

Series	Gamma 17 – Study 3
Reference	1-Timothy 2:1-7
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Welcome back brothers and sisters in Christ to Gamma 17. We are going to be continuing our journey down the pastoral epistles where Paul is basically sharing with Timothy difficulties with his Church. Now we've looked at being a steward of the gospel, who basically Paul is. We have looked at countering the enemies of the gospel where there was a nature of the heresy was speculations about the law and you know, an Old Testament law and then how Paul has actually countered that with grace in his own testimony.

Today, we're going to be looking at the conduct of the gospel, especially in the worship service. So we were talking about on how we pray and next week, the conduct of basically women. This is the most controversial piece of scripture in the whole pastoral epistles, will pay special attention to that, but this week we are looking at corporate prayer. Now let's look at 1-Timothy chapter two, verse one.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people

The word there is **then**. When you say then 'oun' in Greek, it actually refers backwards to something that has happened. All right. So what does he mean, **first of all, then I urge prayer**. Well, if you look backwards, he is talking about with Timothy waging a good warfare, holding faith and good conscience, otherwise he will wind up like Hymenaeus and Alexander who had been ex-communicated. So how do you actually hold faith and good works or good conscience? How do you do that?

Actions that go against the conscience is a bad conscience. So basically, good works. Sin traps us within ourselves. When we have sin, we are looking at our own needs, our own desires, our own pain, our own struggle, the people hurt us or pet doctrines, and what Paul's solution to keeping good conscience and faith is actually to break up by praying for the larger picture, praying for all men. Right. That's how you keep faith and good conscience, by praying for all men, which is actually counterintuitive, isn't it?

I thought the more trouble I have, I better start praying for myself and my family, but I won't look further afield.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people

And you've got four descriptions of prayer, which is how intensively he is looking at prayer. Supplications actually is you coming before God with a deep spiritual need and understanding of our own insufficiency and spiritual poverty.

Blessed are those who are poor in spirit.

You come before God and say, "look, I can't do this." The pray, that kind of emotion that comes from it inadequacy. Prayers, all sorts of requests are devoted to God. Intercessions are just like Christ praying for the believers. It is childlike confidence. We come before God asking for certain things for other people and lastly thanksgiving, because we already believed that God has heard our prayers and we are

already thankful. Thankfulness is an expression of our faith that the prayers are already been heard.

Why pray for all men?

There was a story told of a church somewhere in England, told by John Stott in his commentary Bible Speaks Today series, where there was a small church where in a village where the pastor had gone off on holidays. So therefore they got together and their corporate prayer consisted of praying for the pastor that he have a good time in his holiday and stay safe and for the two ladies in the church, they were actually sick and their corporate prayer ended. You know, village church seems to be praying to a village God, very small. The idea of God is circumscribed by their geography. That is an insult to God. That is not how God wants us to pray.

You know, why they do that? Because we like to see the proximate effect of our prayer. We look across the whole expanse of rubbish over the ocean, and we don't even bother to pray. You know why? Because, you know, whatever we pray won't happen. It looks as if our prayers are like one drop in the ocean and the magnitude from is too great and we don't want to pray. So why pray for all men? It is wasting our time they think. But Blaise Pascal, who is a philosopher, mathematician came to know Christ actually said,

“God instituted prayer in order to lend his creatures the dignity of causality.”

I mean, think about that. He instituted prayer to give us, his children, the dignity of being the causative agents of change in this world. Imagine little old us, some of us are not educated, some of us are old, some of us are sick, we are not very clever. What Blaise Pascal is saying that God has deemed that every single Christian, He has given you the dignity of being able to effect change. Sometime you think, unless I am a politician, unless I am voted a prime minister, unless I have billion dollars like Bill Gates then change can happen. Paul is saying change can happen through our ministry, and this is a challenge to us in corporate prayer. Our minds must be wide and big as our God, we don't worship a village God.

Think for example this beautiful pizza. How do you think the pizza got onto your plate? You need farmers to grow the wheat. You need vegetable farmers to grow the vegetables. You need salami, you need pig farmers, et cetera. So many people have put their hands in order to produce this pizza. You think God can produce pizza by snapping his finger. He can, but he chooses not to. Look at this tumor on a kidney on the left hand side. You think God can heal you by snapping his finger and the tumor, yes he can but he gives his creatures the dignity of causality so we get a chance to operate on the kidney and get to be a chance, basically a conveyor of his healing. That's how God has chosen to work.

