

## Praying For Our Government

### Proverbs 15:8, 29

Through this past year we have been pursuing the path of ancient wisdom for modern times in a study of the book and topics contained in the writings of Proverbs. On the eve of this very important election our topic today could not be more appropriate. Our verse goes much deeper than just practical insight for daily living. It is found as a command on the very lips and teaching of Jesus Himself.

Following on the heels of His teaching about the coming Kingdom of God, Jesus spoke plainly these words, **“Men ought always to pray and not to faint.”** The NIV states it this way **“they should always pray and not give up.” (Luke 18:1)**

The days in which we live are desperate days, despairing days, discouraging days, days that can cause even the most stout hearted to grow weary and faint. The cost of living continues to rise while things like the value of homes plummets. As the cost of gas increases, the cost of commodities increases as well. Medical costs increase while medical coverage decreases. Unemployment rises while hope diminishes. More and more people are becoming dependent on government and less dependent on God.

It seems that on the verge of collapse are some of the very freedoms we as Christians have enjoyed since the inception of this great nation. People are arrested for holding a Bible study in their home. Students are failed in classes when God is the topic of an assignment. Churches can't host football teams for the traditional pre-game meal. Speeches by valedictorians are censured. Prayers before city meetings are no longer allowed. **Dr. David Jeremiah voices the question many have asked: “Is God through with America?” He states that the better question to ask is this: “Is America through with God?”**

The freedom to openly express our values and beliefs continue to be undermined and maligned, while the values of the world go unchecked so that just about anything goes on and over the airwaves or in print, Christian views are openly mocked and spurned. Articles are printed in newspapers and magazines about the demise of Christianity. Our values are the brunt of jokes by late night comedians. We are branded as intolerant and our values are deemed archaic and antiquated. It is apparent that many would like us to go the way of the dinosaur.

Morality and ethical behavior once seen as a hallmark of character encouraged and sought after in public leadership is now overlooked. It matters little that some leaders are embroiled in ethical or moral scandal when justice merely gives a slap on the wrist and considers it acceptable behavior.

That is why on the eve of this very important election we must heed the words of Jesus that **“Men ought always to pray and not to faint.”**

While the proverb we will consider today is about prayer, my focus is going to be on praying for our nation and its leaders. **How can the prayers of people in America affect or turn the ear of God to hear its cry?** Consider first that there is a certain kind of prayer that pleases God.

## I. A PLEASING PRAYER – Proverbs 15:8, 29

Notice that there are two acts of worship that are mentioned in this verse. They are sacrifices and prayers. We see that one is rejected and the other is accepted. It is not saying that God will only accept prayers and rejects all sacrifices. We need to understand that there is something that qualifies whether God accepts one or rejects another. He is just as likely to reject prayers for the same reason He rejects the sacrifice. It is clear that our standing with Him has everything to do with whether or not they are accepted or rejected.

For the nation of Israel both were essential components of communing with God. Sacrifices were a regular part of worship instituted for any number of occasions in the daily life of the people. A sacrifice was a tribute given as a gift to God. It was an offering given for God's provisions.

Sacrifices were also a reminder that sin needed to be atoned for. They were a picture of the atoning sacrifice that would be made by the Messiah when He came. Some sacrifices also served as a reminder of the covenant that God had made between Himself and His people.

A sacrifice was to be a spontaneous expression of reverence and gratitude for blessings and forgiveness. In a way it sought the ongoing mercy and grace of God to be granted to His people. It was an expression of surrendering one's self to God, recognizing that all he had been given came from God – both the tangible gifts of daily provisions and the intangible gifts of grace, mercy and forgiveness – gifts that are not earned or deserved but solely come from the nature and love of God.

When we couple the Old Testament sacrificial system with the writings of Hebrews we understand that the sacrifice did not nor can it ever make us holy. The animal sacrifice looked forward to the once and for all perfect atoning sacrifice of Christ. A person of faith offered the sacrifice with the understanding that it was just a picture or symbol of the one true sacrifice. Old and New Testament believers have this in common – we are all justified by faith.

That's why at communion we don't offer another animal sacrifice. The sacrifice has already been made. While the animal sacrifice made in the Old Testament looked forward to the coming atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, the elements of communion look back at the atoning sacrifice He made on the cross. Both are symbols of the one

sacrifice made once and for all. All Old Testament sacrifices then were made to God out of gratitude for all that He had done.

