

Joseph Stalin, who killed millions of his fellow Russians because of his paranoid obsession with power, scoffed at a colleague who warned that the Pope was likely to denounce one of Stalin's barbaric plans. 'The pope,' he sneered, 'How many divisions does he have?'<sup>1</sup> This is an example of how many people see religion in general and Christianity in particular. The church is irrelevant. The church has no influence. The church has no impact on the world. Whatever impact it might have is negative. The church is not among the movers and shakers of this world – and, according to Stalin, that is because it has no army. But now consider the words of the Apostle Paul in I Timothy 2:1,2:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Paul implies that the church can have a tremendous impact upon the world!

*Restraining prayer we cease to fight; prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;  
And Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.* Cowper

The church can have a tremendous impact upon the world but notice what we must do: we must look beyond the halls of power here on earth and go directly to the throne room of the universe and there offer our petitions on behalf of our nation and our world. Go directly to the King of Kings to pray for your king, Paul says to the believer. Praying for politicians is the subject we want to consider in this article.

### **The Context of Prayer for Politicians**

Paul's exhortation that we pray for politicians is not the sum total of what the Scripture has to say to us concerning our relationship with those in authority over us. What does the Scripture have to say then about the place of prayer for politicians in the larger scheme of the Christian life?

#### *Prayer is not a substitute for action*

Paul makes it very clear that we are to be like the Lord Jesus. He is described as One who preeminently went about doing good (Acts 10:38). Lepers, bereaved widows, blind men and hungry crowds were happy to be around Him for He did them good. 'Go, and do likewise,' we are told (Luke 10:37). In fact, as we have opportunity, we are to 'do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith' (Galatians 6:10). In this sin sick and suffering world Christians are to 'do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with (their) God' (Micah 6:8). In light of such texts we are not simply to pray for politicians but we are to be actively involved in doing good in society. This 'doing good' will take a myriad of forms. Christians will be involved in the political realm itself as politicians and seek to promote justice and good in that way. We will be involved in philanthropic efforts – so many benevolent and beneficial institutions have been founded by Christians. Schools, universities, orphanages, and prison ministries – the list goes on and on. Philanthropic endeavours Christians ought to initiate and support would include crisis pregnancy centers and adoption agencies. It is one thing to decry the evil of abortion; it is another to put time, money, and volunteer hours, into the fine work of such ministries. Furthermore, Christians in Canada ought to avail themselves of the opportunity to let their voices be known through letter writing campaigns and various avenues of protest. Bills are before

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, (US, Zondervan, 1987), p. 194.

Parliament that fly in the face of Biblical revelation and flagrantly dismiss the claims and commands of God. Let Christians arise and cry aloud. Pray we must! But in this country we still have freedom to speak and write and protest (unlike many of our brethren throughout the world). Let us avail ourselves of these freedoms and speak out against forces that would promote the abomination of homosexuality and destroy the traditional family. The point is this: to say that Christian ought to pray is not to say that they ought not to do things that will promote the good and the just in society. Did Mr. Trudeau desire a 'just society'? So do we. And we will work for it.

*Prayer goes hand in hand with submission and respect*

Do you recall some of the salient points in Paul's exhortations in Romans 13:1-7? Obey the government because God put them in authority over you (verses 1-5). Pay your taxes and import duties, for the same reason (verse 6,7). Be respectful and give honour to those in governmental authority. Do you recall what Peter said? Submit to those who in authority over you (I Peter 2:13). Show respect for everyone and show respect for the king (2:17). It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with the implications of these texts for the notions of revolutions and coups, but we can think about our own conduct. How do I measure up in light of these clear commands? As they observe my attitude toward the rules of the road, is it apparent to my children that I have respect for the government and that I am submissive to their regulations? Do my business practice and the way I fill out my income tax similarly reflect a respectful and submissive attitude? Does the way I speak about our prime minister and the members of parliament show that my conversation is influenced by these texts? Remember, God places them there in authority just as surely as He placed Nero in his position as emperor in Paul's day! I suspect that we are as disobedient to the laws of the land and disrespectful of the rulers of the land as we are negligent to pray for those same people. I believe there is a connection.

