PRAYING FOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY

By Rick Renner

To our Western minds, the right to vote may seem like a God-given right that everyone has always enjoyed. But the truth is, countless people throughout the history of mankind and multitudes around the world today don’t have the right to vote. People in the Roman Empire during New Testament times never even imagined the possibility of casting a vote to change the course of government. They couldn’t elect a new emperor or select their senators, proconsuls, and court justices. They couldn’t determine governmental policies by voting. Politicians at that time were appointed or inherited their position due to noble birth.

Today we cherish the right to vote — and we must cherish it — but the pages of New Testament are silent on this subject because the concept of voting simply didn’t exist in the Roman Empire of the First Century. That’s why you cannot find a single scripture that urges Christians to run to the polling booths to vote on Election Day. Although it’s true that Athens had introduced the world’s first semblance of a democracy centuries earlier, for most people living in New Testament times, the concept of voting didn’t exist within the realm of imagination!

But imagine how history could have been changed if those citizens had been able to go to the polling booths and vote for a change in leadership. Perhaps even Nero could have been removed! If this possibility had existed, don’t you think the apostle Paul would have urged Christians to exercise this right? I do. But that possibility did not exist; hence, the subject of voting is never brought up in New Testament Scripture.

Thanks to the battles fought by our own forefathers for the freedom to choose our leadership in a representative democracy, today we as Americans have the right to express our will by casting a vote. And although we may be tempted to complain about politicians who make decisions that are out of sync with what we believe, we need to remember that in our democratic system, the people are the ones who choose those who hold elected leadership positions. Therefore, we have to accept responsibility for those we have elected! If we don’t like the direction our leaders are taking us, we have to look to ourselves, for we are part of the voting public who put them in power.

So when we start feeling frustration about the system or about the seemingly nonstop stupid decisions that are being made at the highest levels of power; when the dishonesty in our so-called “transparent” system hits us in the gut and nearly makes us sick; when policies are implemented that are morally against everything we believe; or when we begin to fear where this all may be headed — we must remember that there were enough people who believed a certain way, who did go to the polling booths, to elect those who are now in power!

When we listen to well-articulated TV commentators in our moments of frustration, their expressions of disgust at the situation strengthens our own state of “upset.” But we have to remember that people elected those individuals! So before we moan and groan about our current President or about how poorly the Congress is
If we don’t like the way things are going — or if we are dissatisfied with our past election choices — we need to remember that our system of government will give us a new opportunity soon to “right a wrong” when it’s time to go to the voting booth again. And when the next election comes, it will be our responsibility to stand up and be counted — to do all we can to make a change that promotes righteousness and peace in our nation. If we as believers fail to use the voting privilege given to us as citizens of a free nation, it is to our shame! Yet even more importantly — especially if the nation has sunk so low morally that the majority keeps electing evil, grossly immoral leaders — it is our responsibility to obey the biblical approach in dealing with the situation.

We must obey the exhortation given by the apostle Paul to pray for our governmental leaders! Before you dismiss Paul’s instructions as too simplistic, remember that he lived at a time of grossly immoral governmental leadership and that, in the end, he was mercilessly martyred by Nero — the very “king” he asked people to pray for in First Timothy 2:1-4!

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplcations, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior….

Paul gives us SIX PRAYER COMMANDS in these verses that God expects us to obey — regardless of who is calling the shots politically.

Paul lays out guidelines for us to follow when we pray. Rather than rush to God with accusations, complaints, grumbling, protests, and whining, we are to follow the positive approach in prayer Paul provides in this passage of Scripture. He begins by saying, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, first of all, supplications….”

1) A RIGHT ATTITUDE

The word “supplications” is a translation of a Greek word that described the attitude of one who beseeched a king. Access to a throne was a great privilege, so when an individual approached such a throne, he was to come with respect and gratitude for this privilege. So as Paul begins telling us how to pray, he reminds us of the kind of attitude we ought to have when we draw near to God. Before we utter a single word in prayer, we must get it clear in our hearts that we have been afforded a great privilege to access the throne room of God. Regardless of the thoughts swirling around in our minds or the complaints we may be harboring in our souls, we need to come into God’s presence with hearts of respect and gratitude. We certainly are not to come ready to unabashedly spew ugly, disrespectful, or slanderous words at Him as though it’s His fault that things aren’t going the way we wished they were going!

