

Prayer for Rulers.

by Edward Payson

We should pray for those in authority because they need our prayers, are exposed to temptation and danger, and their responsibility is greater than that of other men.

Scripture: Psalm 72:1, Proverbs 11:14, Proverbs 16:12, Proverbs 21:1, Ecclesiastes 8:2, Romans 13:1, Colossians 4:2, 1 Timothy 2:1, James 1:5, 1 Peter 2:17

Topics: "Prayer For Leaders", "Christian Citizenship"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the importance of praying for those in authority, emphasizing the need to intercede for rulers and leaders as they face unique challenges and temptations in fulfilling their duties. He highlights the responsibility and accountability that come with positions of authority, stressing the impact of their actions on the nation and the importance of seeking wisdom and grace through prayer. Payson urges the congregation to pray fervently for leaders to govern with integrity, justice, and God's guidance, recognizing the significant role rulers play in shaping the moral and spiritual fabric of society.

Transcript

"I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty."

1 Timothy 2:1, 2.

appears from the preceding chapter, that Timothy had been left, by St. Paul, at Ephesus; to watch over the church in that city, and to guard against the introduction of error, by false teachers. In this chapter, the apostle gives him particular directions respecting some of the social and relative duties which were to be enjoined upon all, who professed to be the disciples of Christ. Among these duties, he mentions first in place, as first in importance, that of intercession; or praying for others.

I exhort, says he, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority. It is evident that persons in authority are included in the direction to pray for all men. It appears, however, that the apostle did not think it sufficient, to inculcate the duty of praying for them, in this general way only. He felt that it was necessary to make a particular mention of this duty, in a clause by itself.

He does, in effect say, While I exhort you to pray for all men, I urge you, especially to pray for those who possess the supreme power, and for all that are in authority. He thus evidently intimates, that, in addition to the general reasons, which should induce us to pray for all men, there are particular reasons why we should pray for those who rule. I propose, in the present discourse, to state the reasons why we should pray, with peculiar frequency and importunity, for all who are invested with authority.

I. We ought to pray for those who are in authority, more frequently and earnestly than for other men, because they, more than other men, need our prayers. In other words, they need a more than ordinary share of that wisdom and grace which God alone can bestow; and which he seldom or never bestows, except in answer to prayer. This is evident in the first place, from the fact, that they have a more than ordinary share of duties to perform. All the duties which God requires of other men, considered as sinful, immortal, and accountable creatures, he requires of rulers.

It is incumbent on them, as it is on other men, to possess personal religion; to exercise repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; to love and fear, and serve their Creator; and to prepare for death and judgment; for Jehovah's language to them is, Though ye be as gods, ye shall die like men; and have your portion like one of the people. In addition to the various personal duties, of a moral and religious nature, which are required of them, as men, they have many official duties, which are peculiar to themselves; duties which it is, by no means, easy to perform in a manner acceptable to God, and approved of men.

They are appointed, and they are required to be ministers of God for good to those over whom they are placed. They are, in a certain sense, his representatives, and vicegerents on earth; for by him they are appointed, and to him they are accountable for the manner in which they discharge their duties. By me, says he, kings reign and princes decree justice; by me princes rule, and nobles, yea, all the judges of the earth. Promotion cometh not from the north, or from the south; but it is God that setteth up one, and putteth down another.

There is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. Since then, legislators, rulers and magistrates are the ministers and vicegerents of God for good, they are sacredly bound to imitate him, whom they represent; to be such on earth, as he is in heaven; to take care of his rights, and see that they are not trampled upon with impunity; to be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise and encouragement to such as do well. They are also bound, by obligations, which ought ever to be regarded as sacred, and inviolable, to seek the welfare of those over whom they are placed, to prefer it, on all occasions, to their own private interests; to live for others, rather than for themselves; and to consider themselves, their time, and their faculties, as the property of the State.

As the influence of their example must be great, it is their indispensable duty to take care that this influence be ever exerted in favor of truth and goodness; and to remember that they are like a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid. Now, consider a moment, my hearers, how exceedingly difficult it must be for a weak, short-sighted, imperfect creature like man, to perform these various duties in a proper manner, and how large a share of prudence, and wisdom, and firmness, and goodness, is necessary to enable him to do it.

