

LAST MONTH we looked at the emphatic exhortation of Paul to Timothy that men should pray. They should offer prayers of all types, for all people, and should do so everywhere.

These exhortations come in the context of a chapter (1 Timothy 2) which focuses on the role of sisters in its second half (v. 9 on) and on brethren in v. 8 (and perhaps vv. 1-8 as a whole). Before looking in more detail at the role of brothers, let's briefly take a look at what he says to the females.

There is instruction of both restricting and enabling varieties. On the negative side, he tells them not to adorn themselves too fancily, nor to teach or usurp authority over men. On the positive side, he encourages them to adorn themselves with good works, to learn, and to continue in faith and love, and in "holiness with sobriety". He also notes that they will be "saved in childbearing"—probably a reference to the fact that the Saviour had been born of a woman with no intervention from man.

The exhortation to the males likewise consists of restrictive and enabling aspects. The men are told to pray "without wrath and doubting". This is a most interesting modifier, for it suggests that males may have a proclivity to these behaviours. It might be natural for them to be roused by anger, but they must resist. It is inconsistent with a life given to prayer "for all men". It might be natural for men to doubt the effectiveness of their prayers and the reality of God's work in human affairs. But they must not surrender to that kind of weak-mindedness.

If prayer is a particular responsibility of males, then they should take it seriously and prepare themselves for it. This covers every aspect of prayer—tone, register, and so forth—but the aspects Paul particularly draws attention to are the different facets of prayer (supplications, intercessions, thanksgivings, prayers) and the comprehensive nature of what can be in the remit (for all men, for kings, for all in authority). In my experience, prayers for world leaders and "all men" are relatively rare, and most of our prayers are offerings of thanks rather than asking God to do things. Of course, if we ask God to do things (subject to His will, of course), then we have to think more carefully about what the need is, and about what we want Him to do. This involves more preparation.

The ability or willingness to pray for a specific circumstance or need does seem to have its cultural aspects. Perhaps it's just my particular ecclesia, but it seems to me that in the US, for instance, brethren are more willing to pray for specific practical need than in the UK, and that this is the better way because it implies a more active and Scriptural conception of God. British reserve may come into play here, but the fact is that God wants us to pray for each other. There are two sides to this, though. One is that the praying brother needs to think about what the needs might be; the other is that those who have needs must not be so shy as not to admit to having them. If there is absence with no disclosure, then it is hard for the brethren to know what to pray for.

A number of ecclesias pause for any welfare announcements to be made known by members before the main prayer is offered. In some places this works well, in others the congregation is too reserved to say anything! I was at an ecclesia once where, prior to his main prayer, the presiding brother asked people to take two minutes to write down any needs they knew of—or indeed any topics at all, requests or otherwise—that they wished the ecclesia to pray together about. The president then listed all the topics and included them in his prayer. I'm not suggesting that this is the best or the right way to do it, but it is an example of a practical way of overcoming an obstacle. If a brother is to present the congregation's needs and requests before God, he has to know and represent what those needs are. Another idea might be for members quietly to ask a brother who is going to give a prayer to include a particular matter, before the meeting begins. Or to have a box where prayer requests can be entered—and then to find some way of ensuring people actually use it! What should we pray about now? might be a good closing question for a Bible Class discussion.

It is a big ask for brethren to represent their ecclesias—and their families, for that matter—in prayer, but it is precisely what God does ask. But, while brethren must reflect seriously on their role, it is also incumbent on those they pray for to help brethren know what their needs and thoughts are so that they may be better represented. There are many ways that this might be done; the important thing is that it *is*.

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