I love this beautiful bridge in Vietnam. Although people are walking on bridge, there are huge hands switch basically represent behind all this work, which people have put are the actual hands of God holding up the world. CS Lewis has an essay, which he writes about the efficacy of God, the effectiveness of God.

“They have not advised or changed God's mind—that is, His over-all purpose. But that purpose will be realized in different ways according to the actions, including the prayers, of His creatures.”

So, which means what CS Lewis is saying that, God's primary purpose to reconcile the world, to send his son to us, to come back again and in Revelation the beast coming out and the false prophet. His primary purpose is on all that salvation remained the same. His secondary plans, how he achieves that, is up to our prayer. See prayer is a request. The essence of a request is distinct from compulsion. It is

that it may or may not be granted and if an infinitely wise being listens to the request of finite foolish creatures, of course it will sometimes grant and sometimes refuse them, isn't it. In variable success in prayer will not prove Christian doctrine at all. It will prove something much more like magic, a power in certain human beings to control or compel the course of nature. So there is a difference between magician and someone who prays. In a magician every time he puts his hand in, he is going to pull out a rabbit, it is within the control of that magician. CS Lewis is saying, prayer is not like that. Prayer is us infinitely stupid people coming before God, with infinite most powerful God and asking him some things.

So if that's the case, then obviously some requests will be honored and answered according to what we expect, and others will not be answered according to how we expect. So therefore, the attitude to prayer must be different. Look at George Mueller. He was probably to this day, the most successful person in the world who actually singlehandedly started orphanages at that time. In 1935, he set up orphanages, actually in the end of his lifetime, he actually ministered to 10,000 British children and everybody just gave him money. He just had to get on his knees, he never went on donation drives, every time he needed money he just got on his knees. And this is what he wrote when he started his orphanages,

"The home will only be established, if God provides the means and suitable staff to run it...I don't look to Bristol, nor even to England, but the living God, whose is the gold and the silver."

You see, a lot of people think if I pray in faith means I'm going to see with a word of faith, with a word of knowledge, this will happen. No, George Mueller, man full of faith says, the home will be established if God provides the means and a suitable staff to run it. He is always looking to God. That's what faith is, that's what prayer is. It is a request.

Look at how God works. This is picture of Esther. In the book of Esther the Jews were being threatened by this bad guy called Haman who was going to launch a genocide on a particular day. And then, her uncle Mordecai came to Esther to tell, Esther please you've got to do something. And Esther said, I can't just simply go to the King. If I order the King without an appointment and being called by him, I will be killed. And Mordecai said to her, look, you know, you're the only one who can and you know what she said to him,

Esther 4:15-16 (ESV) Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16 "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do

And their fast is accompanied by prayer. So implicitly it implies, they prayed. They didn't know what was going to happen and they pray, and you know what, in the middle of the night the King could not sleep. Imagine God gives insomnia. This is how God works. God has a primary purpose. He wants to save the Jews. How does he work? Secondary purpose, insomnia for the King.

Esther 6:1 (ESV) On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.

He suddenly read all about Mordecai and Mordecai actually saved the King from assassination. He had not been rewarded yet and so therefore it turned out that he went and called up Mordecai and rewarded him and Haman was the one who was supposed to give him the honor, and you will find right after that Haman builds the gallows, on which he thinks he is going to hang Mordecai. But if you actually read the book of Esther in the end Haman is actually killed on the very gallows he actually wanted to hang Mordecai on.

See God even allows the frailties of human beings, the evil desire of Haman to build the very gallows on which he will be hung on. See the secondary purposes are changed by prayer and fasting, but the primary ones are not. If you look at what's happening in Myanmar today, we are so saddened as hundreds of people are being killed and the military dictatorship is taking over. What do we as Malaysians do so far away? We have to pray for all men. We have to pray because God works chooses to work through our prayers.

Let me give you an example. There are two tumultuous historical events that happen in the 1980s. One was a Philippines people's power. In 1986 the people rose up against the dictatorship of Marcos and it was a peaceful demonstration because you know why, the soldiers by God's grace turned and joined the people and only 12 people were killed and Marcos was banished. God moved through prayer. Mainly, Catholic church was behind all that pray.