Surely, then, they who are called to perform such duties, in a peculiar manner need our prayers. 2. Those who are invested with authority, need, more than other men, our prayers; because they are exposed, more than other men, to temptation and danger. While they have a more than ordinary share of duties to

perform, they are urged by temptations, more than ordinarily numerous and powerful, to neglect their duty. They have, for instance, peculiarly strong temptations to neglect those personal, private duties which God requires of them as men, as immortal and accountable creatures; and a performance of which is indispensably necessary to their salvation.

They are exposed to the innumerable temptations and dangers which ever attend prosperity. The world presents itself to them in its most fascinating, alluring form; they are honored, followed, and flattered; they enjoy peculiar means and opportunities for gratifying their passions; they seldom hear the voice of admonition or reproof; and they are usually surrounded by persons who would consider every expression of religious feeling as an indication of weakness. How powerfully, then, must they be tempted to irreligion, to pride, to ambition, to every form of what the Scriptures call worldly-mindedness?

How difficult must it be for them to acquire and maintain an habitual, operative recollection of their sinfulness, their frailty, their accountability to God, their dependence on his grace, and their need of a Saviour. How difficult, in the midst of such scenes and associates, as usually surround them; to keep death in view; to be in a constant state of preparation for its approach; to practice the duties of watchfulness, self-denial, meditation and prayer; and to preserve, in lively exercise, those feelings and dispositions which God requires, and which become a candidate for eternity.

How strongly, too, must they be tempted to make the performance of their official duties, an excuse for neglecting those personal duties, which God requires of all men, in whatever station or circumstance they may be placed. I will only add, with reference to this part of our subject, that the Scriptures intimate with sufficient clearness that those temptations are, in most instances, but too fatally successful. They inform us, that not many mighty men, not many noble, are saved.

Our Saviour farther declares, that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God; and it would be easy to shew that the causes which render it difficult for a rich man, operate with equal force to make it difficult for men clothed with authority, to enter this kingdom. We may remark farther, that they have many powerful temptations to neglect, not only their personal, but their official duties. They are tempted to indolence and self-indulgence; tempted to prefer their own private interest, to the public good; tempted to pay an undue regard to the selfish wishes and entreaties of their real, or pretended friends; tempted to adopt such measures as will be most popular, rather than those which will be most beneficial to the community; tempted to forget the honor and the rights of Jehovah, and suffer them to be trampled on with impunity.

It can scarcely be necessary to add, that persons who are exposed to temptations so numerous and powerful, peculiarly need our prayers. 3. This will appear still more evident if we consider, in the third place, that, should those who are clothed with authority, yield to these temptations, and neglect either their personal or official duties, the consequences will, to them, be peculiarly dreadful. Their responsibility is greater than that of other men. They have greater opportunities of doing both good and evil, than other men.

If they do good, they will do much good. If the influence of their example, and their exertions, be thrown on the side of truth and goodness; no one can compute how great, or how lasting, may be the salutary effects which they will produce. On the contrary; if they do evil, they will do much evil. They will, like Jeroboam, make their people to sin. We are informed, by an inspired writer, that one sinner destroyeth much good. This remark is true of every sinner; but it is most emphatically true, of sinners who are placed in authority.

One such sinner may destroy more good, and prove the cause of more evil, than a whole generation of sinners who are placed in a lower sphere. And even if they do not actually do evil, they may occasion great evil, and incur great guilt, by neglecting to do good. Says the voice of inspiration, To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. In another place, we are taught that men partake in the guilt of all those sins which they might have prevented. Legislators, rulers, and magistrates, then, are answerable to God for all the possible good which they neglect to do; and they share in the guilt of all the sins which they might, but do not, prevent.

So far as those who are invested with authority, neglect to prevent, to the utmost of their power, open impiety, irreligion, disregard of the Sabbath, and of divine institutions, profanation of God's name, intemperance, and other similar evils; they share in the sinfulness and guilt of every Sabbath-breaker, profane swearer, and drunkard, among those over whom they are placed. How great, then, is the responsibility of all who are invested either with legislative, judicial or executive authority!

