

The Necessities for Prayer
November 29, 2017

A very sincere welcome and appreciation for all who've taken time to come this evening. Before we turn to our section for tonight, it was brought to my attention that there was one glaring omission from last night. So turn back to First Corinthians chapter eleven for just one thing to clarify, and then we'll get into tonight's message. First Corinthians chapter eleven. I don't like to go back, but this is significant enough that I guess that we should. Look at verse twenty-seven. "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Now just a clarification of what that means for the sake of younger believers. Perhaps you've had a bad week, or you've had difficulty at school, difficulty at home, maybe a spousal problem, and you feel, I'm so unworthy to partake of the emblems this Sunday, or perhaps if you're a man you would feel, I really shouldn't be taking part. I really am unworthy of taking part because it says there in First Corinthians chapter eleven that if you partake unworthily, you're bringing judgment—chastening—upon yourself.

That's not what the verse means. There is not one of us here who is worthy to partake of the bread and the wine. It's not a matter of our merit; it's a matter of our manner. They were partaking of the emblems viewing it just as another meal. That's what he's getting at in First Corinthians. They were there, they were having a feast, some were getting drunk. They were bringing lots of food and shaming those that had nothing, and he says you're doing it in an unworthy manner. You don't really recognize what you're doing. So that when it comes to the privilege of partaking of the emblems, I'm not trying to minimize the need for personal righteousness, but we're not looking here at having a bad week, and thinking I better not partake or I better not take part in the meeting. It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with understanding that what I am doing when I partake of the emblems is to identify with the body and with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than having to do with my worthiness. It's not worthiness it's an unworthy manner that's being looked at here in First Corinthians chapter eleven.

So with that out of the way, let me ask you to turn to just to one verse in the old testament for a moment, back in Exodus chapter thirty-four. Just for the sake of background, Moses has asked God to show him his glory. And we'll just pick up at verse five of chapter thirty-four, "And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance." Now just file that in the back of your mind.

We're going to come now to First Timothy, chapter two. And we'll take time to read the entire chapter. It's a very short chapter so it won't take us very long. "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. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity. I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety."

Now we do trust that God will add his blessing to our public reading of his very precious word.

We could certainly very profitably look at the general subject of prayer considering the principle of prayer, the purpose of prayer, the pattern of prayer, the practice of prayer, the paradox of prayer, the proportion of prayer, the need for perseverance—all of that could well be looked at. But what I want to look at especially this evening is the assembly prayer meeting and consider with you not the necessity for prayer—we would all be agreed that it is very necessary that we be a praying people. In fact I think most of us would it would have to confess that we don't pray as much as we ought to, or as well as we ought to. Prayer is probably the most spiritual exercise that we engage in. You can spend or I could spend an hour or two studying my Bible. With all your helps and concordances and Bible programs, you can spend a couple of hours studying your bible. You do that relatively, I don't want to say easily, but you can do it. But to spend that hour in prayer without your mind wandering in twenty directions is a very difficult exercise. Because the more spiritual the exercise, the more difficult it is to maintain focus and to avoid all the intrusions of the flesh that come upon us. But what we want to look at then is not just the necessity—that we need to be a praying people—but the necessities: what is necessary if we are going to, as an assembly, have effective prayer. Now First Timothy, like First Corinthians is primarily what we would call a church epistle. While it is written to an individual, written to Timothy, Timothy was at Ephesus, at the church in Epheus, and Paul was writing to him relative to different things in the assembly that had to be dealt with, that had to be maintained.

In chapter one he speaks about instructions that are going to further the house of God. He speaks there of godly administration, household administration. Again the background of First Timothy is 'house of God' conditions, and so in chapter one, not

in our authorized version but in the original version, he speaks about godly edifying, or household administration. So chapter one is all about instructions for furthering the house. When you come to chapter three, it's not so much the instructions for furthering the house but the individuals who function in the house. So he'll speak about elders, and he'll speak about deacons, those who are functioning in the house, and he will key on the individuals in chapter three. When you come the chapter four, he's dealing with a man and his fruitfulness, and there are imperatives for fruitfulness in the house of God. In chapter five where he deals with care for widows and care for the poor and care for judgment against elders, he's dealing there with importance for being fair. One of the strongest and most solemn of charges he gives is in chapter five, 'I charge the in the sight of God and the Lord Jesus and the elect angels that you do these things without partiality.' That's a very strong charge for fairness in the house of God. And in chapter six it's incentives for faithfulness, with material things especially, in the house of God. But in chapter two, where we are looking at today is intercession and the fragrance that is going to fill the house.

