

1Tim 23-12-03a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 3rd of December, 2023. We're in 1 Timothy chapter two.

We will conclude the chapter this morning with this very interesting section, verses eight through 15, the role of men and women in the public assembly. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study and we'll begin. Father, what a privilege it is to assemble ourselves with believers of like mind.

We're thankful for your provision of this opportunity to be blessed in that fellowship and with the function of spiritual gifts of encouragement and faith and music and speaking the truth to one another in love. We pray that you will bless our time of fellowship as we dine on the spiritual food of your word. May it be blessed to the heart of each of those who hear it.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. This has been such an interesting chapter, opening with the call for public prayer, which means this is the role of men and women in the assembly. And Paul encourages supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks be made for all men.

And this all men is clearly from the context and from comparing scripture with scripture, all kinds of men. We obviously can't pray for every single individual, but the call here is for unity and for not saying, well, we're a Jewish church or we're a Gentile church. And so we're just going to sort of segregate off and pray for our own kind.

These things that are made in behalf of all men reminds us of some other passages that use this type of phrase. For example, Titus 2.11 says, the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Well, has every single individual received the grace of God that brings salvation? Some are too young.

Some are waiting for the appearance of an apostle or someone to bring the good news. So it has appeared potentially to all men. It has appeared to all kinds of men, but we're thinking in terms of big groups and big blocks.

Romans 5.18, as through one man's offense, judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation. Even so through one man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men. It is no longer restricted to just Jews, all kinds of men resulting in justification of life.

First Corinthians 15.22, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. And this is all who end up being in Christ. It's not coincident or coterminous with every single individual in the world.

This is where universalists go astray. So the passage in Mark 11.32 is another example. The people who are disparaging Jesus, but they love John the Baptist.

And so Jesus asks them a question. The baptism of John, was it from men or from God? And in 11.32 of Mark, they think to themselves, if we say from men, they feared the people for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. All counted John to have been a prophet.

This is all kinds of people from every stratum and every facet of Israeli or Jewish society. Luke 3.15, as the people were in expectation and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not. This is, it is ubiquitous.

It is widespread. It doesn't necessarily mean every single individual, but without regard or respect to category or kind or class, not limiting it based on Jew or Gentile, high or low, slave or free. Same thing in Mark 5.20 about the demoniac in Gerasa or Gadara.

When he is cleansed of the legion and he's clothed and in his right mind and Jesus sends him home and it says in Mark 5.20, he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him and all marveled. That's a limited class. All that heard him, all kinds of people marveled.

Mark 1.37, they looked for Jesus and he wasn't immediately available. When they did find him, they said to him, everyone is looking for you. All men are looking for you.

So we have to take the phrase all men in context and in the assembly when prayer is offered for all men, just as in John 3.26, rabbi, he who was with you talking to John beyond the Jordan to whom you have testified, behold, he is baptizing and all men are coming to him. All are coming to him. Well, that means there is such a wide variety.

It seems like everyone. So when we offer this prayer, Paul is talking about all classes, all groups, leaving no one out. So kings and those who are in authority, those who are in subjection to authorities in the Gentile world and those who have authorities in the Jewish world, pray for the rabbis, pray for the priests, pray for the ethnarchs and the different rulers in the Roman Gentile world.

All men don't discriminate and refuse to pray for some kinds of people. And if you wanna talk about being not bigoted or not prejudiced, this ought to reflect in our prayer life. And Paul has a point here when he says behalf of kings and all who are in high positions.

You have proconsuls as mentioned in Acts 19.38. You have Asiarchs in Acts 19.31. You have town clerks in Acts 19.35. There are authorities over the population and all of them are to be subject to prayer, not just praying for the Jews or just praying for leaders in the church, but all kinds of men, all classes and types. Why is this important? Well, the purpose is that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life. This is tranquility and calmness and the idea here is this is a public assembly.

This prayer is being offered and it is observed. It is overheard. It is reported to the world at large.

