

I Timothy 2:4-6 Christ Alone

Introduction

The world in which the Reformation took place five hundred years ago was so different in many ways to our own. It was a social context in which the Roman Catholic Church was absolutely predominant over every area of society. The Wittenberg church in Germany where Luther had posted his Ninety-Five Theses held one of Europe's largest collections of religious artifacts or holy relics which were preserved as memento or souvenir of a saint. Usually they were a bone or some part of their clothing by which the person was remembered. Prince Frederick III allowed the general public an opportunity each year to view this growing collection of religious artifacts and this served both as an opportunity for prayer but also an effective fund-raising strategy on behalf of the Wittenberg Church. Viewing relics and making financial donations, according to Roman Catholic teaching, earned participants time off their stay in purgatory, the place where they were punished for their sins prior to entry into heaven. The common conviction was that some of the merits earned by holy men and women from the past could be transferred to them thus gaining them quicker access into heaven. However, this teaching about purgatory is not in the Bible. We are saved by God's grace alone because Jesus in His sacrifice on the cross was good enough to stand in our place. This gift of salvation is received by faith alone when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus. It is simple enough to be received by a child as well as by a mature adult. What is more, Paul declares something very important in I Timothy 2:5: *For there is one God and **one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.*** These words would have been a shock to some Jews who viewed angels as possible mediators between God and humanity. A Jewish religious work called *The Testament of Dan* (6:2) stated: 'Draw near unto God, and unto the angel who intercedes for you, for he is a mediator between God and man.' (William Barclay, *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, p. 54). This was not a view held by the first Jewish followers of Jesus. To Jews holding this view Paul's message was abundantly clear: *For there is one God and **one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.*** For the first Gentile converts used to the plurality of Temples in their communities dedicated to the worship of a large number of gods and goddesses these words were equally distinct and a challenge. *For there is one God and **one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.*** In some sections of the Christian church over the next two thousand years there were teachings that promote other mediators to whom we can pray to represent our concerns to God the Father, mostly with reference to Mary, the mother of Jesus or prominent Christian saints who had died in the past. The Reformation rediscovered afresh the reality that we come through Christ alone to the Father. Paul could not be clearer in his declaration here on this subject. *For there is one God and **one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.*** Let us look briefly at this important subject through these words of Paul to Timothy, the young pastor of the Christian Church in Ephesus.

1. Our need of a mediator (I Timothy 2:1-2)

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people –² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. Paul begins this section by putting in context the declaration he will make about Jesus being the sole mediator between God and humanity.

(a) **We all need assistance** *for all people...* There are some things which separate human beings. There are ethnic, gender and social class differences, for example, which can divide us but Paul's focus is on our common need of divine assistance to live our lives in a manner pleasing to God. The media so often focusses on what divides us and highlights the negatives as they perceive it, but by contrast in Scripture we see a gospel of reconciliation through which God desires to bring humanity back into fellowship with Him. The underlying problem is that we are all sinners. Romans 3:23 states: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* Most people can accept this in principle as they know they are not perfect, but the way this sin problem manifests itself in our lives in attitudes, speech and conduct can at times be difficult to work through. What is most serious of all is that many people do not recognise the seriousness of their plight because of our sin problem. Isaiah 59:2 reminds us: *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear.* Until we have grasped the seriousness of our predicament we will not seek the appropriate solution to it. One of the most tragic aspects of human sinfulness is that our spiritual vision is distorted in a way that so often minimises the seriousness of our own shortcomings and maximises those of others –especially if they are people we do not get on with. Whereas with people we love or value we can also be much more willing to view less severely their failures or mistakes. The latter action can be a good thing because if God treated us as we deserved then we would all be in trouble! However, if we want God to be gracious with us then we need to be equally gracious with other people when they fail. When we want God to erase from His records our past failures we must also seek to do the same with each other's past failings. The foundational need of all people is to be reconciled to their Creator and Redeemer. To refuse to acknowledge Him or to fail to give Him His rightful place in our lives is very serious indeed. Paul in Colossians 1:21 describes people with this mindset as *alienated from God and...enemies [of God] because of your evil behaviour.* The first commandment in Exodus 20:3 points very clearly to our obligation to give Him the first place in our lives. In Romans 2:3 Paul challenged any reader or hearer who had yet to trust the Lord Jesus with this clear challenge: *do you think you will escape God's judgment?* One day we will all stand before Him to give an account of our lives. We need to live now in a way that we will be comfortable with then on that day. Have you put your faith and trust in Him?

