

The Heights Baptist Church
Series: What Would God Pray?

Topic: WWGP For Our Country * Scripture: Romans 13:1-7 * 2/6/22

MAIN POINT

God is sovereign and has appointed all governments, including both the godly and the wicked. We are to trust God and pray for our government, sacrificing our personal rights to advance the gospel.

INTRODUCTION

How has social media changed the way people respond to politics?

What is your typical reaction when you are wronged?

How can one's concern for justice get twisted into revenge?

Think about what you see on Facebook, Twitter, or turn on any news channel. Opinions are everywhere, and most people don't put a lot of thought into how they react to the issues with which they disagree. It seems clear that the way of the world is to quickly repay evil with evil. This should not be so with us as God's children! As Christians, we can trust God through the power of the Holy Spirit to deal with the evil that is committed against us and around us. In the meantime, we patiently consider how we might focus less on our own rights and more on advancing the gospel.

Jesus was on earth at a time when Rome was in power, and they had policies that violated human rights. By force they kept Israel under their control, they had a significant slave population, and they executed people through the cruel method of crucifixion. Yet Jesus never got entangled in politics but kept his focus on sharing the good news of the kingdom and training his disciples. We are currently living in a free country, and we have political rights and responsibilities. But we should be known more for our love for God and our love for people than for how we vote or on our political views.

We are also told in the New Testament that we have a responsibility to pray for those in authority over us. In this lesson, we will be looking at "What God Would Pray" for our country.

UNDERSTANDING

HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ ISAIAH 44:28 AND 45:1

Cyrus was the pagan ruler of the Persian empire. Isaiah wrote this prophecy which mentions Cyrus by name roughly 150 years before Cyrus ruled. What stands out to you about this prophecy?

God viewed Cyrus as his shepherd and accomplished all that he pleased through him.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HABAKKUK 1:1-7.

What question is Habakkuk asking of God in verses 2-4?

He is asking God why He tolerates injustice in Judah.

What stands out to you in God's answer in verses 5-7?

Babylon, which was a ruthless and impetuous people, was actually being raised up by God to accomplish his purposes.

HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ DANIEL 7:24-25 AND REVELATION 7:15-17.

These prophecies are about the antichrist and ten nations that follow him.

He will try to change the set times and laws. In other words, he will try to foil God's plans.

According to Revelation 7:17, what will the antichrist and those who support him actually be accomplishing?

They will be accomplishing God's purposes.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PROVERBS 21:1.

What do all the verses we've looked at teach us about the decisions being carried out by our government, even ones that appear to be taking our country in the wrong direction?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 13:1-7.

Paul wrote Romans when Nero - a cruel leader - was the emperor in Rome.

What do these verses tell us our response to our governing authority ought to be, and why?

God commands Christians to submit to the governing authorities and to respect those in authority. We must remember that God has placed this government in authority, and even if they are evil, God is using them to accomplish his purposes. Note that we do have a scriptural precedent that if the government demands that we sin, we are to obey God rather than man (Acts 4:18-20).

God expects His people to be model citizens and to relate to the government in a respectful, obedient way.

Paul provided two reasons for Christians to respect and submit to the governing authorities. One reason was the practical fact that the government has authority to punish wrongdoers. The second reason was because of conscience. Here Paul had in view a higher motivation than fear of punishment. Believers who recognize and respect the God-given role of government submit to it as a demonstration of their Christian devotion.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4.

What kinds of prayers did Paul say we should pray?

In verse 1 Paul mentioned four specific types of prayers that believers should focus on. Petitions are requests to meet our deepest spiritual needs. Prayers are other requests for ourselves made in reverence and humility. Intercessions are requests made on behalf of others. Thanksgivings are expressions of gratitude.

Who are we told to pray for in these verses, and why?

Paul told Timothy to pray for all people, specifically for kings and all those in authority.

We are told to do this for three reasons. First, so we can lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. Second, since this pleases God our Savior, and third, there appears to be a link between praying for governmental authority and evangelism, since “God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

Based on these three reasons and the previous verses we looked at, what kinds of prayers should we offer up for our government?

Pray that the government does not interfere with our ability to freely worship and share our faith. Pray that God would draw people to him. Pray the government would make decisions that would ultimately advance God’s kingdom.

APPLICATION

“All people, all events, all governments, all diseases... are under his control and serving his purposes.... God is in control and you and I are to act like it.... So you worship and you obey and you trust like God is in control.” Dr. Randall T. Hahn, The Heights Baptist Church, 12/12/21

Based on today’s passages, what do you need to do to demonstrate wisdom in politics?

How might our living wisely regarding political matters be used by God to bring others to salvation in Him?

How can I better relate to non-Christian neighbors, coworkers, and Facebook friends in a manner that expresses the love of Christ?

And since God is in control over all circumstances, including the events going on in our nation, we need to pray like it too.

What are some things I can regularly pray for our government leaders?