So chapter two, then, is about the assembly prayer meeting. So a few things then, necessities, things that we need to know, if we are going to pray and pray effectively. For some who have come in late, we're looking at First Timothy chapter two, and considering the necessities of prayer. First thing we have to know is God's command to pray. Now there are three, I'll use the expression venues if you will, for prayer. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke about closet prayer, going into your closet. Close the door, and your father who sees in secret will answer openly. Now we don't have closets, or we do have closets but few of us go into a closet. But the idea of a closet is the idea of shutting everything else out and shutting yourself in with God. So that's individual prayer—shutting everything else out and being alone in the presence of God.

We'll look now at collective prayer, the assembly coming together as a unit to pray and to call upon God for its needs. That is collective prayer. There is a third form of prayer, what I call crisis prayer. And of course you have that, don't you, with Nehemiah especially, and some others, who didn't have time to get alone with God, didn't have time to call for a prayer meeting, but in the heat of the moment, faced with decision, faced with problems, they just lifted up their hearts to God. In a moment of intercession calling upon God for the help. Right at that moment in time. It's the kind of prayer you make when you're driving on the parkway or going into New York City. And so we have collective prayer, we have closet prayer, and we have crisis prayer. We're looking here tonight at what I call collective prayer.

Now, a very good question to ask. Why bother? I mean, why don't we all stay home? Instead of the time spent traveling to get here and to get home we could use that time to pray, and instead of all the money on gas or tolls or everything else, we would be much more financially efficient and much more efficient in our time management if instead of everybody coming together and praying we all stayed home and prayed. So what's the value of a prayer meeting? Let me take you back to the old testament for something for just a moment. You can look at it later in Deuteronomy chapter thirty-three. In Deuteronomy thirty-three, Moses says of the people, if God

had not been with you, how could one chase a thousand, and two chase—not two thousand, but two chase ten thousand. Now you do the math. One man chasing a thousand and two men chasing ten thousand. What are you learning? We're learning that there is a tremendous value to collective activity, that the whole—to use a common expression—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. If we were just being mathematical, we would say, one man would chase a thousand and two men would chase two thousand. But Moses says through God that two men together, combining their efforts, could chase ten thousand. So in collective activity there is more than just the individual parts put together.

So there is tremendous value in collective prayer. But if nothing else, we're commanded here for the assembly to gather together and to pray. We'll see that as we look at the section that is before us. Collective prayer has tremendous value, and we scarcely appreciate the importance of it.

There is an incident that is told about a town in the south that had been a dry town, meaning no alcohol was allowed and no alcohol was sold in the town. A man came in and he built a bar—a tavern. And a little Congregational Church, a very fundamental church, was very concerned, and they had a prayer meeting that God would intervene and do something so the bar would go out of business. Shortly thereafter there was a terrible thunderstorm, and lightning hit the bar and the bar burned to the ground. The bar owner got a lawyer and took the church to court, and sued them for causing his bar to burn down. And of course the little congregation had to get a lawyer. And they presented their opening arguments, the bar owner claiming that the church was responsible for the bar burning down, and the Church claiming they weren't responsible. After, the presiding judge said, "I don't know how this case is going to end. But I do know this. The bartender believes in prayer more than you people believe in prayer."

We pray, and we're surprised sometimes if God answers. But the value of collective prayer is hard to overestimate. So you'll notice first of all here, in this call to pray that comes from the apostle to the assembly, it's a priority. I know that we think of the breaking of bread as the most important meeting of the week. But you'd be hard pressed to prove that in scripture. Paul says before I do anything else, before I deal with elders and deacons, and deal with gift and development of gift, and deal with taking part in the meetings, deal with caring for the widows, deal with accusations against elders—before anything else, first of all I want to talk about prayer. And I want to talk about your prayer meeting. So he puts a tremendous value on the prayer meeting of the assembly.

It's obvious as we go down this chapter that the spirit of God expected both genders to be present. Sometimes, I don't know anything about Midland Park, I have heard of other places where most of the sisters stay home, because it's the prayer meeting. We're going to see that sisters play a tremendous role in the assembly prayer meeting. And that's not just lip service to keep our sisters happy. It's right here in the word of God. The value of sisters being present at a prayer meeting. You'll notice that as he speaks of it, he is impressing the believers here with the fact that there is tremendous value globally, to an assembly praying locally. When you come to a prayer meeting, come with a burden, and come and be brief.