*Prayer indicates the conviction that society must be changed from the inside out.*

What is the best thing we can do for the leaders of our land? We can pray for them! What is the best thing we can do for our country? We can pray for them! How forgetful Christians can be of that fundamental truth. In 1985, after Congress had failed to pass his legislative agenda, a prominent New Right leader declared: 'The only way to have a genuine spiritual revival is to have legislative reform...I think we have just been legislated out of the possibility of a spiritual revival.'<sup>2</sup> This is wrong-headed and un-biblical. If society is going to change it must be changed from the insider out. People must be converted, politicians must be saved, and sinners must be won to Christ. The historian J. Wesley Bready, in a book entitled England before and after Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform, described the 'deep savagery of much of 18<sup>th</sup> Century England' and says that the 'evangelical revival did more to transfigure the moral character of the general populace than any other movement British history can record.'<sup>3</sup> Wesley and the leaders of the revival "restored to a nation its soul"! Examples like this could be multiplied. But the point is this: whatever involvement individual Christians might have in the politics of our day, the church must ever be faithful to its primary task, that of preaching the gospel to all the world and seeking to make all men disciples of Christ. And, the church must be faithful to pray for that kind of turn-around. No wonder Paul speaks with urgency: 'Therefore I exhort first of all' – do you see the passion? I exhort and I urge you to do this! Now first of all, in terms of priority, you must pray for these people! This is terribly important. And no wonder, since

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke, UK, Marshalls Paperbacks, 1984), p. 3.

the face of a nation can be changed only when the heart of a nation is changed. And God alone can do that. So, pray!

*Prayer indicates confidence that God is able to do mighty things.*

Paul encourages prayer because he is convinced that God is almighty and thus able to bring about radical change. When we pray for kings we remember that God is King of Kings. When we pray for powerful men we remember that to God the 'nations are as a drop in the bucket, and are counted as small dust on the scales; look He lifts up the isles as a very little thing' (Isaiah 40:15). He puts presidents in power and He brings prime ministers down. Our Lord said to Pilate, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above' (John 19:11). While wars and rumours of wars whirl about us how comforting to remember that God 'causes wars to cease throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear in two; He burns the shield with fire' (Psalm 46:9). We remember that the oft quoted 'be still and know that I am God' is not spoken in the context of a beautiful pastoral scene but rather amidst the clash and clang of sabre rattling nations who are being told to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Almighty God. God can and will do His will in the world. This is our God! "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (verse 11).

### **The Content of Prayer for Politicians**

*Pray for all men, especially leaders.*

Paul tells us that we ought to pray for all types of men. We ought to pray for men in all kinds of groups and for all men without distinction. But in particular we ought to pray for those who are in positions of authority in government. Paul prayed for the king. We are to pray for city councilors, mayors, provincial and federal members of parliament, premiers and prime ministers. Leaders who have the opportunity to display their folly on the world stage ought especially to be on the hearts of God's people. We ought to pray for leaders of countries where the church is persecuted. Being informed about such countries is the first step. Then fervent prayer about such situations must follow.

We might be tempted to leave out of our prayers leaders we consider to be vile. It is sobering to remember that the "king" to whom Paul referred was Nero. Now Nero, while he may not have 'fiddled' while Rome burned, did greet the news about the fire with some glee. He was not averse to 'eliminating' his own family members and was the first emperor to persecute the family of God. Pray for this man, Paul tells these people. Years later, as Paul is about to be beheaded in Nero's Rome, do you think he would have backtracked on this instruction? I think not! He would, in all likelihood, have called all the more urgently for fervent prayer for the soul of this man. Sadly, Nero, as far as we know, died in his sin, lamenting the fact that in him the world was losing a great actor. We ought to pray for leaders of our day before they too die in their sin. No matter the wickedness of the particular politician, we ought to pray that God would save him or her. When you watch the mayor of Toronto frolicking with degenerates on the streets of Toronto in a homosexual parade, what is your response? If it is not to pray for him (and them), then your response is less than Biblical. Remember that Jesus, standing before a great and wicked city, His heart full of love and compassion, lamented: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing' (Matthew 23:37)! They killed and stoned those whom Jesus had sent to them. But love and compassion for poor sinners evokes this heart-wrenching lament. Love for sinners, even the most vile of politicians, must drive us to our knees, remembering that 'the vilest of

sinner who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives'. Has it occurred to you that it is possible that one day Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush, Osama Bin Laden and Tony Blair may all sit down at the wedding feast of the Lamb? If it has not, perhaps it is because you have not been praying for them.

*Pray for the desperate need.*

The word translated 'supplication' especially emphasizes the idea of 'need, lack'. You come and you ask because of a need you have or a need someone else has.