How much trouble can you get into from the Roman authorities or from the local town authorities if you are overheard praying for them? What does this connote? We are not subversive. We are not antagonistic. We are not trying to undermine these authorities.

We respect them as from God and in praying for them, it makes it very difficult to say you're a terrorist in our midst. You're a malefactor and a bad influence. You are causing subversive attitudes and you're speaking animus against Caesar or the Roman Empire or the governors or whoever else.

If the attitude is I will find a way to pray for them, this pretty much eliminates the potential for being accused of conflict or rebellion and that enables Christian assemblies to live a peaceable and quiet life, tranquility and calmness. Why is this important? Why have we been emphasizing this over the last several weeks? In our day, people are dividing. They are taking sides.

I suggested on Wednesday night an article and I want to read you a few short excerpts from it that sort of summarizes this idea. This is by Arta Moini. It is called Gaza, Ukraine and Our Quest for Catharsis.

The moment Hamas carried out its heinous terrorist attacks against Israel, the war in Gaza was instantly globalized, reverberating in the hearts and minds of people oceans away who were neither Israeli nor Gazan. Millions on social media picked a side, proudly displaying solidarity flags, condemning their opponents as either evil terrorists or genocidal oppressors. You've seen this.

You've experienced this. Both foreign states and populations assumed reflexive positions, railing against antisemitism or settler colonialism and identifying with the quote unquote victims in a Manichean struggle that cares little for historical context, nuance or open debate. You remember Manichaeism was a religion that cropped up in about the third century of this era, 300 years after Christ and Mani, the guy who invented it was from the area of Iran.

He was a Parsi guy and he incorporated, he tried to syncretize and synthesize Judaism and Christianity and Buddhism and a whole bunch of other things. But his main idea was that the world is composed of light and darkness, polar opposites. So when somebody says something is Manichaean, it means they see it in completely polarized terms.

You are either wonderful, righteous, holy and good, or you are evil, bad, dark and nefarious. And there's no shades of gray. There's no moderation.

There's no mixture of right and wrong. It's just, you see things in polar opposite terms. So, and ignoring history, ignoring complexity, ignoring the fact that there are points in favor of both sides and there's nuance, there's depth and so on.

It's just, they became virtual participants in the conflict as if their own lives and futures

depended on it, canceling and dehumanizing their opposition and treating them as the other, the opposite, the total bad guy. So they're either an extreme Hamas-y Islamist or they're a sympathizer with Israeli Zionists. There's no redemption.

There's no redeeming qualities on either side. The entire episode, Moini says, parallels the global reaction to the Ukraine war, which we've seen over this last year and a half or so, in which solidarity with Ukraine as a victim of foreign aggression or empathy with Russia as a victim of Western hegemonic overreach divided the world. You know, most people in this country just are in the tank for Ukraine, but in Europe and other places and in Russian communities in this country, there is sympathy for Russia.

And you say, how can they sympathize there? Well, there's your manichaeism coming in. The, you know, Putin, Russia, evil, bad, awful, terrible, no justification whatsoever, without ever bothering to investigate why are they doing this? I'm not saying it's right. I'm saying people don't bother to find out.

It's just knee-jerk automatic support. And what this does is for one, there are numerous examples of other brutal conflicts and atrocities that don't capture international public and governmental attention. And so they're ignored.

These are just flag-waving causes that come to the fore and consume and soak up everyone's attention. So judging by history, this global internalization of distant wars by outsiders is highly unusual and a rather pathological development. People didn't used to do this, to just take sides as though it's the Super Bowl and I'm for the Cowboys or I'm for the, you know, the AFL champion.

It happens when both ruling classes and civilian populations across the world begin to perceive these far off external conflicts in existential terms. This is a battle between right and wrong, between good and evil. It's definitional for me.

And they put themselves at the center of it as a messianic protagonist. My side is right. I am a proclaimer and a flag waver for what is right.