Notice in our verse that God detests a certain kind of sacrifice. Sacrifice had become routine. It had lost its significance. They had given the outward appearance of fulfilling religious requirements, but they had lost the purpose and forgotten the meaning. Such sacrifice in God's eyes was worthless, meaningless, empty. They hoped to in some way manipulate God to give them what they sought. But God does not look on the exterior, He sees the motive of the heart, the façade that covers a dark heart. The appearance may seem genuine but the motive was wrong.

In just a couple weeks we are going to celebrate one of my favorite meals – Thanksgiving dinner. I love everything about the meal, from the early aromas coming from the kitchen once the turkey begins to bake to the pies cooling on the counter. I love leftovers and more leftovers. There is just something about stuffing that has been soaking up turkey juice while it's been baking inside the turkey. I love to scoop out the stuffing and then pile it on my plate with a ladle of gravy. But let's say this year Robyn decides to do something different. Maybe she ran out of time to make stuffing so instead she goes out to the garden and scoops up some dirt and stuffs the turkey with that. Now while it's cooking, it smells the same and even taking it out it out of the oven looks the same. It looks good on the outside but on the inside it's another story. You can bet I won't eat it.

That's what the wicked try to do with God. They mask their dark heart with a veneer of good deeds and religious activity, but God sees what is really underneath the snappy looking packaging. God detests the religious activity of the wicked.

Prayer is the other element of worship that also speaks of our desire to communicate with God.

Like Jesus, Paul would remind us that we are to pray at all times and for all occasions. And according to our verse it is the prayer of the righteous that God is pleased with. He knows that their requests come from a right motive and in right relationship with Him. It is the prayer of the righteous that God hears.

**How is it though that the unrighteous think that God will hear them when they pray? Why do they think that God will in some way give them an audience when they refuse to obey His commands?** I believe there is only one prayer of the unrighteous that He hears and answers. It is when they repent and seek confession for sin and by faith place their trust in Christ for salvation.

But God does hear the prayer of the righteous.

**Psalm 34:17 “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles.”**

**I Peter 3:12 “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”**

In his prayer of confession, David, speaking to the Lord says **“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it: You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” Psalm 51:16-17**

David’s prayer was accepted because it came from a heart that sought a right standing with God. On the other hand, when the prophet Samuel delayed in coming to bless Saul and the army before battle, Saul took it upon himself to make the sacrifice. God rejected him because he was not in a right standing with Him. God won’t accept our sacrifice or our prayer if we are not right with Him.

Scripture reminds us that there are a number of things that the Lord is delighted in.

He is delighted in His creation.

He is delighted in the angelic host singing praise.

He is delighted in His Son.

He is delighted in the prayers of the righteous.

Think about some of those prayers for a moment.

There was the prayer of Abraham for Sodom.

There was the prayer of Moses for Israel.

There was the prayer of Job for his friends.

There was the prayer of Elijah for rain after famine.

There was the prayer of Daniel.

There was the prayer of Nehemiah for Jerusalem.

There was the prayer of Paul for the churches.

There was the prayer of Jesus for believers.

So what makes a person upright instead of wicked?

The righteous have acknowledged their sin and placed faith in Christ for salvation. They continue to seek to know God, to be in a right relationship with Him.

John Piper suggests two reasons God delights in the righteous and rejects the wicked.

***The first is that this person trembles at the word of God.*** When he reads God’s Word he is compelled in some way to change.

**Isaiah 66:2 “...to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word.”** There is a reverence and awe for God because we more clearly see Him and His holiness and we tremble at how sinful we are in comparison to Him.

God wants us to obey the truth. **How far as a nation have we turned from His Word? How far have we strayed from obedience?** Verse 3 continues by noting that when the wicked offer their sacrifices, it’s like they are murderers or idol worshippers. Verse 4 notes that when God spoke no one listened, they turned a deaf ear to Him. It is no wonder then that when the wicked cry out to Him He does not hear them. They choose to ignore Him. He chooses to ignore them.

The upright hear the word of God and tremble.

They know God and obey Him.

When worship was being restored in Israel after Josiah became King, they found the Old Testament law and brought it to him. In his presence they read the law and he trembled when he heard God's Word read and the judgment on those who disobeyed.

