to the word he uses, which has its root in 'need' rather than 'want', and if so, a need of what?

Q5 The second word Paul uses is translated as 'prayers', but whereas the first could be asked of a man (request) this one is for that which only God can give. What would you class as worthy of this word?

- Q6** Paul equates a healthy prayer life with lives that are lived peacefully in all godliness and holiness, pleasing to God (vv. 2,3). How would you see that working out in everyday life?
- Q7** To a world of Jewish and Greek thought, which considered that there were many ways in which a person could have direct access to God, Paul's words in verse 5 were pretty revolutionary - that there is but one mediator between humankind and God - and indeed may cause issues with those who direct prayer toward angels or saints. In a multi-faith and denominational world, how does this knowledge affect our relationship with those whose religious tradition and experience is different from ours?
- Q8** The second half of this chapter concerns itself with conduct in worship. Ignoring the gender issues of vv. 8-10 for the moment, what do they tell us about how we should approach our prayer and worship, particularly if you compare v 8 with Isaiah 1:15,16?
- Q9** If we take Paul's words about women in the Church as written, then there are problems when we live in a country which is striving for equality. Read vv. 8-15 and then contrast them with Galatians 3:28. If these both reflect Paul's instruction to the Church, how do we explain the differences?
- Q10** If you were to change anything about the way in which worship is organised and conducted within your church or fellowship, what would it be and why?

Takeaway

Over the coming days think through the implications of Paul's words, 'I want (people) everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.'

Prayer

Pray for the prayer life of the Church, that it might embrace the whole world, and seek equality and justice for all who live upon it.

'A grateful heart is a beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being.'

(James E. Faust)

'Arranging a bowl of flowers in the morning can give a sense of quiet in a crowded day - like writing a poem or saying a prayer.'

(Anne Morrow Lindbergh)

'The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, "O God, forgive me," or "Help me."'

(Billy Graham)

'Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night.'

(George Herbert)

'Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.'

(Mahatma Gandhi)

'If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.'

(Meister Eckhart)