And of course, this lets people feel righteous and vindicated and they justify. And instead of righteousness coming from identification with Christ and being in him, righteousness comes from espousing and vocally supporting some far off protagonist or antagonist in a war. And it is, these flames are fanned by media and social media and the rest.

So these are conflicts of nationalism, Moini says, a contemporary ideology that links the future of peoples to states. On the other hand, the global milieu in which they take place is one of profound crisis of meaning and legitimacy. And it's made worse by the identity politics that both the left and the right have been practicing since the 1960s.

And this is so helpful in understanding the world that Paul is calling us to pray for. How do you pray for it? We have to understand it, first of all. And to understand that so many

people, especially the vocal ones and the ones you hear on TV and see in social media and so on, are caught up in this polarized view of the world that sees everything in terms of oppressor victim.

Somebody is the oppressor, someone else is the victim. So when you have critical race theory, white male evangelical Christians are the oppressor and minorities and others are the victims. They can be women, they can be people of color or whatever, but it's an oppressor victim narrative.

And that is a very shallow, Manichean view of the world that the oppressor is always wrong, the victim is always right. And being a victim and being oppressed becomes a virtue in and of itself. You're automatically a figure of sympathy and a target of charity and support and people rallying to your side because you are oppressed.

And forgetting there are some people who need to be subjugated, who need to be hemmed in and restricted because they have evil objectives, they have bad plans and purposes. We used to understand this in the days of fighting communism and socialism, where taking away people's freedom for the service of the state is inherently evil and we need to oppose that and we need to restrict and oppress people who want to foist that on the rest of us. Criminals are suppressed and oppressed by having their freedom taken away and being incarcerated.

And they need to be taken off the streets. Trigger happy, mentally unstable people need to be oppressed. We don't call it oppression, but somebody who's for prisoner rights and thinks nobody ought to be incarcerated says, well, the whole prison system is oppressive.

And these men inside are victims. They were arrested on minor charges and the penalty outweighs the crime itself and so on. And so they are viewed as victims.

And the prison system and people who support penalties for crime, people who think you ought to have to pay a high bail to get out of jail when you're arrested and so on, well, you're just oppressors. And so immediately you wrap yourself in righteousness saying I resist the oppressors and I favor the victims in whatever this scenario is. And it's a deceptive and false narrative that whether consciously or unconsciously causes people to believe themselves to be righteous, holy, and good based on issues and support or pressure against such things.

Identity politics is a politics that stresses strong collective group identities as the basis of political analysis and action. Politics are defined by what happens to a group with which I identify or sympathize. So this guy is bad if he's picking on women or LGBTQ or some other minority or some people group.

This guy is bad for Native Americans. He's bad for immigrants. He's bad for pick your

group with which you identify and the group coheres and is defined by some identity.

And it's never American citizen. It is always some subdivision that inherently causes division. We have been taught and emphasis is laid over and over again on unity, regardless of gender, male or female, regardless of ethnicity, Jew or Greek, regardless of social status, slave or free.

The unity in Christ is supposed to overlook those divisive categories. The Bible comes out squarely against identity politics and viewing the entire world as political. So these group identities are the basis of political analysis and action.

Political engagement with the society as a whole increasingly is perceived to not really make progress. This happened in the 60s and 70s, women's rights and civil rights and the rest of it. Well, the progress isn't fast enough.

It hasn't gone far enough. We don't see the kind of results we want. So progressive people started retreating into a focus on their own self and into specific cultural and ideological identity groups, which made rights, status and privilege claims on the basis of a victimized identity.

I belong to this identity and we're not being treated right. We're victims of something. And this begins to be the view of life.

And you can see how antithetical this is to the Christian worldview, to a godly biblical worldview. It's subjective. It's me and my group defined by some arbitrary identity.

And I see myself as a part of this group or sympathetic with this group and we are victims. And if you're a victim, there has to be an oppressor somewhere, oppressor evil, victim good, regardless of the actual intentions or outcomes or reasons for there being a conflict or some opposing view. So these groups included ethnic minorities, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, religious groups, lesbian women, gay men, deaf and other disabled people.