I should have mentioned that last night, when it comes to the breaking of bread as well. Maybe I probably have adult ADHD, because when someone prays for ten or fifteen minutes. I'm off somewhere else. I can't follow. There is tremendous value to brevity. The longest prayer in the Bible, if said out loud, is the prayer of Solomon, and it takes about seven minutes to say. So the next time someone prays longer than seven minutes you can say, 'behold a greater than Solomon is here.' Brevity has tremendous merit, and praying specifically for things, getting to the point, as we'll see. So the first thing is, knowing the call or God's command to pray.

The second thing I need to know is the character of God. Now I read that for you in the old testament from the book of Exodus, where Moses says, "Show me thy glory," and God makes his name to pass before Moses, and declares that lovely full expression of all God is, "the Lord gracious and merciful, slow to anger, long-suffering, pardoning" and so on. And the reason I read that is, as soon as God reveals himself to Moses that way, Moses turns around and uses what God just revealed to pray. You're a pardoning god, Okay, pardon our sin and go with us. So I want to talk to you about knowing the character of God and using it for the sake of prayer.

Now look, some of you will know what I mean. You know, you're given an assignment in school to write, I don't know, a term paper of two thousand words, and so you start looking for synonyms to fill, to kind of pad it out to make sure you get to the two thousand words. The spirit of God doesn't look for words just to pad things out. When he speaks about prayer, intercession, giving of thanks, and supplications, he's giving us four different kinds, or four different aspects of prayer. So that, as I come to it, when I think about supplications, why would I supplicate God, if he were not the God who is sufficient? Why would I intercede? That means to ask for someone else, If he isn't the God who is sovereign? Why would I pray if he is not the God who is sacred? Why would I give thanks, if he is not the God who satisfies? So as I appreciate God as being sufficient for everything, I can come to him with everything; as I appreciate God as being sovereign and in absolute control.

I can intercede on behalf of other people. I can come to him and ask him for those who are not saved; for those who are ill; for those who have needs; and especially for the spiritual welfare of other believers. I can intercede because he is sovereign and can do what I cannot do. And I come in prayer, which is a general word that implies both worship and coming to one who is sacred. One who is able and worthy of my prayer and my attention. And I give him thanks because he is the God who satisfies. So when you think about a God of sufficiency you are thinking about his grace.

When you think about a God of sacredness you are thinking about his glory. When you're thinking about a God who is sovereign you're thinking about his greatness. When you thinking about a God who satisfies you're thinking about his goodness.

So what am I saying? I guess what I'm getting around to saying is this, the better I know God, the better I'll pray. One tremendous reason for reading this book, getting to know your God, is to be able to pray more effectively. To learn his character, to learn his heart. We're seeing it right here in this very section. We are learning what is in the deepest heart wish of God, that all men be saved and come to the

knowledge of the truth. That there is no limit to God's desire for humanity to be saved; that there's no special group that has an inside track on salvation that God is interested in, and he neglects others. We are looking here in this chapter at the very heart wish of the God of eternity. His heart is open to us, and as we go through the word of God and learn more and more of what God is like, it changes how we pray.

So my prayer life reveals what I know of God. And the more I know of God the more it changes my prayer. Now we read those words in Deuteronomy thirty-four, God's revelation to Moses. We don't have the time to do it here, but you go through the old testament—the book of Nehemiah, the book of Daniel, the book of Jonah, the book of Joel, the book of Nahum, several of the Psalms. You know what they do? They draw upon that revelation. What God gave to Moses they use for prayer. It becomes the basis of their prayer. On occasion Daniel speaks of a God who is who is merciful and long suffering. Ezra speaks of a God who who grants mercy and and long suffering and pardon and recovery.

And you could go on in the word of God. Even Jonah complains, 'didn't I know that you're a God who is long suffering and merciful and that you wouldn't judge them if they repented?'. And so the revelation given affected the prayer life of generations to come. How much do I know of God, and how much does it affect our assembly prayer meeting? How much of God do I bring into an assembly prayer meeting, that actually carries with it tremendous fragrance and worth? We're reminded here then of knowing the character of God. I don't think that there are four different prayers where somebody gets up and makes intercession, someone gets up and makes supplication, someone—I think really it should be part of every prayer: giving of thanks, supplications, intercessions. All that being part of our exercise in prayer as an assembly.

