



HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD ...

Whether it's Russia valuing dominance over diplomacy, America valuing commodity over community, or Israel valuing land over lives, the world is not in a good place. And Christians can sometimes, sadly, be almost as bad – especially when we forget just who it is we're following and what exactly we're here for (crusades, anyone?).

To quote Jesus' response to the disciples when they suggested calling down fire on the Samaritans: "You do not know what spirit you are of" (Luke 9:55, majority text).

So, how are we supposed to respond to a world in turmoil? Or a church, for that matter?

Let's look at what Paul has to say about it ...

1 Timothy 2:1-7

So far in this letter, Paul has stressed the need to challenge issues which can bring division to the church or distraction from its mission. He's also pinpointed one of the main problems for Christians in Ephesus, and perhaps for us today: a self-righteous heart and the absence of humility.

From ch2 onwards, he offers Timothy some practical advice on how to keep a church together. Beginning with the need to pray – as in regularly, and corporately. The saying, "the couple that prays together, stays together", apparently applies to churches, too.

But there's more to this than just trying to fix a church. Paul here mentions requests, prayers, intercession, thanksgiving. For everyone – *everyone* – and for every leader. Now note: Paul is not saying, "Endorse those leaders. Vote for them. Overlook the lies and the lack of integrity and the outright acts of wickedness."

He's saying, "Pray for them. And for everyone." Why?

In this passage, Paul gives us 4 reasons – reasons that are just as applicable today as they were then. Pray ...

1) For a peaceful world (vs2). Who doesn't appreciate a bit of peace and quiet? (I get told this by my family on a regular basis, so I'm assuming it must be true.) And that's a good enough reason to pray for it, right? After all, how many of the psalms are a cry for *shalom* or peace? Or a command to seek it? (It's in at least 15 of them – so 10%!)

But this is about more than our own sense of wellbeing – natural though that is. The gospel spreads faster in times of peace than it does in times of conflict. Just ask yourself how many missionaries are working in Gaza at this moment (and yes, I know the situation is a complex one, but yes, Palestinians matter, too – not just Israelis).

So, pray for peace. For your sake. And the world's.

2) For the salvation of others (vs3-4). Actually, that could have read "salvation of all" – because that's exactly what Paul is getting at here. It's 1) good, and 2) pleasing to God, who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (similar to 2 Peter 3:9). Which is a tricky one if you're a hyper-Calvinist with no heart for the lost, but a spiritual no-brainer if you're anyone else.

So, if you want to see that relative of yours saved, or that friend, or your child's friend, or that colleague, or that neighbour, or that barista who serves you in that coffee shop every week, you're more likely to if you pray for them. The same goes for whole nations and people-groups.

I'll explain why that might be in a minute.

3) Because this is what Jesus died for (vs5-6). We so often cite this to make a Christological point – and that's important – but miss the missiological one. Jesus, the God-man – fully divine and fully human – lived with us and died for us, to reconcile a holy God and an unholy world. To reestablish the spiritual Wi-Fi connection. And when we pray for that world, we are playing our part.

It's a bit like the OT priesthood. You had the High Priest, there to mediate between God and Israel; and you had the rest of the Levites, there to assist him in that role. Similarly, Jesus is called our great High Priest – and we are a royal priesthood. *All* of us (1 Peter 2:9).

Remember that – it might come up again next time!

4) Because this is what we were called to (vs7). Paul ends by saying, "Pray for the world, coz that's what I'm all about. As a herald, an envoy, a

teacher of the Gentiles.” Now we could easily fall into the trap of thinking, “Well, that’s Paul’s mission, not mine. We’re not all called to be an Apostle Paul.” Which is kind of true, kind of not. I mean, we’re not all called to be a planter of churches across the northern Mediterranean, that’s for sure. But we are all called to pray. For other people’s missions. And our own.

Because, like Timothy, we are all witnesses. In our streets, our workplaces, our schools, our colleges, our clubs, even our coffee shops! We’re all told to *go* (Matthew 28:19-20).

So, pray for the world. And pray for your own doorstep.

Let Us Pray ...

Paul, then, instructs the Ephesians to pray: for their Roman overlords, for their neighbours near and far, and for peace – because that creates the necessary environment for the gospel to spread and the world to change. To put it in a very Jewish way, Jesus came to repair the world, in every sense – and prayer is a crucial part of that process.

But Paul is also trying to get the Ephesians to refocus: to get their priorities in order. If we’re praying for our mission, we’ll be more likely to live in a way that’s conducive to that. Prayer keeps it at the forefront of a church’s mind – hence the weekly prayermails, the monthly prayer-focuses, the prayer ‘n’ share times, and this Sunday: Mission Sunday.

Because if we don’t pray for people, we’re almost certainly not witnessing to them. Conversely, if we’re serious about witnessing to them ...

We’ll be praying.

So, let’s do that, using the words of a man renowned for his prayerfulness and peacefulness, St Francis of Assisi:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Amen.