The desire to gain sympathy on the basis of a tarnished identity was sometimes taken to absurd lengths. Privileged white men pronouncing themselves victims based on their alleged oppression by women and especially by feminists. You know, reverse discrimination.

That's my problem. They've gone so far trying to help the underprivileged and the oppressed that now my rights are being curtailed. And you had legitimate examples of this where they had quotas for racial minorities at colleges and perfectly qualified, highly qualified people that were considered to be white and were excluded and people with less qualification were let in based on quotas.

And so there's been an explosion of groups vying with one another for social recognition

of their oppression and demanding that people respect it. This has been exaggerated on college campuses where young people have divided into any number of separate identity groups. And you can see this now with these protests and marches largely in favor of Palestinians, formerly in favor of the Ukrainians, where it's identity politics and it's not even your own identity based on a war in some far off place.

Now from the comfort of your armchair, you can engage in identity politics, identify an oppressor and a victim and feel righteous by your support for the victims. The politics of identity is a kind of cultural politics. It relies on the development of a culture that is able to create new and affirmative conceptions of self to articulate collective identities and to forge a sense of group loyalty.

The healthy version of this is being a believer and being body of Christ and having our identity in Him and drawing our righteousness and our standards from Him and from God's word, God's perspective, divine purpose, divine plan, divine declaration of our righteousness. And we are free. We are not oppressed.

We do not view ourselves in the body of Christ as victims and draw virtue and a sense of entitlement from victimhood. We have been freed from our problem. We were victims of sin.

We were slaves to sin, but in Christ, we have been made free. And now we have a positive outlook. We have an identity in Christ, but that identity is not designed to be exclusive.

And this is the point of Paul's exhortation about prayer. It should never be an us and them. We've got the mystery truths.

We've got the secret doctrines. We're a clique and we've got a special handshake that we identify each other as being an ice church or we're doctrinal types or we are this and that. And it's an exclusive group.

Paul's reminder here is we pray for all kinds of people everywhere, even those that others would exclude. We're gonna pray for the Romans. We're gonna pray for the Caesar.

We're gonna pray for the Pharisees. We're gonna pray for these hypocritical priests and other religious leaders. We're gonna pray for the city mayor and the regional governor.

We're gonna pray for everyone because we are not here to try to draw righteousness and engage in identity politics or try to be divisive. We are here to be cohesive. We are here to be inclusive, not in the sense that we lose all standard and what fellowship has light with darkness.

And we're, everybody come in, it's a big tent. I don't care what your lifestyle is. It's not

that.

Our goal is we quietly discern. We quietly make choices that ensure that we do not compromise God's standards of righteousness, that we don't sponsor it, that we don't encourage it, that we don't participate in it, that we are not corrupted by it, defiled by it. Remember hating the garment spotted by the flesh? It doesn't keep us from trying to pull someone out of the fire.

The someone we care about, but the garment spotted by the flesh, we've got to avoid that corruption. We've got to find a way to pray for the individual and encourage the individual without cooperating in that spotted garment. We hate the garment spotted by the flesh, but some we endeavor to pull out of the fire.

So we pray. And the goal is that we do not end up dividing and condemning and doing what the world is doing with identity politics and with this global sense of entitled righteousness because I'm for the victims. I'm going to wave a Palestinian flag.

I'm going to vote that we send more money to Ukraine. And that makes me good. I don't really know details about what's going on in Palestine.

I don't really know anything about the historic and well-documented corruption in Ukraine. I don't care about the fact that over 80% of the support sent to Ukraine disappeared down a rat hole and nobody knows where it is. It's been untracked, undocumented.

But when you look at what's available and what's actually being shot at the enemy, where did all of the hundreds of millions of dollars go? It's missing in action. It's all gone to the black market. And now these things that were ostensibly sent to Ukraine are showing up on the black market in the Middle East and elsewhere around the world.

