

Pentecost 4/Independence Day

July 7 & 8, 2019

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Isn't the Fourth of July great! Why? We come together as a nation to enjoy all the blessings that we have been given. For most people, a pause is placed on the nitpicking and fault finding that we do so often. Instead we gather up the band, the floats, the firetrucks and we make as much noise as we possibly can. We give thanks for the men and women who have done extraordinary things so we can enjoy the blessings of this country. We chill some cold ones. We light up the grill and eat all the hamburgers, brats and hot dogs that we can. We watch Joey Chestnut eat 71 hotdogs. We sit in lawn chairs next to sweaty people and laugh like old friends. Then we watch colorful explosions go off in the sky and cheer and clap. Isn't the Fourth of July great?

But then what comes next? The Fifth of July. The political divides that we see in our country once again make the headlines. We go back to the struggle to get more money and stuff. The frustrations and anger that we have in our hearts comes back rearing its ugly head. Perhaps, we begin to wish that we could go back to the Fourth of July. What are we to do? The Apostle Paul answers that question today in the words of our text.

"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." Did you catch what God says? We pray for **"kings and all those in authority."** We might be tempted to think: *Well, that was easy for Paul to say. He doesn't live in the world that we do today. They didn't have the problems that we do today.*

These words were written at a time when those in authority were absolutely brutal with Christians. The blood of martyrs were being spilled all over the world. Those who were in authority were not friends with Christians. Paul was writing the words when the Roman empire was one of the greatest powers in the world. Nero would use Christians as human torches to light his gardens. You didn't even have to look toward Rome to see how those in authority were persecuting Christians. It was also Paul's government that had ordered Peter and John to never speak the name of Jesus again. It was Paul's government that pulled the trigger on the most innocent man that ever existed. Do you realize just how difficult it would have been for Paul's readers to put his words into practice?

Do you realize just how difficult it is for us to hear these words today? If there is one thing that I have learned over the years, is to be very careful in talking politics with people. No matter the issue, there are always two sides. People are passionate about their opinions. Oh so often, those passionate feelings spill over into words and actions. So, what does God tell us to do? He says that we are to pray for them. Did you catch who Paul says we are to pray for? **"ALL those in authority."** He tells us to pray for **ALL**. That's easier to do when someone in authority shares our opinion. It's harder to do when that someone does not share our opinion.

But despite that turmoil, despite the shortcomings of those who hold office, despite the ways that leaders might abuse their office, listen to what Paul says in our second lesson: **"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities."** Our responsibility is to show love toward God as we follow the governing authorities. God wants to bless this world through the gift of government. When that may not happen, God still wants us to pray for them. Ask God to help them be the blessing that he wanted them to be. How do we do that? We look to Jesus. Think of all the times that Jesus showed love to the authorities even when they didn't deserve it. God says that we should pray for **"all those in authority."**

So what do we pray for? First, Paul says that we are to bring **"petitions"** to Him. We can ask God to help government to carry out its role of providing for people's needs. There are people who need to be cared for. We can pray for those who provide peace and safety to us. We need people to provide a sense of security for us. For we need all those blessings so that the Church can carry out its task of bringing God's forgiveness and salvation to the people of this world.

Secondly, Paul says that we are to bring **"prayers"** to Him. Think of what we ask God in the first 3 petitions of the Lord's Prayer. We ask God to help people to keep his name hallowed. We ask God to open the hearts of people so that His Kingdom may come into the hearts of people. We ask God's will be done here on earth and in heaven. The devil wants

none of that to happen. Think of how much easier it is for God's Word to change the hearts of people when there is peace.

Thirdly, Paul says we are to bring **"intercessions"** to God. God established governments to be his servants. Ask God to help those in authority to be a servant. Ask God to help them be the blessing that God desires.

Finally, God wants us to offer up prayers of **"thanksgiving."** Thank God for the blessings he provides for us through the various people in society: Ask him to protect our police officers, firefighters and first responders. Thank God for the farmers who grow our food. Thank God for the doctors and nurses who enable us to live better. Pray for those teachers who are in the public classrooms of our nation. Thank God for the people who serve in offices of government. Thank God for the people who serve us in all kinds of different trades so that we may have a more comfortable life. We have a fantastic country that is filled with people who are blessings to us. Give thanks to God for them.

When **"all those in authority"** fail, ask God to forgive them as he has forgiven us. Ask God to provide us Christians to have more opportunities to share God's Word. That won't be done through a change of laws. It can only be done through the Word of God that sets a soul free. When the government is the blessing that God intends it to be, then **"we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."**

May God help all to put these words of Paul into practice. **"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."** May God continue to bless our country through our prayers. Amen.