

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**March 6, 2011**

**House of Prayer, Pillar of Truth**

**1 Timothy 2:1-6 & 3:14-16**

**Key verse: “There is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).**

“A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner. This is a happy discovery for the Christian who begins to pray for others.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *Life Together*)

At the center of the life of any vital church is the ministry of prayer. Paul writes to Timothy, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone” (2:1). “Everyone” certainly includes praying for one another, but “everyone” also calls us to pray for people, places, and concerns beyond the walls of the church.

Paul focuses his instructions for prayer more specifically on “kings and all who are in high positions” (2:2). At the time that 1 Timothy was written, persecution of Christians was a real and growing threat. There was a practical urgency to praying for those in authority.

As I write this commentary, the Middle East is in turmoil, with uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Bahrain. Here in the U.S., we face grave challenges including how to deal with our country’s growing debt problem. Christians here do not face an obvious threat of religious persecution, but we should never take for granted the need for us to intercede for leaders in our country, world, and in the church.

At the center of our praying, Paul suggests, is the mission that Christ has entrusted to the Church, bringing our world to Christ and Christ to our world. The Church is to pray and work for this mission on behalf of our God “who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2:4). Paul summarizes “the truth” about Christ in verses 5 and 6: “For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time.”

If 1 Timothy 2:1-6 challenges every church to be a house of prayer, 1 Timothy 3:14-16 calls every church to stand as a “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (3:15). A “pillar” is what holds up the roof, structurally. A “bulwark” is a wall built to defend against attacks. Paul teaches that the Church must always uphold and defend the truth of God.

To uphold and defend “the truth” is not to demand that everyone be in lockstep on every point of doctrine or Biblical interpretation. Paul refers here to that essential core of truth that is at the heart of our faith, the core of truth that he summarizes in 2:5-6 and here in 3:16: “Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.”

Why is it important that the Church stand as a “pillar and bulwark of the truth”? The answer is that knowing and receiving the truth as revealed in Jesus can set people free and fit them for heaven. Without the truth about Jesus and His salvation, people are lost and cannot find the way back to God.

In a video based on his book, *3:16 Stories of Hope*, Max Lucado illustrates the fallacy of the view that all paths lead to God:

“All roads lead to heaven. Well, the sentence makes good talk-show fodder, but does it make sense? Can all approaches to God be correct? How can all religions lead to God when they are so different? We don’t tolerate such logic in other matters. We don’t pretend that all roads lead to London or all ships sail to Australia; all flights don’t lead to Rome. Imagine your response to a travel agent who proclaims they do. You tell him you need a flight to Rome, Italy. So he looks on his screen, and he offers, ‘Well there’s a flight to Sidney, Australia, at 6:00 a.m.’

“‘Does it go to Rome?’ you ask.

“‘No, but it offers great food and movies.’

“‘But I need to go to Rome,’ you say.

“He says, ‘Well, let me suggest Southwest Airlines.’

“‘Southwest Airlines flies to Rome?’

“‘No, but they win awards for on-time arrivals.’

“You’re getting frustrated, so you reiterate: ‘I need one airline, to carry me to one place—Rome.’

“The agent appears offended: ‘Sir, all flights go to Rome.’

“Well, you know better. Different flights have different destinations. That’s not a thickheaded conclusion, but an honest one. Every flight does not go to Rome. And every path does not lead to God.”

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