So knowing the command to pray, knowing the character of God, but then knowing the concerns of God. We are here to call upon God not to persuade God to change his mind, we are here to work together with God. Now this brings us to the great paradox of prayer. If you're partly a Calvinist you would say that since everything is determined and God is going to carry out his purposes, what value is there in prayer? Why pray if everything is going to be? Why pray? Well of course what we learn is God not only ordains the ends but he ordains the means. And he chooses to use our prayers as a fulcrum to accomplish his purposes. So mixed into this grand design of God for His purpose for the ages is the prayers of believers, which he uses to further and to move along his purposes to their ultimate ends. So learning the concerns of God for prayer.

Now we have one of them right here, that God desires all men everywhere to be saved. The unquestioned desire of God.

Now Paul quickly adds, 'for there is one God'. Now you may say, what's the significance of that? Many of the people here in the assembly at Ephesus (go back to Acts chapter twenty, go back to the beginning of the assembly at Ephesus) had been idol worshippers. Part of their pantheon of deities would include gods who would be opposed one to the other, and you would be constantly playing god against god, and

you'd be wondering which god really do you need to pray to this week, and which god you have to make sure is on your side. The god of rain if it's drought? The god of harvest? The god of sunshine? You would constantly be trying to figure out which god to work with. Paul says, there's only one god, and because there's only one god, there's only one will for all of humanity. No need to worry about opposing points of view. No need to worry about opposing deities that might have some other plans for the human race. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus.

So we have the unquestioned desire of God and the unique will of God. And of course, very practically, how do I get to know God's concerns? How do I get to know god's will? It's through this book. It's the only way. It doesn't come in dreams. In fact, it was just recounted to me, Martin Luther said he made a covenant with God. His covenant with God was that God would not speak to him through dreams, through visions, through prophets. He wanted God just to speak to him through his word. That's all he wanted. And that's all he needed. And that's how God still speaks.

That's how we learn what God's interests are in the twenty-first century world. We learn through this book what God's concerns are and what God's interests are. But I learn, as I read it, that it doesn't just say, 'this is the will of God.' There are occasions where it says that. But for the most part I see how God is working.

Now let me just take you quickly, and this could consume an entire meeting but we'll just mention these and pass on from them, if you just look at the prayers of the apostle Paul and just limit it to the four prison epistles that he wrote, Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon. There are two prison prayers in Ephesians. There is one prison prayer in Philippians one prison prayer in Colossians, and I don't think you could take what he has in Philemon as a prison prayer.

In Ephesians chapter one, he is praying for the believers to be enlightened, that they might know the riches of the inheritance, enlightened as to all their spiritual wealth. In chapter three he is praying that Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith. That they may be able to comprehend with all saints the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ. So in chapter three he's praying for enablement to enjoy spiritual truth. When you come to Philippians chapter one, you recall there that he is praying for their enrichment. And when you come to Colossians chapter one, he speaks about them walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, strengthened with all might according to the power of His glory unto all longsuffering with joyfulness. So, he's praying there for empowerment. Now just look for just a moment. He's praying for enlightenment, he's praying for enablement, he's praying for enrichment, he's praying for empowerment.

What I come away with is this. He doesn't pray about so and so's heart condition. He doesn't pray about so and so's hospital stay. Paul is vitally concerned with the spiritual welfare of the people of God. Now there is nothing wrong with praying about physical needs. It's a matter of proportion. When the Lord Jesus Christ gave his model prayer, if you want to call it that, 'Our Father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come, thy will be on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread forgive us our trespasses lead us not into temptation,'

there is a study in proportion. First of all, three things about God. Three things about myself. Three more things about God. So the first proportion I learn is, it's more about God than about myself. 'Hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us a say our daily bread forgive us our trespasses lead us not into temptation thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. '

So at both ends he weights his prayer with desires for God's will and God's glory. Now in the middle, three requests for self, but notice that only one of them has to do with physical needs. Two of them have to do with spiritual needs. So again, proportion. He's praying mostly for spiritual need, rather than just for material needs. Now just take that template and put it against most of our prayer life and my own prayer life. We pray and weight our prayers more toward the physical needs of believers and the temporary problems rather than actually praying for each other to grow spiritually, to have a greater appreciation for Christ, to have a greater appreciation for the word of God, and to appreciate more and to live more in the good of all that Christ has brought us into.