How aggravated will be their guilt, how terrible their punishment, should they prove unfaithful to their country and their God! Surely then, they, above all other men, need our prayers; since they have peculiarly difficult duties to perform, are under peculiar temptations to neglect those duties; and, if they neglect them, will receive a punishment peculiarly severe. And remember, my hearers, that we assist to place them in this difficult and dangerous situation. Are we not then sacredly bound to afford them all the assistance in our power, to obtain for them all that wisdom and grace from heaven, which it is in the power of fervent and persevering prayer, to draw down?

Shall we place them, as watchmen, upon a steep and slippery precipice, where it is exceedingly difficult to stand, and infinitely dangerous to fall; and neglect the only means which can render their standing secure? God forbid. It is unreasonable, it is ungenerous, it is cruel and unjust, --cruel and unjust, not only to them, but to ourselves, and to the community. This leads me to observe, 4. We ought to pray with peculiar earnestness for all who are in authority, because our own interest, and the great interests of the community require it.

This motive, the apostle urges in our text. Pray, says he, for all in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty. These expressions plainly intimate, that, if we wish to enjoy peace and quiet; if we wish godliness and honesty, or, in other words, religion and morality, to prevail among us, we must pray for our rulers. That we depend on them, under God, for the enjoyment of these blessings, is too obvious to require proof. How much, for instance, do the morals, the peace and prosperity of a State, depend upon the enactment of wise and equitable laws.

And how much integrity, wisdom, and prudence, how much knowledge of human nature, of political principles, and of the science of legislation, is necessary to enable men to frame such laws. And from whom shall legislators obtain these qualities, if not from the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift; to whom it is owing that there is a spirit in man, and whose inspiration gives us understanding. Again; if the morals, peace and prosperity of a State depend much on the formation of good laws, no less do they depend on the proper execution of those laws.

Indeed, the best laws, unless strictly and impartially executed, are perhaps worse than none; since they only serve to show the vicious and abandoned that legal restraints may be disregarded with impunity. But it evidently depends much on rulers and magistrates whether the laws shall be executed with strictness and impartiality; and perhaps it requires more firmness, integrity, and wisdom to execute them in this

manner, than it does to enact them. Permit me to add, that it is exceedingly important that those by whom the laws are enacted and executed, should themselves exemplify obedience to the laws; for if they disregard their own enactments, it can scarcely be expected that others should obey them.

Farther; the peace and prosperity of a nation, evidently depend much upon the measures which its rulers adopt, in their intercourse with other nations. A mistake or error in this respect, apparently trifling, may not only involve a nation in great embarrassment, but can plunge it into all the evils of war, and it is too much to expect of fallible, short-sighted creatures, that they should never fall into error, unless they are guided by him who sees the end from the beginning, and who can never err.

Once more; the peace and prosperity of a nation depends entirely on its securing the favor of God. This, I presume, no one will deny. But his favor cannot be secured by any nation, unless its rulers are just men, ruling in his fear. We have already observed, that rulers share in the guilt of those national sins which they might, but do not, prevent. We may add, that nations share in the guilt contracted by their rulers, and in the punishment of their sins. Of this remark, many striking verifications are recorded in the Scriptures.

Indeed; if those who are placed in authority, become impious, irreligious, or immoral, they will soon, by the force of their influence and example, impart much of their own character to the people over whom they preside; and thus render them fit objects of the divine displeasure. Permit me to add, that we cannot rationally expect to be favored with wise and good rulers; we cannot expect that God will bestow on them those intellectual and moral endowments which are necessary to render them ministers for good, unless we fervently ask of him these blessings; for favors which we neglect to ask, he may refuse to bestow.

Nay more, he will probably punish our negligence and impiety, by turning our national counsels into foolishness. We are informed, that when he pleases, he can take the wise in their own craftiness, and carry headlong the counsel of the froward; that he leadeth counselors away spoiled, and maketh judges to become fools; that he removeth the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged; that he taketh away the heart of the chief of the people, so that they grope, as in the dark; and that he can, on the other hand, counsel our counselors, and teach our senators wisdom.