And then you got Tianamen Square in 1989 where thousands of people in Tianamen Square gathered, they wanted democracy. They wanted to change government. They wanted freedom and instead the Chinese government at that time sent troops and tanks and killed thousands and thousands of people. You thought, unlike the Philippines People Power, the Tianamen Square was a defeat for democracy and it is a defeat for the purposes of God. But no, you actually notice years later on? These are two people, Zhang Boli and Zou Fengsuo, they were there. They were 1 of the 21 leaders of Tianamen Square who had to flee from that country. And many of these people flee from the country and people who were dispersed from Tianamen Square were totally disillusioned with communism and it made them turn to what something deeper. Here's one of the dissidents, Professor Fenggang Yang, who actually wrote,

But really after [Tiananmen], I suddenly felt that I was a homeless person in terms of spirituality. That was a very painful period for me. I want[ed] a spiritual home. When I looked for the different religious traditions, Christianity made the best sense to me, so I converted.

His is a story that's repeated time and time again and the growth of the Christian movement in communist China is so great today that they are supposed to by 2030 has the largest number of concentration of Christians in the entire world. All from what seemingly failed insurrection. You see, God works. God works in different ways, but God's purposes will be fulfilled. So therefore we need to pray, we need to pray because it's the easiest part of love.

If we don't pray for all men, the easiest part is the pray, the hardest part is to sacrifice or to give or to give a part of your life for that. So if we can't even pray, don't talk about sacrifice.

Number three, prayer is a worldwide reach. You could pray for anybody, just like the internet, across the world, anywhere in the world and God gives us this privilege of causality. Who are we supposed to pray for. Pray for kings also, those who are in high positions that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives, godly and dignified in every way. You know, why do we pray for Kings? Why?

Proverbs 21: 1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

You think, the way the government is going, everybody is fighting for power. There is nothing we can do, it is getting worse and worse, but you forget, the prime minister's heart is a stream of water in the hands of the Lord, he turns it where he will. So we need to pray and we pray for all in government. This is Church of England in 1962. You know what they did.

God 'to save and defend all Christian kings, princes and governors.'

Is that the way we're supposed to pray? God pray only for please, please save Pakatan but not Amno, is that right. No, no. We pray for everybody because in the time where Paul was asking Timothy to pray, his church to pray, the ruler was Nero, Nero was a terrible, terrible tyrant. And yet the church would pray that Nero would rule justly. Here are some prayers by Clement of Rome;

Grant them, Lord, health, peace, harmony and stability, so that they may give no offence in administering the government you have given them.'

So peace, health and harmony, pray for the Kings. Tertullian AD 200, as a Christian leader, he prays.

"We pray also for the emperors, for their ministers and those in power, that their reign may continue, that the state may be at peace, and that the end of the world may be postponed"

And in fact, the peace, PAX Romana, peaceful period of time starting from Roman Emperor Augustus, where the roads were all over the Roman Empire from 27 BC to 180 AD, the Greek language was widely used. This was a time when Jesus came and it was through this piece that much of the gospel spread to the entire Roman Empire. Right? And so therefore we are to pray for the state to maintain order and justice. And we are to be this conscience and we are going to pray for the government to keep order in peace. So this is what we're supposed to do.

1 Tim 2: 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth

So therefore God wants all people to be saved. 1-John 2:11 echoes this,

1 John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Does that mean that God wants or basically he is going to save everybody? Well, God's love. He is willing.

Ezekiel 18: 23 Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

So God desires everyone to be saved, and God is sovereign.

Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

So everything works out, nothing is to the left or right of God's sovereign will and yet even though he desires all men to be saved, there is in Matthew 25, the judgment of the nations, people are divided into the sheep and goats where the goats go off into eternal destruction. What about Revelations 21.

Revelations 21:8b their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Why is it that some people, if God desires to save everybody, why is it that some will be condemned? And we need to look at this passage and look at the word all. The sight of our God, our savior, who desires all people to be saved, which means this is all men without distinction, which means all men irregardless, social, ethnic, national economic classes. It is not all men without exception. But the problem is God willing, but unable. Obviously he is willing, but he is not unable or is he able but unwilling, which is it?

Well, here we have a conundrum between God's election where God says no one can come to me unless the father draws him, and God's love, he desires all people to be saved. If you look at a famous passage,

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

God is willing. God is love.

If he is willing and able, why doesn't he do it?

There is a dimension of moral responsibility, which actually comes onto human free will and this is best exemplified by Acts chapter 4 verse 27 when the disciples wrote,

Acts 4: 27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place

He is talking about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He is talking about that, and what he is saying is that there is a parallel process. There is free will where they actually had plan and plotted to kill and nobody force Pontius Pilate to ask the crowd, what do they want. Nobody forced the crowd to say crucify him. There is free will in a sense that they voluntarily acted upon their desires and yet if you look back, at the back room there is God's sovereignty because he appointed them to do this plan. If you look back here, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. There is a parallel process of free will and sovereignty of God.

