

Franklin Graham: Interceding for President Obama Is Not an Option

The president recently asked for prayer as he faces the complex and dangerous challenges of leading our country in such tumultuous times.

His request was a pointed reminder to me that I should be praying for our president and our leaders every day—not to get something from them—but simply in obedience to the Scriptures. I personally haven't prayed the way I should, and I'm sure that's the case for some of you as well.

We know from Scripture that God can turn the hearts of kings (Prov. 21:1). That means that we should be praying for God's will to be done and for our leaders to seek God and listen to Him. We should pray that they would be surrounded by godly counsel and, most important, that our leadership would personally know God and the salvation found through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Think about all of the issues before our president and the leaders of our nation at this moment. Ebola is not only a huge problem for Western Africa, but it could be a major problem for this country. Our broken borders are a major challenge. In addition to all of the other concerns, they can provide terrorists easy access.

ISIS is brutally murdering Christians in Syria and Iraq, and other jihadists are killing Christians in Iran and other parts of the Muslim world. Believers are being threatened, villages are being burned, and churches pulled down.

Ukraine is in peril as Russia seems to want to rebuild its former Soviet empire there. China is spending huge amounts on

its military and beginning to flex its muscles in the Pacific, threatening its neighbors including Vietnam and the Philippines. North Korea has nuclear weapons, Iran may be on the verge, and the threat of terrorists gaining access to nuclear bombs is very real.

Should we not be diligently praying that God would give our president, Congress and military leaders wisdom? Our senators and governors and council members need our prayers—even if they are not the candidates we voted for.

Interceding for those in authority is not an option. It is a biblical command that we are to obey. “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:1-2, KJV).

Understand that the Apostle Paul is writing this instruction to his protégé, Timothy, at a time when the vile emperor Nero was at the helm of the vast Roman Empire. Christians were viciously persecuted, clothed in wild animal skins and put in the arena before hungry lions, even covered red in pitch and used as human lanterns to light the streets of Rome.

Nevertheless, the aged apostle, who would soon be martyred during Nero’s reign of terror, instructs Timothy to make prayer for the rulers of his day—including the deranged Nero—a personal priority.

There should be a sense of urgency in our prayer life, an understanding that we “do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The prince of darkness is grimly and powerfully at work in world affairs, and prayer is a great battlefield—especially as we pray for those in leadership.

When Scripture says that the “king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water” (Prov. 21:1), it means that a Sovereign God can turn the heart of a king at any time and in any way. If there are policies and platforms that don’t conform to biblical ethics, the intercession of Christians can be used in a powerful, transforming way.

Neither kings, nor presidents, nor mayors, nor members of Congress are the ultimate authority—God is. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh ...” (Ps. 2:2-4).

As Charles Spurgeon said, “prayer is the slender nerve that moves the omnipotent muscle of God.” The Bible commands us to pray for authorities, because all authority has been established by Him to accomplish His purposes.

When the prophet Jeremiah wrote to the Jewish exiles who lived in Babylonian captivity, he encouraged them not to protest or rebel against their captors, but to pray for them: “Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace” (Jer. 29:7). Even in the midst of an evil and wicked land, Jeremiah focused the Hebrew captives to pray for God’s blessing.

Perhaps this is at least part of what the apostle meant when he said that praying for our leaders can result in an atmosphere that is conducive to the spreading of the gospel, leading to a “quiet and peaceable life” (1 Tim. 2:2, KJV). The more hostile the culture is to Christians and Christianity—and that is certainly the case in our nation today—the more difficult it is to preach and teach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord may use our prayers for those in authority to somehow

delay or even stop legislation or initiatives that hinder the advance of the gospel. We have experienced serious moral degradation in America, but there are still many opportunities for the proclamation of the gospel. The day may soon come when that freedom no longer exists, thus all the more reason to pray for God's mercy to turn the hearts of our leaders now.

It is also very clear that the ultimate reason the Bible instructs us to intercede on behalf of our leaders is so that they might come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. "This [our intercession] is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

God's desire is that as many people as possible be saved before He returns. He commands "all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30), so that they might escape the eternal wrath of God at the judgment.

Praying for those in authority means that we are constantly asking that the Lord will open their hearts to the truth of the gospel message and receive Christ as their Savior. Born-again leaders have the indwelling Person of the Holy Spirit to guide them as they seek to govern.

I can't help but ask myself if all Christians had fulfilled this admonition and been faithful to pray for our leaders, would our nation—even our world—be different today? Can our diligent, heartfelt prayers make a difference for the future? Most certainly.

Prayer is the Christian's greatest weapon in a world that seems to be coming apart around us.

Franklin Graham, son of iconic evangelist Billy Graham, is the president and CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse.

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