What need there is in this world! With the winds of war blowing hot and controversy swirling around his administration's handling of the matter of Iraq's 'weapons of mass destruction', U.S. President, George W. Bush, met with several preachers on February 13, 2003. Among the ministers was Max Lucado who asked the President how he could seem so calm and peaceful in the midst of such stress. The President's reply was: 'I'm feeling stronger now than I've ever been in my life. And the reason is because every person in America is praying for me. When I stay on my knees, that's when I have power.' He was then asked how he would like the ministers to pray for him and Mr. Bush asked that they pray for 'clarity of mind for himself so that he might make wise decisions' and also for his wife and daughters, as he is concerned about their safety. How refreshing, and even startling to see a politician who understands the need for prayer and the need for others to pray for him! For the most part, however, politicians do not see the need and it is thus incumbent upon Christians to do so. Let us survey our national scene. We see an aggressive and militant homosexual lobby and their appalling efforts to destroy a Judeo-Christian concept of the family. We observe rampant immorality on every level. We find that the breakdown of the family has reached epidemic proportions and we grieve over the fact that 55% of children born in Quebec are born out of wedlock.<sup>4</sup> The stunning reality is brought home again to our minds that we live in a country that has no law regarding abortion, and that the slaughter of the unborn continues unabated. Pragmatism and political correctness guide decision making at every level, and knowledge of God and Biblical wisdom are not only rare in society, they are not considered worth pursuing. Amidst all these concerns, the crying need is surely for politicians to be won to Christ. We need to pray not only for wisdom and understanding for politicians but for conversion. Luther was reputed to have said: 'I would rather be governed by a competent Turk than an incompetent Christian'. We will pray for competence but we want much more. We want to see conversions! This is God's concern. This is what God desires. 'For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (verses 3,4). Oh that government officials might indeed be 'God's ministers to you for good' (Romans 13:4). But the deeper longing of our hearts is to see them become monuments to His saving grace.

In light of this we should pray for politicians who are Christians, that God would endow them with wisdom, shrewdness, understanding and competence beyond their natural abilities. We should pray that God would grant them boldness and courage in their witness, preserve them unspotted in the often sleazy world of politics and keep their eye true in the murky processes of political wrangling. Further, we should pray for churches and individual Christians who have contact with politicians at every level that they would not simply seek to promote good legislation but that they would promote the kingdom amongst these needy folk.

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<sup>4</sup> According to University of Montreal research, as reported in the Montreal Gazette.

*Pray for specific people and items.*

The word "supplications" in verse one means "the petitions for the fulfillment of certain definite needs". Particular needs and particular requests are in view here. We should be particular whenever we pray and especially when we pray for politicians and the political world. Perhaps you know are personally acquainted with individuals in politics – pray faithfully for them! We all know of particular people on the provincial and national scene – pray for them by name. Do we at times succumb to the notion that people like Mr. Chretien are beyond the pale of God's saving grace? God forbid! Does not the conversion of Richard Nixon's hatchet man, Charles Colson, remind us that God can save anybody? Read his book Born Again and be reminded that the hallowed halls of political power are not beyond the reach of God's mighty hand. More significant than that is God's gracious dealings with the most powerful man in the world during the heyday of the Babylonian empire. Read Daniel 4 and see God bringing the great Nebuchadnezzar to his knees and, I believe, to Himself. Or consider Jonah 3 and observe the King of Nineveh as he rises from his throne, lays aside his robe, covers himself with sackcloth and ashes and turns to God. Surely this stirs us to pray for particular people and pray with confidence that God is able to do it!

*Pray with thanksgiving.*

We are to bring supplications, prayers and intercessions to God with thanksgiving (verse 2). I recall arriving in Canada many years ago having, in the providence of God, escaped the seething cauldron of racial hatred and violence in South Africa. I recall profound thankfulness sweeping over me when, as a young man, I became a citizen of this great country. Folk like us felt deeply grateful for the privilege of the vote, for the freedom to walk into any public washroom and not look for a colour sign. I was not a believer then and didn't really know whom to thank. But we do, do we not? Are we thankful for the freedoms we enjoy in this country? Are we thankful for the liberty to voice our displeasure? Are we thankful for the prosperity with which we can serve God and promote the kingdom? For many years Canada has been recognized as one of the most desirable places in the world to live. Thank the Lord for what you have here.

*Pray for a quiet and peaceful life.*

We ought to pray for politicians, Paul says, in order that we may lead a "quiet and peaceable life" (verse 2). The two words he uses probably suggest the following: peace on the outside (freedom from turmoil brought upon us); peace on the inside (freedom from inner turmoil). And this would be so that the people of God may grow and mature and live a life characterized by all "godliness and reverence" (verse 2). Thank God that, for the most part, we do live a quiet and peaceable life here in Canada. Let us pray that that might continue. We do see disturbing signs of the erosion of these liberties. We have in recent times heard of a Christian couple having their children taken away from them simply because they sought to follow the Biblical admonitions regarding discipline. We have witnessed a Christian school teacher persecuted by authorities because he spoke out against homosexuality, despite his doing so in the most circumspect manner.