What about Joseph who has been cast out of his family, sold as a slave to Egypt at the end of the time when they reconcile with his family, his brothers come to him and he tells them this.

Genesis 50:20 (ESV) As for you, you meant evil against me,

Which means they are selling him to traders, abandoning him, almost killing him. That is evil.

You meant it for evil but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

By God sending him as a slave in Egypt eventually resulted in him being second to Pharaoh and he has thought seven years of grain and that saved people of Israel as well many people in Egypt as well. So there is a parallel process. They, the brothers plotted to kill Joseph. Out of their own free will, nobody forced him and yet in God's sovereignty he was able to align it so that they actually acted according to his plan and that sending him of to Egypt resulted in salvation for Israel and for many people in Egypt. Right. So there is moral accountability. They plotted to do evil out of their own desires, motives and

beliefs and as long as you do that, they are morally accountable, which is why John 3:18 says,

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned.

There is a choice and choice brings responsibility, and that's how we actually balance God's election and God's free will. The language of God's love is also often confused. There are different levels. The Bible expresses God's love in different ways. It expresses God's love in terms of trinitarian love, love within the trinity; Father, Son and Holy spirit. It also expresses loves in his providential love and care for all of creation where he causes the rain to fall on the unjust and the just. He has also a desire to love all mankind, so that they will come to saving knowledge, but there's also a special love towards his elect, towards us who Jesus died for and a conditional love for the elect, which revolves discipline.

In the Bible you will see these five expressions of love, but what we do often is, and is the same thing as the way we love our child, the way a husband loves a wife, the way you love your dog, the way you love hamburger. They're all different dimensions of love, isn't it. But if you elevate one above the other. Let's say you elevate one. God's love towards all mankind trumps all other kinds of love. Right. You see, God saw Christ death respect to the special elect, which is us, different than the way he saw it from the rest of mankind. Now you elevate the love towards the elect that when you believe in limited atonement where God's son's death was only efficacious for his elect, but not enough for everybody else, which then diminishes his love for all of mankind. So what we are trying to do sometimes is that we misunderstand the language which the Bible uses.

So compatibilism is being to understand there is human responsibility as well as God's sovereignty, but they work in a parallel process. It is like having a huge house, big house, plenty of room, and you want all the orphans to come and join you. You invite everybody, but only one. Your house is big enough for everyone, but only one chooses to come into your house. And that's a little bit of a picture of God's love. We are responsible.

He is responsible for what he did. He put his knee on George Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 30 seconds, and he and we will be held accountable. The only reason we have difficulty in understanding this is that because we are trying to get and wrap our heads around this idea of a transcendent God and a personal God. Let me illustrate.

Here we actually have God basically expressing himself or revealing himself through his son, Jesus Christ, which is basically in the world. When Jesus comes to the world, he enters the space time continuum, where something has a cause and there is an affect. It is a sequence. God is now sequenced. He becomes a personal God. But in reality, God is a transcendent God where today, tomorrow and yesterday all become one blip in a moment of time.

And so therefore what we do is we confuse these two expressions of God. That's why we can't really understand what is freewill versus sovereignty of God.

1 Timothy 2:5-7 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

A lot of people believe, as long as you got belief in one God, all of us can go to God, but the trouble is issue of sin. That's why you've seen every culture there are always mediators. Why do we have mediators? Why can't we go directly to God? Because innate in every human being is this concept of distance, that because of sin we cannot go near God. We actually need mediators and that is why Jesus can be the only mediator because Hebrew says,

Hebrews 7:26-27 (ESV) For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and yet exalted (which means his deity) above the heavens. 27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

This is God. Right. There is only one, God, there's one mediator between man and God and the man, Jesus Christ. The criteria is that he is a man and he is God and he gave himself as a ransom for everyone.

1 Timothy 2:7 (ESV) For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

And this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ is the only mediator. Lastly, to end this passage.

1 Timothy 2:8 (ESV) I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.

So therefore the impediments to prayer where we come together for corporate prayer is sin, anger and quarrelling. We need to have these things put aside before we actually come to pray. In fact, the Psalm 24 says,

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

That's why the gospels tell us that you've got something against your brother, you need to go and settle that before you come and have the worship session. We actually embark on corporate prayer. It doesn't matter whether you lift up hands. In the Bible, they are plenty of passages talking about kneeling, standing, walking, uplifted hands, bowing, prostrate or even sitting. David sat when he prayed. All right. It doesn't matter which posture you take. It is the inward authenticity and prayer and posture that is most important. Right. So may God add a blessing to you as you discuss this in your groups.