It's just been co-opted and there was no oversight. There was no plan. There was no accountability whatsoever.

But hey, I'm all for Ukraine and just send more money. It's like any other problem. War on poverty, war on drugs, just spend more money.

I don't care how you spend it or where the money actually goes. That's immaterial. I am righteous and I feel good about myself because I support the victims.

It's a deceit, it's a lie and believers shouldn't fall for it. And Paul encourages us here to pray for everyone, to hope for and ask God to encourage the wellbeing of all kinds of people so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in godliness and reverence. The idea is don't get sidetracked and don't get dragged down into the squabbles and the conflicts and the debates and the arguments and the animosity and the bitterness and the hatred and vindictiveness that comes up from political strife.

Taking a side and alienating and polarizing people over politics and world events and losing the opportunity to shine the light of Christ. What is it that reflects God's glory? It is a quiet and peaceable life. Blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus says.

How do you make peace? It's not by going and sticking your nose in somebody's argument. It is by being peaceable, living a quiet and peaceable life, reflecting godliness and reverence. So we have to be careful about taking sides and downvoting people with whom we disagree and upvoting people that we think have it right and trying to draw virtue from, well, my position about this candidate or this party or this issue or this conflict.

I'm right and you all are wrong. And the more I talk about how right I am, the more righteous I feel. That is not our source of justification or vindication or righteousness.

And to the extent that we fall for that lie, we have been co-opted, we've been deflected, we've been taken out of the spiritual battle. So Paul says, here's a good litmus test for where you are in living this quiet and peaceable life. And notice this is public prayer.

These men are to lift up their holy hands as we see further down in verse eight. Lifting up holy hands, this is a public posture of prayer. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior.

Notice opposing the Romans and supporting the zealots or supporting the subversives or those who want Jewish identity and Jewish hegemony and Jewish independence. Nowhere in the New Testament do you find the apostles or the Lord Jesus himself taking sides in the political squabbles of the day. The only thing that they come out in opposition to is perversion of God's truth.

Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites. You are the blind leading the blind and everyone's gonna fall into the ditch. You are deflecting people from God's truth.

So I don't have to debate and march and try to stamp out some pet project of mine, whether it's abortion clinics or over-prescription of painkillers leading to abuse or the border crisis and all of these things are coming in. I can certainly have an opinion and I can certainly pray that God will work and that God will influence the authorities, not so that this problem can be solved to my satisfaction. And hey, I was on the right side of this, but so that the testimony of believers will draw people to Christ and through Christ to God, the Father.

When we view politics and world events and debates and the trending social media topics and so on in this light, how can I act? How can I speak in such a way as to defuse these rancid, acrid, contentious exchanges of words and instead represent and bring forward the virtues of life in Christ? Love, joy, peace, long suffering. If I find myself in a discussion that starts turning heated and those things begin to diminish, I have lost 1

Timothy 2. Prayer is emblematic and representative of our interaction as church and as believers with society and with state. And we are not to be divisive.

We are not to participate in corrosive and acrimonious debate and argument and make ourselves and our point of view odious to others. We can certainly embrace it. We can defend it, but we do so in a spirit of love because our goal is peaceableness, quietness, or calmness.

And so what is the goal of this prayer? Living calmly. You look at this same word that's used in 1 Thessalonians 4.11. You should aspire, this is 1 Thessalonians 4.11, aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands as we commanded you. Our goal, our priority, our purpose should be, we should aspire to lead a quiet life.

It's the very same word as quiet in our passage. Mind your own business. Work with your own hands.

Be as self-supporting as you possibly can, as we commanded you. What is the goal here? Well, back in verse 15 of chapter one, it's a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. Remember the five worthy sayings that we saw from Paul? He says this five different times in his letters.

Faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That's our focus.