His prayers were intensely spiritual. I hope you don't leave thinking I am suggesting that we stop praying for believers going through trials, believers going through illnesses, believers who are in hospital. I'm not suggesting that at all. I am just pointing out the proportion that is seen in the prayer life of the Lord Jesus in the life of the apostle Paul is always more on the spiritual than on the material and on the physical. So we are reminded here of the unquestioned desire of God. The unique will of God. But notice it's all based upon the unlimited work of Christ.

Now he's here speaking about people being saved. So you'll understand the special relevance. Why can we pray for all men? Because the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself a ransom for all. That's why we can do it. But I am reminded of something deeper, and it's just this. The basis, the value of any prayer is based upon all that Christ is and has done. We never can come and think that our lives merit answers to prayer, as we'll see in a few moments.

The best I can do by a righteous life is not to hinder prayer, but I can never merit prayer. We always stand on the ground of mercy not of merit.

You never can make a contract with God that as long as I come to all the meetings and bring my family to all the meetings they'll all get saved and go on and be wonderful Christians. Or if I refuse that big promotion at work that's going to take me away somewhere where there's no assembly, God is going to give me a nice big raise right here where I am. It doesn't always work that way. You can't make God sign a contract with you, that's so much faithfulness will get so much answers to prayer. It doesn't work that way. Some of the most godly and spiritual and consistent believers have known the greatest trials in family life, in business life, in personal life. God doesn't sign contracts with us. We never can obligate God to answer prayer. We come and we come on the basis and on the ground alone of mercy because of all that Christ is and all that Christ has done.

So we are reminded here then of knowing the command to pray, knowing the character of God in prayer, knowing as well the concerns of God that we pray things for which we pray. But the key thing he is coming to here is knowing the need for consistency in our lives. Three areas he is going to deal with here in these verses. He's going to deal with our actions. He's going to deal with our attitudes, and he's going to deal with our attire. And these are things that I think are important to see. Now, just so there's no misunderstanding. First of all he begins with actions.

I should mention this. Look back at verse one, you'll notice that the last word in the chapter is men. You'll notice in verse four the word is men. You'll notice in verse five the word is men. You'll notice that when you come to verse eight the word is men. The difference is it's a different word. The word in the first three occurrences is the word for humanity. Humankind, if you will. When it comes to verse eight, he changes, and uses the word for males.

So now he's going to make a differentiation between men and women in the assembly. And he says if the men pray I want them to lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. So what does he is he saying? Well, go back to what he's told them to pray for. They are praying and they are showing by their prayer for the authorities that they are not rebellious, that they are not plotting sedition, that they are not doing anything to undermine the government, and the result of that will be they will be left alone to lead a quiet and peaceable life. Now he says, that's the goal of what you're praying for, but you're at war among yourselves. He said, how can you be at war among yourselves, with hard feelings towards each other, and yet you're getting up and you're praying that God will give you peaceable conditions in the world? He says, that's inconsistent. He says, if you are going to pray for others, and you want to lead a quiet and peaceable life, make sure that there's peace in the assembly. Make sure assembly conditions are consistent with what you're praying for. And so he reminds them here. Lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting. Now if you want to lift up your hands in prayer that's fine. Some people take this literally. But I think the stress here is not on lifting up your hands, but on having holy hands.

Now he says if you are praying for unsaved men to turn from sin and to turn to Christ, and your hands are dabbling in sin, that's a bit inconsistent. You're saying one thing, and doing something else. He says, that's inconsistent with what you're asking God to do.

He says, make sure that if you are going to get up and pray that you are consistent. And not only those who get up and pray. This also refers to people who are sitting, even if you're not getting up and praying. Remember, whoever's speaking in the assembly is the mouthpiece, they're representing the entire assembly in the presence of God. So these standards are not just for those that take part publicly, but for everyone. All of the men should have hands that are marked by holiness. No secret sins. No double-clicking on questionable sites. No habits that you'd be ashamed to have others know about. Make sure there are hands that are holy—clean hands. Psalms twenty-four: 'who will ascend into the hill of the Lord, who will stand in his holy place. He that has clean hands. I will wash my hands in innocence. So will I compass

thine altar.' Psalm twenty-six: clean hands. It is vital in the assembly to be marked by clean hands.

Then he says this. And I hope this is an encouragement, not a discouragement. Virtue of character is more important than vocabulary. Virtue of character is more important in your prayer life than a vocabulary that strings words out endlessly. God is looking for a heart. Clean hands.