Piper suggests a second characteristic of a righteous person who is heard by God. ***He trusts in the willingness and power of God to show mercy.***

**Lamentations 3:22-23 "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed because His compassions fail not, they are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness."**

What a great promise from God who withholds what we deserve and gives us what we don't deserve. The person who trusts in God's mercy confesses sin, hates sin, and trusts God to forgive sin when it is confessed. When you read the prayers of Nehemiah or Daniel for example, you understand their heart of confession for their own sin and the sin of the nation. As we pray for our nation, first confess our own sin and then confess the sins of our nation.

**When we pause to pray for our nation, do we have confidence that God hears us? Is our confidence based on a right relationship with Him? Do we confess sin?** The Psalmist is very clear that if I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me. I may be saved but if I continue in unconfessed sin, His ear is not tuned to my cry, until like David, I repent and turn from the sin.

God is pleased with the prayer of the righteous. He hears them. **What must we do then in order for God to hear the cries of His people in this land?** I think the answer is found in **II Chronicles 7:14.**

## **II. A PENITENT PRAYER – II CHRONICLES 7:14**

II Chronicles 6 records the building of the temple and then records the prayer of dedication given by

Solomon on its completion. He spoke profoundly about the character and power of God and how there isn't any place on earth or in heaven that can contain Him. Even though in the broad scope of the universe the temple may seem insignificant to God, Solomon hoped that God would abide there and so hear the prayers of His people in that place. As if God needed reminding, He reminded God of the promises He made to David about establishing his throne forever. He acknowledged that there may be occasion when they are defeated in battle due to sin and yet asked that when they confessed sin, God would hear and forgive. When they sinned again and rain was withheld, when they confessed – forgive. This is as much a prayer of confession as it is a dedication.

In chapter 7 they offer sacrifices to God and one night God appeared to Solomon. He confirmed to Solomon that He had heard the prayers offered and would accept the temple as a place of His residence. God then qualified the type of prayer He will hear when the nation sins.

**"If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."**

The verse begins with a condition. It's the word "if." The conclusion of the matter is that God will forgive if certain conditions are met.

Prayers must come from God's people. They must belong to Him through a covenant relationship.

They must humble themselves.

They must pray and not just assume God will hear. They must seek His face. It is a desire for something of great value. The Bible reminds us that if we truly seek God, we will find Him.

They must turn from their sin. Someone has said that this is the test of Biblical repentance.

**Some time ago, Pastor Joe Wright of Kansas was asked to lead the Kansas State Senate in prayer. The**

senators were expecting to hear the usual kind of formal prayer but they got a big surprise. This pastor used the opportunity to call sin by its real name, and to ask God to give these leaders the will to repent of their wicked ways. As he prayed this prayer, some of the senators got up and walked out.

Here's what Rev. Wright prayed: "Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that's exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values. We confess that:

We have ridiculed the absolute truth of your Word and called it pluralism.

We have worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism.

We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery...

We have killed our unborn and called it a choice...

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

We have abused power and called it political savvy.

We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition.

We have polluted the airwaves with profanity and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts today; try us

and see if there be some wicked way in us; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of Kansas, and who have been ordained by you, to govern this great state. Grant them your wisdom to rule and may their decisions direct us to the center of your will. Amen."

(This is a great prayer for our nation.)

At its core **II Chronicles 7:14** is a prayer for revival, revival that begins in the heart of one praying on behalf of others in whom the individual desires to see revival. In our case, we are praying for revival to come to America, but it begins by my first seeking a revival in my own heart. It asks us to consider whether or not we are in a right relationship with God, that we belong to Him. Like Solomon or Nehemiah or Daniel, my prayer must begin in humility by acknowledging who God is in character and person and then from a penitent heart confess my own sin. When I am in a right relationship with the Lord then I am able to petition God on behalf of the land that it will return to Him. When God hears the prayers of a penitent heart, He will hear and begin His work of healing the land, restoring its people back to Himself. More than ever our country needs this prayer.

We are quick to criticize the woes of our land and even the leaders who guide us without reverence for God or acknowledging that it was He who put them there, but have we stopped to pray in a way that is acceptable to God? Perhaps the fault is not on the godless leaders, but on God's people who have neglected to pray for this nation and its leaders as we should.