Therefore, the first thing we need to do when we prepare to pray for our government is to get our attitudes right.

2) A PRAYER OF PERSONAL CONSECRATION
As Paul continues, he says, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers…”

The word “prayers” portrays a person who comes into the intimate presence of God to consecrate himself as a first matter of priority. Before he ever utters a request, a complaint — before he utters anything else at all — his first priority is to pray for himself and to get his attitude right in the presence of God.

So Paul affirms that our first responsibility as believers is to pray for ourselves and to get our own attitudes right before we start talking about others. When our own attitudes are corrected, it usually changes the way we pray concerning others. We reflect the Father’s heart instead of our own personal preference or opinions. To pray effectively and appropriately, in a way that’s wholly pleasing to God, everything must be surrendered to Him and the power of His Spirit before anything else is spoken to Him in prayer.

3) A PRAYER OF INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS

Once a believer has dealt with his own wrong attitudes and his need of consecration, Paul tells him what to do next. He says, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions…”

The word “intercession” means to appeal to God on behalf of someone else. Once a believer’s own attitude has been dealt with and he has consecrated himself to the will of God, he is now in a position to appeal to God about someone else. Perhaps the believer senses the Holy Spirit’s leading to pray for someone who is unable to pray for himself, for a novice believer who simply doesn’t know how to pray effectively, or for a government leader whose spiritual condition and unwise decisions are negatively affecting masses of people. In other words, the believer feels called to assume an intercessory position and to focus his prayers toward a specific individual or situation. When this is the case, it will be easier for the believer to pray if he has first made sure his own heart is clear of clutter. Then he can pray for others free from any wrong attitude or selfish agenda.

4) A PRAYER OF THANKFULNESS

Paul continues in his list of prayer guidelines, saying, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks…”

While in God’s presence, we are also to offer “giving of thanks…” This phrase depicts an overflowing, grateful heart.

Let’s be honest — it’s difficult to be grateful and thankful and maintain a complaining attitude at the same time! God knows this. So He tells us to allow thankfulness to flow from our hearts, knowing that it will change our entire attitude in prayer.

So before you start griping about a political leader — or anyone else — first take time to think of what there is you can be thankful about regarding that person. This will change your tone and make you more effective in prayer. And be assured — God will appreciate your change of attitude!
5) A PRAYER FOR EVERYONE

Paul continues, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men....”

The word “all” means we are not to show favoritism or to be picky about those for whom we pray. Regardless of their spiritual status or political affiliation, we are to pray for “all men” that God puts on our hearts. This is a good test, because if there is someone we think we can’t pray for, that may be an indication of an attitude problem inside us that needs to be consecrated to God. This is very important for us to understand — our inability to pray for someone actually reveals a deep need for us to be changed.

6) A PRAYER FOR GOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS

Paul continues, telling us that we must pray for “for kings.” If anyone needed prayer, it was the kings who possessed high seats of authority and power in the First Century! But Paul broadens the divine command by saying we are to pray for all who are in authority. The word “authority” is used here to depict prominent governmental officials.

Ponder that for a moment. That means we are to pray for all prominent governmental officials — even those we don’t care for at all! Paul tells us the reason for all this praying is “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior....”

Believers of New Testament times had no ability to vote, so they did what they could do and followed Paul’s SIX PRAYER COMMANDS. I’m sure if they had been given the right to vote, they would have rushed to the polling booths to cast their votes. But the only vote they could cast was in prayer — so they prayed! Since their governmental leaders were entrenched in power and there was nothing they could do to physically change it, these early believers took their role in prayer very seriously — and ultimately the power of those prayers brought about change far greater than any election day could ever produce!

Remember — our democratic system allows us to vote, and we must exercise this cherished right. But once the election is over, we have to face the fact that the men and women who have been placed in positions of power are there because of the democratic system that elected them. They represent the choice of the people who put them there. If we are unsatisfied with the outcome, our opportunity will come again a few years down the road to change the situation. Yet even so, our greatest effectiveness will be found as we enter God’s presence in the authority of Jesus’ name and fulfill the SIX PRAYER COMMANDS given by the Holy Spirit to the Church through the apostle Paul.