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you gave us grace even when we were your enemies in sin. Help us remember this and be changed by this truth. Help us remember to repay evil with the love that you gave to us. We pray for those who are in authority over us. Guide them into making decisions that would protect our religious liberty, so we can live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. We pray we would live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse us of doing wrong, they may see our good works, and glorify you. Ask the Lord to help us love others with a sacrificial love, keeping self-centeredness out of the equation. Pray that God would give us opportunities to serve others this week for the sake of Christ. We pray we would draw others toward a saving knowledge of the truth. In Jesus' name we pray!

COMMENTARY

ROMANS 13:1-14

13:1. In principle (though not always in specifics), to submit to the civil authority is to submit to God. The statement in this command which unlocks its meaning, and which gives Christians ground to accept it and apply it, is this: There is no authority except that which God has established. This is a statement of the overarching sovereignty and rule of God in the affairs of this world. If God has appointed every civil ruler, every governing authority, then why should any Christian fear submitting to that which God has appointed?

13:2. Rebelling against what God has instituted will bring the judgment of God, more than likely through the rulers themselves. The fact that “governing authorities” are human authorities—sinners just like us—is perhaps what makes it so difficult. The key to discerning when that time has come is found in Paul's words, what God has instituted. When rulers put themselves in the place of God by legislating moral or spiritual positions (all acts have moral and spiritual roots) which are contrary to the revealed positions of God, resistance is warranted.

13:3-5. Paul next explains the “why?” behind his statement in verse 2 that to rebel against authorities is to invite judgment upon oneself. In an “ideal” world, governing authorities are God's servant to do you good ... to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. The world is not a governmental theocracy in which God is king. Since Israel abandoned the direct theocratic rule God desired for them, and asked God for a king like “all the nations around us” (1 Sam. 8:5,20), even His chosen people have been governed by human rulers. There is no direct, geopolitical theocratic rule in place today; all people on earth are ruled by some sort of human authority. In Israel's case, this was to be a good thing (witness the moral and civil law codes given to Israel to protect their best interests) and should be a good thing for all nations.

Most governing authorities implement law codes that are basically moral, designed to protect citizens and to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Inherent in God's assignment of responsibility for authorities is not only the provision of good but the use of force (the sword) to restrain evil. There is no conflict here between Paul's words in Romans 12:19-20 about not taking vengeance, and his words about the use of the sword to restrain evil. The former is personal, the latter is constitutional. In the former, hatred (vengeance) is at work; in the latter, justice is at work.

13:6-7. Shades of Levitical legislation are apparent in Paul's next words. Just as the Levites in Israel were to be supported by the twelve tribes, so governing authorities are to be supported by taxes on the people. Added impetus is given to Paul's words by his change of terms from verse 4. There, God's "servant" is twice designated by diakonos, the word which is also used to describe those who minister and serve in the church (e.g., Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 4:6). But in verse 6, Paul uses a different word for servant, leitourgos, a word used for someone who serves in behalf of another. The former word speaks of the activity, the latter the activity as representing another.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

2:1 Paul didn't write 1 Timothy as an exhaustive treatise on church organization. Instead, he wrote to give Timothy confidence to face those who spread false doctrine and undercut the church's commission to evangelize. Therefore, Paul's first line of defense was prayer. In this verse, the apostle mentioned four different words for prayer. Petitions included requests individuals made of God. The term prayers was the most general word. Intercessions included prayers for other believers. The thanksgivings Paul mentioned probably included gratitude for God's blessings. The apostle may not have intended any sharp distinction among the four terms. The use of all four terms emphasizes the importance of prayer in overcoming the false teaching in Ephesus and in winning the lost to Christ. The subject of these prayers included everyone—indicating the breadth of Paul's concern.

2:2. Paul encouraged Timothy to pray for governmental authorities who could help provide an environment conducive to evangelism.

2:3 A quiet life of dignity and godliness pleases God. God is also pleased when believers express concern for the salvation of others.

2:4 Paul directly connected evangelism with pleasing God in this verse. Prayer for the lost pleases God because God wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The false teachers promoted lies, but Paul encouraged Timothy to pray that those lies would be exposed. "Come to the knowledge of the truth" is a way of referring to being converted. "The truth" is often used in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as a synonym for the gospel.

The Greek word translated "saved" can convey various meanings, including "to deliver, preserve, protect, heal," and "make whole." In the context of 1 Timothy 2:4 the word refers specifically to conversion, to the transformation that occurs when a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior. Paul understood salvation in the believer's experience as embracing the past, present, and future. The initial moment of salvation, occurring when an individual accepts Christ as Savior, is sometimes referred to as justification. At that moment a believer enters into an eternally secure relationship of peace with God. Salvation, however, also continues in a process called sanctification or becoming more like Christ. The believer is enabled to progress toward spiritual maturity through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Ultimately the believer's salvation will culminate in a future glorification, or deliverance from the power of sin. Such is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed with Christ. These various aspects of salvation motivated Paul to share the gospel with unbelievers.