(b) **We can all give assistance** (I Timothy 2:1) *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people* – However, here in this passage Paul's primary message is to Christian believers and is a strong encouragement to them to take action on behalf of *all people*. The apostle suggests there are four things we should do for the people around us. (i) *Petitions* or requests. It was not a particularly religious word in Paul's day but one that highlighted our own and other people's need of assistance with some of the things we are doing. It described specific focussed requests for something that is needed. It often was used in the context of an immediate need that has arisen and for which we seek a quick and complete solution. In the New Testament this word was only used in reference to God. It was an acknowledgement that I am not self-sufficient but in all kinds of contexts need to rely on others to enable me to live my life. Most people will readily acknowledge that with reference to employing the skills of others for their own benefit –after all who doesn't appreciate the blessing of our National Health Service! But Paul goes further here and says that too often people forget to acknowledge God and His place in their lives. We bring our requests to Him. (ii) *Prayers* This is the more general term used of our conversation with God. It could be that we want to bring someone before God in prayer but we are not aware of any specific needs in their lives. So we may be seeking in more general terms God's blessing on or care for an individual or their family. It is interesting that if we do this regularly we may find a greater interest in them and learn in time of more specific requests we can bring to

God on their behalf. If we invest in praying for people we will naturally want God's blessing on them –for their good and for His glory. The church directory is a good prayer list of people to pray for on a regular basis. I hope each one of us gives some time each week to pray for one another. If you have never tried it before can I encourage you to pray through the names in the directory asking for God's blessing on the people named there; if there are individuals you do not know then it will give you a greater incentive to ask the following Sunday to find out who you were praying for! (iii) *Intercessions* This is the strongest word Paul uses of specific appeals for assistance in times of real need. We all know the difference in general prayers for something and bringing something serious or urgent before the Lord. These are passionate appeals for something to be done. We have had those times when we have cried out to God for ourselves or for other people in need. We need to pray personally but also collectively in prayer. I thank God we have several prayer meetings in the church during which we can focus on bringing needs before the Lord. (iv) *Thanksgiving* Balanced biblical praying includes thanksgiving in which we come with gratitude to God who has answered many of our previous appeals to Him and for which we are truly grateful. The apostle highlights this aspect of prayer repeatedly in his communications with the new Christian congregations to which his letter were written. For example, Philippians 4:6: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* The importance of thanksgiving is in highlighting that prayer changes things. It recognises that when we come through the one mediator God has appointed that He hears and answers our prayers in accordance with His holy will. Do you remember to be thankful in your prayers? It would be good each day to highlight something for which we are thankful. We have so many blessings that we can so easily take for granted.

We also have a responsibility to pray for the government at local and national level. We don't simply vote and then leave them to it until the next time we are called to the voting booth. We have a duty to pray for them... *for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness* (I Timothy 1:2). We can be quick to make comments on their failings and in this contemporary age can be quick to post social media comments, but do we exercise the responsibility to pray for them? No-one can fail to be moved by the tone of Tim Farron's resignation speech as leader of the Liberal Democrats (14 June 2017) as he hinted at the struggles he has faced for seeking to serve as a Christian and as a national politician. He could have handled things better, but how many of us would be comfortable handling hostile journalists day after day? The fact that they may have been a minority is not the issue, but the problem of the increasing intolerance in the public square is a cause of real concern. The Early Church consistently advocated praying for the Government of their day. Peter wrote in I Peter 2:17: *Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.* The Emperor in question was the brutal Nero who would later order the execution of both Peter and Paul along with many other Christians whose names are unknown to us. In the later second century AD North African Christian leader Tertullian wrote that he prayed in this way for the Emperor of his day, for: 'long life, secure dominion, a safe home, a faithful senate (parliament), a righteous people and a world at peace (*Apologia* 30, Barclay, *Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, p.49). Yet we have a clear motivation in praying for good governance: *that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness* (I Timothy 1:2). There is a consistency about such prayers. We do not expect standards from our national leaders that we are not seeking to follow ourselves. There is a level playing field in our prayers. We are all in it together for the common good, but supremely for the glory of God who created us to live in a way honouring to Him who created us in His image.

