

GOD BLESSED AMERICA
I Timothy 2:1-6

"First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, Himself human, ⁶ who gave Himself—a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time."

INTRODUCTION

These thought-provoking words are entitled, "Only in America": **1-** Only in America can a pizza get to your house faster than an ambulance. **2-** Only in America are there handicap parking places in front of a skating rink. **3-** Only in America do drugstores make the sick walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions, while healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front. **4-** Only in America do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries and a Diet Coke. **5-** Only in America do we leave cars worth thousands of dollars in the driveway and put our junk in the garage.

The United States of America was founded chiefly by people who fought for the *liberty* to worship God and to build a nation upon God's principles of justice and righteousness, as taught by the Bible, because they believed their God-inspired *virtue* would give them the most prosperous and blessed society upon earth. Dr. Bob Moorehead pastored Seattle's Overlake Christian Church for 29 years. His 1995 essay, "The Paradox of Our Age," provides keen insight into what's happened to our nation since its founding:

We have taller buildings but shorter tempers; wider freeways but narrower viewpoints; we buy more but enjoy it less; we have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, yet less time; we have more degrees but less sense; more knowledge but less judgment; more experts, yet more problems. We drink too much; smoke too much; spend too recklessly; laugh too little; drive too fast; get angry too quickly; stay up too late; get up too tired; read too seldom; watch TV too much and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to our life but not life to our years. We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor. We've conquered outer space, but not inner space; we've done larger things, but not better things; we've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we have higher incomes, but lower morals; more parties, but less fun; more acquaintances, but fewer friends. We build more computers to hold more information, but have less direct communication.

These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion; tall men, but short character; steep profits, but shallow relationships. These are days of two incomes, but more divorces; of fancier houses, but broken homes. These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throw-away morality, one-night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer to prevent; calm or kill. Indeed, these are the times!

Yet, despite these many negatives of our present society, we still enjoy liberties and privileges by virtue of being citizens of this nation that most people in world history could only dream of but never experience. It's proper and even urgent to ask the LORD God and our Savior to aid, revive, and help our nation. But today's sermon will build upon the theme, "We keep asking God to bless America. He already has. Now it's our turn." God has blessed and still is blessing America. But we need to do our part to bless America! We can do many godly things. We can be *good* citizens by voting, being patriotic, saluting the flag, singing the national anthem with passion, obeying the laws, paying our taxes, and not parking in handicap spaces if we're not handicapped! We can be *godly* citizens by faithfully sharing the good news of salvation through **Jesus**; by modeling Christ's Golden Rule of **Matthew 7:12** (NIV): "'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you"; by standing for principles that bring God's blessings upon a nation; by following God's standards, not the world's, in how we dress, talk, work, care for people and possessions,

spend money, respect authority, honor our commitments to our family, and in how we pray for our country. More briefly, the Apostle Paul gives us three specific things in **I Timothy 2:1-6** we can do to bless America: (1) Pray persistently (**vss. 1-2**), (2) live laudably (**vs. 2**), and (3) evangelize enthusiastically (**vss. 3-6**).

I. PRAY PERSISTENTLY

"First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those who are in authority." Our society is increasingly hostile to open, public prayer. There's a joke circulating about a teacher who entered her classroom 15 minutes early one morning at the start of a school day. She caught a bunch of boys in a huddle on their knees in the corner of the room. She cried out, "What are you doing?" One of them said, "We're shooting craps." She replied, "Oh; that's all right. I was afraid you were praying." This is part of America's ills. People often huddle together here, but it's not for prayer. They huddle together to play something, attend something, or watch something, but too seldom do people huddle together in prayer to the God of Creation and sustainer of our nation! English Methodist pastor Samuel Chadwick (1860-1932) stated, "The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. . . . He laughs at our toil, he mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray." E. M. Bounds (1835-1913), an American attorney and minister who became a modern apostle of prayer, wrote, "What the church needs today is not more machinery or better [machinery], not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Spirit can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men" (or, we might add, "through women").

E. M. Bounds also reminds us, "God shapes the world by prayer." We must prevail in prayer if we are to see evil rolled back in America and our own lives. We must pray for everyone to embrace God's will who means anything at all to us, and pray for some who don't mean anything to us. We must pray desperately and determinedly for our spouses, our children, family members, ministers, church members, church leaders, and political leaders. We must pray at home! We must pray at church! We must pray at prayer meetings! We must pray while driving our cars, doing our laundry, cleaning our houses, and doing our chores! We must pray when we get up in the morning and when we go to bed at night! **James 5:16-18** reminds us, "The urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect."¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land.¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit."

As the 20th century dawned, America and much of the Christian world stood in critical need of revival. Prayer efforts were launched worldwide, including Chicago, Melbourne, India, and Korea. Revival began in Wales. Within six months in 1904, 100,000 were converted out of a population of 2 million (1-in-20), the equivalent of nearly 17 million new Christians in America. The first year of the revival, there were no cases for the judges to try; police were out of work; taverns went bankrupt; illegitimacy dropped 44%; and production slowed in the mines because the mules could not understand the cleaned up speech of the workers. This revival of 1904-5 spread to England, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the United States. When it reached America, pastors of Atlantic City reported that out of a population of 50,000, only 50 remained unconverted. In Portland, Oregon, 240 department stores closed their doors daily from 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. to pray. If we pray long enough, hard enough, fervent enough, and faithful enough, God will change some things for the better! Never doubt the power of God or His response to our prayers! We must pray persistently!