If, then, we wish to enjoy the protection of wise and equitable laws; if we wish our rulers to be endowed with wisdom, prudence and integrity; if we wish to see our country prosperous and happy; to see learning and liberty, morality and religion flourish; let us never forget to pray with earnestness and perseverance, for all who are invested with authority. There are some things, in our present situation, which render this exhortation peculiarly seasonable. In the first place, is there not reason to believe, that the duty here enjoined, is a duty which we, and our countrymen generally, have too much neglected?

Have we not all been much more ready to complain of our rulers, than to pray for them? Some have complained of our national government, and some of our State government; but where is the man who has prayed for either, as he ought? Have we not reason to believe that, if one half the breath which has been spent in complaining of our rulers, had been employed in praying for them, we should have been much more prosperous and happy, as a nation, than we now are? If any feel convinced that we have erred in this respect, let me remind them that now is the time to correct our error.

We are now commencing a new mode of political existence. Now, then, is the time to correct past errors, and to establish right principles. In the second place, it is now peculiarly important and necessary that we should pray for our legislators and rulers, because the duties which they are now called to perform, are peculiarly arduous; and because much, very much depends upon the manner in which these duties shall

be performed. Not only our own temporal interests, but the future prosperity of the State, the welfare of our children, and of our children's children, will be seriously affected by the official conduct of our present, chief magistrate, counselors, and legislators.

To them is committed the difficult and responsible work of shaping the commencement of our course; and such as is its commencement, will probably be its progress and its termination. Surely, then, every one who has a tongue to pray, ought to employ it in earnestly supplicating the Father of lights, to impart to our present rulers, a double portion of his own Spirit; and to give them, as he did Solomon, a wise and understanding heart, that they may know how to rule and guide this people.

Let every one who calls himself a disciple of Christ, remember that one of his Master's commands is, pray, supplicate, intercede for all who are in authority. View them, my friends, in the light of this subject, and methinks you cannot deny them your prayers. See them placed in an awfully responsible station, where they have numerous and difficult duties to perform, where they are exposed to peculiarly powerful temptations, where they are in imminent danger of losing everlasting life, and incurring aggravated guilt and condemnation.

Remember that they are men, and of course, weak, fallible, and mortal. Look forward to the other world, and see them there reduced to a level with other men, and standing before the tribunal of God, where nothing remains of all the honor and influence which they once possessed, except the consequences of the manner in which they employed it. View them in this light, and you cannot but feel for them, and pray for them, that they may obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful, and receive a crown of righteousness in the great day.

To conclude; how desirable is it both to rulers and people, that such a disposition should exist; that the religion which enjoins and produces it, should universally prevail among us. What an encouragement would it be to rulers, to unite their own morning supplications with those of the people over whom they were placed, and with what confidence might they engage in the duties assigned them, believing that he whom they and their subjects had addressed, would direct all their paths.

Then religion, and morality and peace and harmony would prevail. Rulers would love their subjects, and seek their good; and subjects would love the rulers, in whose behalf they were daily addressing the throne of grace; while the God whom they both worshipped, would command the blessing upon them, out of Zion; and the world would see how good and pleasant it is for rulers and subjects to dwell together in unity. It is, however, necessary to remark, that all these blessings can scarcely be expected from the prayers of the people alone.

They must be attended with the prayers of their rulers. All the considerations which have been urged, as reasons why we should pray for those who are in authority, may be urged with still greater force, as reasons why they should pray for themselves. In this way alone, can they obtain that wisdom and grace which are indispensably necessary to render them faithful in this world, and happy in the world to come. Never, perhaps, since the foundation of the world, has a state been so prosperous, so happy, as was the Jewish nation, while under the government of one who began his reign by saying, Lord, thou hast set thy servant over this great people, and thy servant is as a little child, and knows not how to go out, or come in before them.

Give thy servant, therefore, a wise and understanding heart, that I may know how to rule this thy people. God grant that this may be the sincere prayer of all our rulers, and that all the people may say, Amen!

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