

Why the National Day of Prayer Remains Vital for Our Country

“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4, NKJV).

The National Day of Prayer is a vital part of our rich heritage. Because of the faith of many of our Founding Fathers, public prayer and national days of prayer have a longstanding and significant history in American tradition.

Since the first call to prayer in 1775, when the Continental Congress asked the colonies to pray for wisdom in forming a nation, the call to prayer has continued through our history, including President Lincoln’s proclamation for a day of “humiliation, fasting, and prayer” in 1863.

A Historic Joint Resolution

In 1952, a joint resolution by Congress, signed by President Truman, declared an annual National Day of Prayer. The Supreme Court affirmed the right of state legislatures to open their sessions with prayer in *Marsh vs. Chambers* (1983).

In 1988, the law was properly amended and signed by President Reagan, permanently setting the day as the first Thursday of every May. Each year, the president signs a proclamation, encouraging all Americans to pray on this day. Last year was significant indeed as all 50 state governors, as well as the governors of several U.S. territories, signed similar proclamations.

Priority Prayer

Why should we pray for those who are in authority? I see two reasons in 1 Timothy 2:1-4: (1) “so that we may lead a

tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” and (2) so that God can bring those in authority—as well as those under their authority—to Himself. He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

I once heard the late international Bible teacher, Derek Prince, expand on this. He said that it doesn’t matter what plans, systems or programs you devise; if you bypass prayer, you will not have power to carry them out. He compared prayerless intentions to a building that is wired for electricity but not connected to a power source; nothing will work, even if the wires are in good order and the light fixtures are beautiful.

Our power-source is prayer, and we are enjoined in the Bible to pray in particular for “kings and all in authority,” for good government and for wise leadership. Why? So that (1) we might have peace and order, (2) for the propagation of the Gospel and (3) because God desires all men to be saved.

Another reason we should pray for those who are in authority is simply to be obedient to the will of God. It’s clear that He wants us to pray for those in authority. He also wants us to obey them, as far as it is possible to do so. If you “do good,” as Romans 13:1-7 says, you will have no need to be fearful of the authorities.

A Courtroom Experience

I had an interesting experience that illustrates this point very well. When my children were younger and we first moved to Franklin, Tennessee, I had to make a lot of hurried trips to the school to pick up our youngest daughter from basketball practices. Once I was running late, and I was speeding. (I’d like to be able to say that I was too new to the area to know the speed limit, but it was posted clearly.) Wouldn’t you know, a siren went off, and I got pulled over. I’m sure I tossed up some quick “mercy” prayers, you know—“*God, have*

mercy! ..."

I didn't want to become upset, so I decided to be really, really nice to the policeman. He came over and lectured me on how this particular stretch of road has more accidents on it than any other. I just kept being nice, but it didn't get me off the hook. He wrote me a ticket, and I had one of those early morning dreadful court appearances. I thought my mercy prayer didn't work. It also crossed my mind that even though I talk about praying for those in authority, I myself hadn't exactly obeyed those in authority in this case. I could try to justify it all away—but the truth is the truth!

Later, in the courtroom, the cases were called in alphabetical order, and "Goll" wasn't too far down the list, especially since some people didn't show up. "James Goll" was called, and I stood up, wondering who was there that knew this infamous prophetic and prayerful author, and I walked forward. They grilled me with the usual questions: "James Goll, have you done this, and did you do that? ..."

"Yes, sir," I said, standing there like a soldier in rapt attention. "Yes, sir."

Then I noticed that the judge was looking at me, totally perplexed. He told me to approach the bench, so reluctantly and cautiously I did. I was wondering, *What in the world is about to go down?* The microphone was still on. The judge proceeded, "What are you guilty of?"

"Well, sir, you know. ..." I thought I had already acknowledged everything. "I was going 17 miles over the speed limit, and ..."

He peered at me over his glasses and said, "Well, this police officer said that all you're guilty of is kindness. In fact, the official wrote down right here that you are 'unusually kind.' You're just guilty of kindness! Case dismissed!"

Laughter roared out across the entire courtroom. The most

surprised person in the courtroom was me. For a moment, I thought I was in a Holy Spirit renewal meeting!

So instead of getting judgment, I got mercy, and I didn't have to pay a thing. I didn't even have to go to one of those driver schools, and nothing went onto my record; although, I kind of wish that it had gone on my record that I was "guilty of kindness."

Prayer Releases God's Mercy

That is exactly what our prayers do! A drama shows up in the courtroom scene of heaven and the Judge of the living and the dead pronounces that "Mercy triumphs over judgment!" Yes, prayer tips the scales of judgment in favor of the saints!

Right now, let's lift our voices together in priority prayer for all those in authority on this National Day of Prayer, and let's toss away judgment and criticism to instead bless our leaders in Jesus' great name. {eoa}

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