II. LIVE LAUDABLY

Vs. 2, "so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." God wants us to be godly people, a holy people, whose lives visibly demonstrate we belong to the LORD and live only for Him. A preacher once confessed, "The ugly part of me sure showed his beastly face the other night. I was driving on a two-lane road that was about to become a single lane. A woman in a car beside me was in the lane that continued. I was in the one that stopped. I needed to be ahead of her. My schedule was, no

doubt, more important than hers. After all, am I not a man of the cloth? So I floored it. Guess what? She did too. When my lane ended, she was a fender ahead of me. I growled and slowed and let her go ahead. Over her shoulder she gave me a sweet little bye-bye wave. Grrr! I started to dim my headlights. Then I paused. The sinister part of me said, 'Wait a minute. Am I not to shed light on dark places?' So I put a little high beam in her rear view mirror. She retaliated by slowing down; to a crawl. This woman was mean. She wasn't going to go beyond 15 miles per hour. And I wasn't going to take my lights out of her rearview mirror. Like two stubborn donkeys, she kept it slow and I kept it bright. After more unkind thoughts, the road widened and I started to pass. Wouldn't you know it? A red light left the two of us side-by-side at an intersection. What happened next contains both good news and bad news. The good news is, she waved at me. The bad news is, her wave was not one you'd want to imitate. Moments later, conviction surfaced, 'Why did I do that?' I'm typically a calm guy, but for 15 minutes I was a beast!"

Brothers and sisters, could this story have been written about us? Are we ever a beast at times—at home, at work, at Wal-mart or Fry's, while driving or shopping? We can be pretty good people *inside* our church. But God is more interested in how we act and react *outside* the church. **I Peter 2:9, 11-12** (NLT): "[F]or you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light. ¹¹ Dear friends, I warn you as 'temporary residents and foreigners' to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. ¹² Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when He judges the world." If we want to change America for the better and people around us for the better, we must live laudably; honorably reflecting our Lord's best qualities without a "holier-than-thou" attitude toward the lost and without unleashing the "beast" within us upon them.

III. EVANGELIZE ENTHUSIASTICALLY

Vss. 3-6, "This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, Himself human, ⁶ who gave Himself—a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time." God longs for all people to be saved from the everlasting destruction toward which they are headed by living in defiance of their Creator's loving and perfect will. Evangelism is sharing the "good news," the "gospel," the "evangel" of what **Jesus Christ** has done for us and can also do for anyone and for everyone. Evangelism is our primary responsibility and purpose in life once our place in Heaven is secured. **Luke 8:26-37** presents the unusual tale of a man so possessed by demonic spirits that he lived little better than an animal among the "tombs." **Jesus** released him fully from the demons' power. This bizarre person had suffered many of the torments of Hell this side of the grave. It's understandable that he wanted to remain in **Jesus'** presence and experience the Heavenly freedom and joys **Jesus** guarantees His followers. But **Jesus** told this reborn man he had a greater privilege than to remain in **Jesus'** direct, Heavenly presence. "The man from whom the demons had departed kept begging Him to be with Him. But He sent him away and said, ³⁹'Go back to your home, and tell all that God has done for you.' And off he went, proclaiming throughout the town all that Jesus had done for him" (**Luke 8:38-39**). Our greatest privilege and our greatest responsibility as born-again Christians is "proclaiming throughout [our] town all that Jesus [has] done for [us]."

Leighton Ford, a Billy Graham associate, often shares this story. "I was speaking at an open-air crusade in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Billy Graham was to speak the next night and had arrived a day early. He came incognito and sat on the grass at the rear of the crowd. Because he was wearing a hat and dark glasses, no one recognized him. Directly in front of him sat an elderly gentleman who seemed to be listening intently to my presentation. When I invited people to come forward as an open sign of commitment, Billy decided to do a little personal evangelism. He tapped the man on the shoulder and asked, 'Would you like to accept Christ? I'll be glad to walk down with you if you want to.' The old man looked him up and down, thought it over for a moment, and then said, 'Nah, I think I'll just wait till the big gun comes tomorrow night.' Billy

and I have had several good chuckles over that incident. Unfortunately, it underlines how, in the minds of many people, evangelism is the task of the 'Big Guns,' not the 'little shots.'"

Evangelism, telling others what **Jesus** has done for us and can do for them, is the job of every follower of Christ! It matters not whether we are considered to be a "big gun" or a "little shot." One time many years ago, preacher Dwight L. Moody (1837-99) was criticized because of the evangelistic methods he used. Moody replied, "I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it." One Sunday as they drove home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, there's something about the preacher's message this morning I don't understand." Her Mom said, "Oh? What is it?" The girl replied, "He said God is bigger than we are. He said God is so big that He could hold the world in His hand. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, honey." "But Mommy, he also said God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Is that true, too?" Again, her Mom assured the little girl that what the pastor had said was true. With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?" If God is inside us, He will show through to the outside unless we make considerable efforts to prevent Him being seen by burying ourselves in the darkness of sin or refusing to cooperate when He attempts to reach out to someone through us. God longs for "everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," and He longs for us to experience the Heavenly joy of people embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior when we evangelize enthusiastically.

CONCLUSION

While serving as our Vice President, George Bush, Sr. represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev (1906-82). Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out against the Soviet Union's official atheism by Brezhnev's widow, Viktoria. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope. She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. She apparently believed in life after death. She also believed **Jesus Christ**, by His death in our behalf on the cross, is our best and only hope to receive mercy from God unto eternal life and avoid everlasting death.

What are the three specific things the Apostle Paul instructed us to do as Christians to bless the nation in which we live?: To Pray persistently, to live laudably, and to evangelize enthusiastically.