2. The calling of the mediator (I Timothy 2:3-5)

³ *This is good, and pleases God our Saviour,* ⁴ *who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* ⁵ *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus...* God wants us to have fellowship with Him and to give us the gift of salvation. He is described here as *God our Saviour*. He created us in His image with a view to fellowship with us. Sadly human beings rebelled against His loving oversight and have messed up this wonderful world. However, as the end of the book of Revelation reminds us, God's will for a perfect world where creatures made in His image have the best quality relationship with Him will come to pass. What is God's desire here? God provides salvation that is sufficient for all people as the sacrifice of Jesus is of infinite worth. The gift of salvation is offered to all without exception. There is no distinction between rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, or any other distinctive that separates people from each other. We need to distinguish between the directive will of God –things that will happen for definite. This includes God's plan to send Jesus to be our Saviour from sin and the fact that He has chosen to redeem a people to Himself who will be with Him for ever. On the other hand there is also the permissive will of God which is highlighted here and also in II Peter 3:9: *The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* In John 6:37-40 Jesus said these words: ³⁷ *All those the Father gives me will come to Me, and **whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.*** ³⁸ *For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me.* ³⁹ *And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all those He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day.* ⁴⁰ ***For My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.*** God has a plan and a purpose to redeem us but how can this be possible for a perfect holy God to be reconciled with guilty sinners?

The means by which it is accomplished is through the mediator between God and humanity –the only person who was truly God and truly human – the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone could reconcile us to the Father. Jesus Himself said so clearly at the Last Supper these words to His followers: *I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through Me* (John 14:6). These words were echoed in the proclamation of the apostles when the Christian Church was founded. Peter and John, after the healing of a lame man in Jerusalem, made this clear statement in Acts 4:11-12: *it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.* ¹¹ *Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."* ¹² ***Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*** Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem were visibly angry at this proclamation. There were different forms of Judaism that had co-existed uneasily in Israel at that time, but the Christian Gospel was presenting a radically different message that taught so clearly that the sacrificial system in the Temple was no longer necessary because Jesus had paid in the full the cost of our redemption in His sacrificial death on the cross. This message was not always welcomed either in the Gentile world. In Ephesus where Timothy was now pastor of the Christian Church, we read these words relating to Paul's early mission work there, recorded in Acts 19:23: *About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.* Luke, the writer of Acts explained that it caused serious offence to some people in that city who created a significant commotion as a result of what they had heard. However, instead of uncertainty of not knowing whether offerings made through the Jewish sacrificial system or any other religious practice had been sufficient to please God the Christian Gospel proclaims loud and clear that we are saved through Christ alone, by God's grace alone, received by faith alone. What is our authority to confirm that this is so – it is God's Word, Scripture alone that teaches us this wonderful truth;

