

Sermon for July 3, 2016 – Independence Day

1 Timothy 2:1-6 NIV84

Theme: **Christ wants you to care for your country by . . .**

1. *Praying for everyone – especially your leaders.*
2. *Sharing the Gospel with your neighbors.*

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior,⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.

I want to tell you about a special type of American warrior – without whose service our country would have been lost ages ago. He has fought in every battle – from the Revolutionary War to the current War on Terror. He has helped in every natural disaster. Whenever our country was in turmoil, he was serving. Even during times of peace, this warrior has remained vigilant – thanklessly helping our country in more ways than you can imagine.

Can you figure out who this person is? It's the Christian, who prays for his country. Such a person brings the needs of our nation before God's throne – begging the LORD's mercy for Christ's sake. And why does he do that? Because he realizes that, without God's blessing, our military would meet certain defeat, our fields would lie barren, our economy would be in shambles, and our unique freedoms would be lost. Every good thing we have and are as a nation is because of God's undeserved grace.

Do you truly love this country? Are you worried about the direction it is heading? Are you concerned for the souls of your countrymen? If you answered yes to these questions, then know that God has a job for you. As we will learn in our sermon text for this morning, **Christ wants you to care for your country by** 1) *Praying for everyone – especially your leaders.* 2) *Sharing the Gospel with your neighbors.*

Part One: *Praying for everyone – especially your leaders.*

Our sermon text is taken from a letter the apostle Paul wrote to a disciple named Timothy, who served as a missionary/pastor in Ephesus while Paul was off preaching the Gospel in Macedonia. This letter was meant to both encourage Timothy and give good practical advice for his ministry.

Concerning the relationship a Christian should have with civil government, the apostle Paul writes: *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--² for kings and all those in authority. . .*

God wants Christians to pray – and not just for their own health, wealth and good. He wants Christians to pray for everyone. Why is that? Because, without God’s grace and mercy, not a single soul could survive on this earth. Everything we have and are comes from Him: our bodies, souls, employment, homes, family, etc . . . it’s all an undeserved blessing from God. Thank God that we know this to be true, because many people live as if all these blessings were purchased through their own hard work and effort. Many people are quick to thank America’s founding fathers for our freedom – not realizing that, if God had not mercifully blessed their efforts, all their work would have been in vain.

Could you imagine what it would be like to sponsor an impoverished family – providing clothing, food, shelter and employment – only to have them act as if you did nothing? Imagine them saying no word of thanks; instead, they boast about how their effort and ingenuity saved them from poverty. How would you feel under such circumstances? Now consider that our nation often acts the very same way to God! Is it any wonder that the apostle urges us, first of all, to pray for everyone?

But how and for what are we to pray? St. Paul offers us a fourfold guideline: First of all, Paul urges us to bring “requests” - recognizing the needs other people have and ask God to fulfill them. What needs do people have? Certainly there are physical things like food, water, clothing and shelter. We also have social needs, like feeling love and security. As a nation, we need peace, safety, law and order. Spiritually, we all need to know the truth about our sins and the forgiveness we have through faith in Christ Jesus. God wants us to ask for all these things on behalf of our neighbor.

Secondly, Paul encourages us to “pray.” The underlying thought behind this action is God’s honor. Here we can think about the first three petitions of the LORD’s prayer. We pray that God allows his name to be hallowed in our land, and not abused. We pray that God’s good and gracious will is done in our country, so that every evil plan and purpose of the devil to entice people away from Christ is thwarted. We also pray that Christ’s kingdom spreads as we witness the Gospel in our community, nation and world.

Thirdly God wants us to make “intercessions” on behalf of others – especially those who govern. Ask the LORD to forgive president Obama when he errs, and to lead him to do what is good and god-pleasing. Pray that the LORD protects him, blesses him with wisdom, and leads people to respect his office – recognizing that he is only in power because God put him there. The same is true regarding Governor Walker, Mayor Christman, our Supreme Court justices, our local magistrates, and all others. Everyone in government is God’s servant whom he chose to place in authority over us, as the Bible says: *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. . . . For he is God’s servant to do you good.”* (Romans 13:1,4 NIV84)

This is not to say that we always have to agree with every decision our leaders make. It also doesn’t mean that we should never sound a warning when their decisions lead others into sin. We have a God-given responsibility to speak out at such times so that others are not led astray. But even if we had an absolutely immoral government (like the apostle Paul did when he penned his words) that doesn’t mean we should stop praying for it. Pray in fear of God and out of pity

for the souls of those who govern us. It would be easy to pray that God simply grants us new leaders; but, before we pray that, shouldn't we ask God that our current leaders recognize their bad decisions, be led to repent and have the opportunity to correct them? Isn't that how you would want others to pray for you? Show, then, the same love to your political leaders.