When we pray according to and consistently with this verse in mind three things happen:  
God will hear the prayer of the righteous  
God will forgive the penitent heart  
God will heal the land

The song writer has aptly written:



Thou art coming to a King;  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much.

**James 5:16** reminds us that **“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is very powerful.”** If we desire to again see God do great things in the people of this nation, then we must be in right standing with Him. Such prayer offered by godly people will bring a great work in the hearts of others so that they are spiritually healed.

A pleasing prayer  
A penitent prayer  
A purposeful prayer

### III. A PURPOSEFUL PRAYER – I Timothy 2:1-4

In the classic movie *Fiddler on the Roof* a group of men are following the Rabbi asking him questions of a religious nature when someone asked if there was a prayer of blessing for the Czar. After a short time of pondering the question he indicated that there was such a prayer. With attentive and eager ears they all leaned in wondering what such a prayer would be. The Rabbi said “May the Lord keep Him (pause) far away from here.”

This passage is a command. We are to pray for those in authority over us, those who lead our nation, our state and our community. It doesn't say pray for them only if we agree with them or if they make decisions or laws that favor us or we are in favor of. We are to pray for them, period. Our prayer should not be that they are away from here or that they just rule well, but rather that they draw near to God.

Consider that at the time Paul wrote this Nero was the head of the Roman Empire and we know from history what kind of tyrant he was toward Christians. Paul clearly understood the rapid decay

of the Roman Empire under Nero, so all the more reason to urgently and perseveringly pray for civil leaders at every level. Paul says, pray for all of them. Paul will remind the Romans that civil leaders are His servants. He put them there.

And in the context of the passage he not only suggests that we pray for the salvation of all men, because God is not willing that any should perish, but come to repentance, he also says we should pray for the salvation of government leaders.

Almost every day David prays for the salvation of President Obama. He may know all the Christian lingo and have all the right window dressings, but many of his actions and decisions do not reflect a Christian/Biblical worldview. Maybe he truly is saved and has strayed far from the truth, but still David faithfully prays for him to be saved. The other day he and Robyn were talking and David said that the President's time is running out, not as President, but to be saved. I need to take a lesson from son.

Paul didn't want them just to pray that civil leaders would have wisdom to rule well, but that they would be saved. We have a lot of folks in government who need that prayer. **Can I have a witness?**

**So how can we pray for our leaders?** Whatever the outcome on Tuesday here are some suggestions about how we should pray for those in government positions.

1. Pray that they will love the truth and seek to govern by that truth by daily seeking God through His Word and prayer.
2. Pray that they would recognize their own inadequacy and need for God to help them rule and that they will seek godly wisdom to lead.
3. Pray that they will display courage and integrity, that they will have strong convictions based on

godly values, that they will always choose to do what is right.

4. Pray that they will surround themselves with staff who have integrity and who seek to lead with wisdom, rejecting all counsel that violates biblical principles.
5. Pray that they would have the courage to resist those who would pressure them to violate biblical principles.
6. Pray God's protection on them and their families.
7. Pray for effectiveness in office and justice to those who practice evil.
8. Pray that they would recognize their own personal sinfulness and need for Christ.
9. Pray that they would be ready to sacrifice their own political or personal agenda for the sake of what is right for this nation.
10. Pray that they would reverse the trends of socialism and humanism which seek to deify man and not God.
11. Pray that they would remember that their position comes from God and they are accountable to God for the decisions they make.

We can choose to become faint or we can choose to pray. It's a choice. **Whether the person we voted for wins or not, will you commit today to make it a regular habit to pray for our government and for the spiritual healing of our land?**

I close with these penetrating words from Pastor Warren Wiersbe: "Godly parents can raise godly children and godly children can provide godly influence in their communities and in the nation. In a democracy where leaders are elected and not

inherited, the Lord's remnant must exert as much influence for righteousness as possible; certainly every believer ought to pray for those in authority. I occasionally hear people lamenting the state of the nation, but most of them fail to point out the main cause: the church collectively and individually isn't doing their job in spreading righteousness. If the righteous remnant were spreading more salt and light, there would be less decay and darkness."

"During times of spiritual decay, it was the godly remnant of righteous people who maintained the flickering flame of spiritual life in the nation." WW

Before you vote – pray.

After you vote – pray.