3. The work of the mediator (I Timothy 2:6)

⁶ *who gave Himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.* Jesus Himself made this prediction prior to His crucifixion, recorded in John 12:32: *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* The diversity of Christians across the globe is fulfilment of this remarkable prediction. The Christian Church is the most diverse body of people on the planet. In the Old Testament Job lamented that there was no one to whom he could turn to help him bring his predicament to God. Job 9:33-35 states: ***If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together, ³⁴ someone to remove God's rod from me, so that His terror would frighten me no more. ³⁵ Then I would speak up without fear of Him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.*** Job the patriarch who lived probably as many years before the time of Jesus as we live after it was earnestly desiring a mediator, but his prayer was not ignored by God because it was always in His plans to send Jesus as the sole mediator between God and humanity. In Matthew 20:28 we have a record of these words of Jesus: *...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.'* There are numerous religions in the world and many ways to God advocated that are clearly at variance with one another. But religion will not save you, only coming to God through Christ alone, the one mediator between God and man can we brought back into fellowship with our heavenly Father. Have you experienced the joy and blessing that salvation through Jesus can bring? If not can I urge you to put your faith and trust in Him today. Church of Scotland Minister and later New Testament lecturer at Glasgow University, William Barclay, (W. Barclay, *Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, pp.54-55) told the story of a man who prior to the Second World War had wanted nothing to do with God. His only son was called up to serve in the Armed Forces and was tragically killed. The man made numerous trips to the local War Memorial to read yet again the list of names of local people, including his son, who had died to save their country from Nazi-German occupation. This experience brought this man to a very real saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His life was totally transformed by the gospel of Jesus and His sacrifice for us. He got it so clearly - the cost to God the Father of sending His Son to be our Saviour. His testimony was simply this- words spoken with respect to his own son: 'I guess he had to go down to lift me up'. Although, there was no direct link between the two events the willingness of his own son to lay down his life for his country had turned a man who had lived for himself to see a better way. In fact, it was not a better way, but the best way, because He made his peace with God and was reconciled to his heavenly Father. Has God opened your eyes to see your need of Jesus? Have you come to accept the best way of all?

4. Our devotion to the mediator (I Timothy 2:7)

⁷ *And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.* Once we come to faith in Jesus Christ we have a responsibility to make Jesus known to other people. Paul put it so eloquently in his second letter to the Church at Corinth. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!* ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God.* (II Corinthians 5:18-20). Paul uses three words here in I Timothy 2:7 to describe his new calling as a follower of Jesus. He is first of all (a) a herald A herald is a person who has a formal calling to declare news people need to hear. Ripon in North Yorkshire where I lived as an undergraduate student in

the 1980s had a town Cryer who came out every weeknight evening to pass on the news to whoever was gathered there. I can no longer remember what he had to say and it was by then and many years earlier only a ceremonial function –for which he was dressed appropriately. However, in former centuries before newspapers and other means of conveying news became more common such individuals were employed to declare to their local communities at appointed times whatever message the Government or local council wanted to be shared with them. It is part of our calling as Christians to ensure that the people we know hear about Jesus and have an opportunity to hear about the good news of the Gospel. Not everyone will respond favourably, many did not in Jesus’ day either, so if people rejected Him it is most unlikely that everyone we speak to will accept the invitation to join us in following Jesus. However, we are not responsible for their choice, only the giving of an opportunity or opportunities to make that response to the gospel. Naturally we will pray earnestly that the Lord will bless our efforts to share the good news of Jesus with those around us.

(b) an apostle An apostle is literally ‘a sent one’ –someone who goes out to share the good news of Jesus amongst people who have no knowledge of Him. It is a missionary calling that is envisaged and may involve church-planting in communities where there is not another effective gospel witness or where an additional new cause could assist in reaching more people for Jesus in a larger community. Now most of us will not be formally sent out with such a mission as our primary calling, but all of us are called to be witnesses through our lives and where appropriate through our words. Will you and I be faithful witnesses for Jesus?

(c) true and faithful teacher Once again the vast majority of Christians will not be called to be full-time Bible teachers or scholars –in fact only a small minority will hold such posts. Others of us have a local calling as pastor-teachers responsible to teach God’s Word in a particular congregation. For those of us with a formal position teaching God’s Word we have a big responsibility and will one day give an account to the Lord for how faithfully we have adhered to the truth of the Gospel. The leader of the Church in Jerusalem and step-brother of Jesus, James, wrote these words in his letter in the New Testament: *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly* (James 3:1). It is only right that Ministers of the Gospel realise how seriously they are to be faithful in teaching God’s Word and not merely offering their own blessed thoughts! However, it would be good if every Christian could learn a basic outline of the good news of the Gospel and answers to some basic questions that come up quite regularly from enquirers. Paul wants us to have full confidence in the Gospel received through Christ Alone who is the sole mediator between God and humanity. I pray that each one of us may have received it for ourselves, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.