Finally, God wants us to offer up thanksgiving. Thank for LORD for the blessings He provides for us through the various people in society: for example, the protection our police officers, firefighters and first responders provide. Thank God for the food our farmers grow, the health our doctors and nurses provide, the education from our teachers, good laws from our legislatures, and just judgments from our judges. Thank God for all he does through the various trades with which he has blessed our nation. Consider how carpenters, masons, bankers, grocers, janitors, librarians, stay-at-home moms, etc. . . . all have a positive impact on our lives. Thank God for the people of our nation - all the while recognizing that God is working through their vocations to provide everything we need.

Yes, with all the bad news going on in the world, it's good to take time to reflect on all the good the LORD still does through the people composing our nation. Thank God for his undeserved blessing on our country. Ask him to continue to grant it for Christ's sake. Why? So *that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

Now understand what this last phrase means. We aren't praying for God's blessing so that we can live an easy life – doing whatever our selfish heart desires. No. God grants us all the blessings and freedoms we enjoy for his glory. As Christians, we want God to continue granting all His blessings so that we can show Christ's love to our neighbors in both our words and actions. *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

Part Two: Sharing the Gospel with your neighbors.

God loves Americans – not because of who we are or what we have accomplished. No, actually God loves us in spite of all that! God loves the people of our country simply because He created us. The same could be said for Russians, Arabs, Chinese Africans etc. . . . God loves all people, in spite of their sins. He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. He would rather that they repent of their sins and live! (cf. Ezekiel 18:32)

This is why Paul writes: *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.* Jesus paid for your sins. He paid for mine. Jesus paid for the sins of every person who has ever or will ever walk this earth. Why? To buy us back for God. Do you want proof that God loves you and the people of this country? Then look no further than Jesus' cross. The Bible says that everyone who looks to him in repentance and faith is fully forgiven. They are adopted into His family. They have the privilege of calling God their dear Father. Through faith they become citizens of a kingdom far greater than the United States of America: They become citizens of heaven.

God desires the eternal salvation of all. He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. This is why he asks us, Christians, to both pray and share the Gospel with our family, friends and neighbors.

You see, here is the sad truth: the devil is wreaking havoc in our country. He is enticing our neighbors away from God. Materialism is running rampant. Violence is on the increase. Thousands of innocent babies (all of whom God created and loved) are being killed every month. Our nation is trying to redefine morality. The demon-god of “self” is being preached. And as this continues, our countrymen – yes, even members of our own family – are falling away. Whether they know it or not, they running headlong into hell.

And this is why God wants you to lovingly confess His law and Gospel with your fellow countrymen. Only the Gospel can rescue people from the curse of sin. Only it can restore a right relationship with God. The LORD wants you to be as concerned for your countrymen as he is. And how concerned is the LORD? So much so that He suffered and died for their sins.

We all glorify the soldier who lays down his life to protect his country. As a soldier of Christ are you willing to do the same? The people of our nation needs men and women who are willing to give up living for themselves in order to live for their LORD. Our country needs men and women who are unafraid to speak about sin, and share the love of Christ through their words and actions. This is how you can give up your life for God – all the while fighting for the spiritual welfare of your countrymen.

America’s best defense has never been its military, government or constitution. It has always been the LORD who has granted these blessings. It has also been Christians who pray for this nation. For their sake, God has graciously blessed and preserved our country.

Remember the famous poster of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and saying: “I want YOU for the US Army?” Well, God the Father wants you for his spiritual army. Christ wants you to care for your country. How? By praying for everyone – especially your leaders. By sharing the Gospel with your neighbors. May the LORD help us do this, not only on this holiday weekend, but every day until He comes. Amen