That's where deliverance, that is where progress, that is where peaceableness and quietness, godliness and reverence are sourced. We can be delivered out of sin, out of conflict, out of wasting our lives and our time on deceptive issues that offer a false righteousness that isn't real. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Chapter four, verse 16 in this book, we're gonna see the same thing. Paul is gonna tell Timothy, take heed to yourself and to the teaching, to the doctrine, to the content of faith, continue in them for in doing this, doing what? Taking heed to yourself, examining yourself to see if you're in the faith, take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, continue in them. In doing this, you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

If you want to genuinely benefit those who are party to our conversations and to our points of view, take heed to yourself, be sure that we've got the beam out of our own eye before we start talking about moats elsewhere and to the teachings and the principles and promises and doctrines of the word of God. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, continue in them. In doing this, you will save yourself and those who hear you.

Needs to be about godliness. 1 Corinthians 9.22, Paul says to the weak, I became as weak that I might win the weak as I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some. It is about salvation.

That's the goal. What is happening on the global stage, what's happening in a conflict here or there or elsewhere, what's happening in terms of legislation and policies and border this and abortion that and issue this and get that guy out of Congress that and vote for this candidate, vote for that party. They espouse this, they oppose that.

We get deflected and distracted. We are the only people on the earth with the opportunity to reflect God's glory. It's believers who understand the word of God who are here to shine as lights.

And to the extent that we get down in the dirt and grub around in political debate and dispute and taking sides and touting the virtues of one and condemning the crimes of the other, we, any unbeliever can do that. We are here to do what only we can do in the power of God's spirit and in the light of God's word. And that is be a beacon of hope and salvation.

The issue is Jesus Christ came to save sinners starting with us. Paul says, I'm the chief. And we ought to look at it as I am a beneficiary of God's grace.

I was lost in sin till Jesus took me in. That's a gospel song. First Corinthians 10 31.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Ask yourself the question after you have a discussion about events or situations near or far, global or local or personal, when you come away from that, did the glory of God get reflected anywhere? Was it mentioned? The peace that passes understanding, the peace that Jesus leaves with us and gives to us not as the world gives, the fruit of the spirit, was it in evidence? Or did it just leave a bad taste in everyone's mouth? A post that you make. I love the posts that I see from some in our church where I'm not saying everybody ought to post, I certainly don't.

But when I see them, it's a verse of scripture with a beautiful photo and it draws you back to being in Christ, dwelling in the secret place of the Most High and the shadow of the Almighty, not worrying about the terrible tribulations, the snare of the fowler and the deliverance and the safety and the peace and the confidence we have in God through Christ. That ought to be the lasting resonating effect of contact with us. Someone ought to come away saying, I've just had a glimpse of the glory of God.

I have been reminded of the grace of God, the goodness of God, the provision of God, the future we have in Christ, the present comfort, future glory. Purpose of Paul's prayer is that we do not create unnecessary conflict, unnecessary disturbance. Well, that is a full-time job for us.

We're so easily tripped up by our own nature, our desire for vindication, our desire to win an argument or prove somebody wrong. It's a human failing, it's human instinct. But to quote the phrase, we should be better than that.

We should let the word of God and the spirit of God dwell in us richly so that our responses and our points of view that are expressed here notably through public prayer. This is the first contact that the outside world has with these new groups of believers, these new churches springing up. They say, well, what are these people about? Well, they hear their prayers and they hear these people are not subversionists.

They're not rebellious. They're not trying to undermine Rome or take back the country for God or whatever. They're praying for the government.

They're praying for peace and stability and that everyone is blessed with a calm and quiet life. And their godliness and reverence are an example. And a suppressing influence on these awful, conflicting, argumentative, just so spiteful sometimes, painting the other side as the worst possible evil and one's own side as the glorious shining good.

It's not helpful because it doesn't bring people to Christ. That's Paul's point. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're gonna start at verse eight and we're going to see the role of men and women in this public assembly and why Paul says what he says about braided hair and silence in the church for women.