

Thankful for All People

1 Timothy 2:1-4

Introduction

St. Paul tells us we are to pray for all people. When Bill Clinton was President, Dad was concerned about some of his policies and wrote a letter to him, explaining his concerns. He closed by saying, "I am praying for you." A couple weeks later, he got a letter back from the President's office, written by an aide who obviously had only read the last sentence. Right above the stamp of President Clinton's signature was a note that simply said, "Thank you for your support." Many people think that when we say, "I'm praying for you", it means we're asking God to bless them in all their endeavors. In these four short verses, Paul says much about prayer. Tonight, I will focus on the first verse.

How to Pray

In **verse one**, Paul tells to pray for all people and how to pray. He gives us four categories of prayers to make for others—Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and Thanksgivings.

Supplications

Martin Luther says that supplications are *prayers with which we pray for evils to be averted* (**LW: 28, 257**). Bad things happen in this world to everyone. Our prayer is that God would watch over them and protect them in times of trouble. It is like what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, when we pray, "deliver us from evil."

Prayers

While "prayers" can seem like a generic term, Luther says that *these are requests for good things* (**LW: 28, 257**). This is what we pray in the prayer of the church each Sunday when we have a petition for the government. We pray that our leaders would make wise decisions and enact laws in accordance with the Word of God. While this may not be something some of our government officials would think good, it is why they are in office: to enact and enforce laws that are in line with the will of God and to keep the peace at home and abroad. (Read **Romans 13:1-4**). Yes, Paul says that governing authorities are ordained by God, and we should obey them because He has appointed them, they represent His authority. He also says that they are *God's servants, avengers who carry out the wrath of God on the wrongdoer* (Romans 13:4).

Intercessions

Intercessions are the prayers we pray for our enemies, those who do not seem worthy of our praying for them. As Jesus says, *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* (**Matthew 5:44**). One of the things we can pray for when praying for our enemies is forgiveness, as Jesus prayed from the cross when He said, *"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing"* (**Luke 23:34**), and Stephen did as he was being stoned (**Acts 7:60**). We also pray for enlightenment, that the Holy Spirit would come to them and illumine their lives, drawing them to Jesus and salvation.

Thanksgivings

Luther says this about thanksgivings: *Gratitude always merits the receipt of more; ingratitude drains the fountain of divine goodness. Gratitude consists of more than the expression "I thank You, Lord God." it also involves acknowledging first that it is a gift of God (LW: 28, 258).* It is vital that we give God thanks.

Thankful for All?

I can pray for evils to be averted, for good things to come, and even to pray for forgiveness for all people. But some people are really hard to be thankful for. We did a 40-day spiritual adventure one year in one of the Baptist churches I pastored. One part of it was that each day we were to write down the name of a person in the church and something about that person we were thankful for. In 40 days, you mention almost everyone in a small church. I must admit it, I had to think long and hard about a few of them to come up with something for which to be thankful.

Seeing Life as a Gift from God

This kind of soul-searching is good for us. It helps us to realize that everything in life is a gift from God. Everyone in our lives is also a gift from God. Like Luther said, "[giving thanks for something is] acknowledging that it is a gift of God." For if something or someone is not a gift from God, we have no reason to thank Him for them. You wouldn't thank your cousin for the sweater your aunt got you for Christmas, would you? You thank the giver of the gift.

Gratitude Shapes Our Lives

Gratitude also shapes our lives. If we are thankful for what God has done for us and the things He has given to us, we thank Him with our actions, with the way we use and take care of these gifts. If we are thankful for the church and the salvation we receive in it, we gladly give of ourselves to serve in the church. If we are thankful for the people God has put in our lives, we gladly give them the Gospel because we care about them.

Means of Grace

This thanksgiving begins at the Sacrament of the Altar. One of the ancient names for it is Eucharist, which is Greek for Thanksgiving. When we receive the body and blood of Jesus, we are showing Him our gratitude for the salvation He has given us by His sacrificial death. This Thanksgiving and always, let us remember to live in thankfulness for all the gifts God has given us, all things, and people.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