But not only is there a need for consistency in my actions, but consistency in attitudes as well. Now he says, you are praying for others to submit to the word of God. You're praying for kings for all that are in authority. Praying for all men, really, to submit themselves to the authority of God's word. Now he says, what about the authority being recognized in the assembly? I don't want a woman to have authority over a man. I want the authority maintained as as I outlined it, as I instituted it in the garden of Eden. He says, I want to see the right attitude on the part of believers. I want to see your attitude right because you're praying for others to change, to repent in their attitude, and to submit to the Word of God, and to bow to it.

Why are our sisters in this section commanded to be in silence? Someone says, well they're being punished because Eve was the one who led into sin, and because she was the one who took and gave to her husband, she's being punished, and she's got to be silent. With all due respect of the season, humbug. That's not what it means. What it means is simply this. Adam was first formed, then Eve, going back to the garden. He says, I gave leadership to the man, and I created the woman to be a help meet for the man. Now, he says, that was the order that I intended. I intended headship and leadership in the man and a woman to be a help. Now he said in the garden roles were reversed. Eve took the lead. Adam followed and the result was disaster. Now, he says, in the assembly I want those roles to be maintained. I want the original intention I had in creation, for man to be in the place of leadership, and for the woman to be a support and the woman to be a complement to him. I want that order maintained in the assembly. So the silence of the woman is not a punishment. The silence of the woman is a return to God's original intention in divine order. Leadership is in the man; he takes the lead, and not the woman. When the woman took the lead it led to the fall.

So we have creation order: Adam first then Eve. We have the disorder that occurred in the fall. The reversal of order, Eve took the lead and Adam followed. Now, he says, the redemptive order I want maintained in the assembly is leadership in the male, and support in the on the part of the female, in the part of the sisters. So he is reinstating original intentions here in a local assembly. So if there is any place on earth that divine order should be maintained, certainly it is in the Christian family, but as well in a local assembly where the truth of God is valued and is appreciated.

Now he comes to the need for consistency in attire. Now it's always touchy to deal with dress. But we have a special latitude now, because while this used to refer to sisters, it can apply to brethren as well, so you know pretty soon the men will be wearing earrings and nose rings. So this is broad.

This is both brethren and sisters when it comes to attire. Number one, why does he speak to us here about clothing and attire? Can I suggest at least two things. Number one, if you are praying for people to value the spiritual above the material, what am I doing with my two thousand dollar Armani suits sitting in the assembly? Now I'm not saying you have to go to Goodwill to buy your clothes. But I'm just saying, if I'm putting all the emphasis on material things in my life, how can I come and pray that unsaved people will realize that the spiritual is more important than the material? And if, as he speaks in chapter two of the women adorning themselves modest apparel, just so we're clear here that in being modest, is the idea of 'becoming'. So it doesn't mean you dress to look like you're the original bag lady. You can dress attractively. You can dress becomingly, you can dress to match. But the idea is, where is the emphasis? Is all my money going for material things? Or is it that I'm recognizing the value of the spiritual? So is it the spiritual or the material? And then he says, is it the external or is it the internal? Are you putting all your emphasis upon pearls and gold and all of that, just to be seen, just to make a statement? Or are you really recognizing the value of the inward versus the outward. So attire, the way we dress, sends a message if we are putting all of our interest in the external. If we are putting all of our interest in the material and we come and we're praying for the spiritual and the internal, there's a disconnect.

And again, we're not speaking about looking slovenly. We should look nicely dressed. We should be respectfully dressed but the idea is emphasis—where is the emphasis being put? I sometimes, if I'm dealing with this relative to the breaking of bread, put the question to our sisters and to our brothers, do I spend more time picking out my wardrobe, or getting ready spiritually for the meeting? That's a way of testing where the emphasis is. Do I spend more time fussing with my wardrobe and my appearance, as compared to my spiritual condition and my preparation for remembering the Lord? You can say the same of the prayer meeting.

Now I know that has a little difficulty, because many times we're rushing home from work, rushing from dinner, and so on, but you'll understand where I'm at with this section. The emphasis the spirit of God is placing is upon the inward and upon the spiritual and recognizing the the value of that and the tremendous consistency that gives. So that when our sisters come in keeping with First Timothy chapter two, and they're nicely dressed, they're nicely adorned, but there's not gaudiness, there is not the desire to draw attention to themselves nor the desire to make fashion statements when they come. And they come and they take their place in silence and in subjection. They are adding tremendous weight to the prayer of the men who rise to lead the assembly in prayer. They are adding consistency to the requests that are being made known in the presence of God. So we need to know what is consistent with our prayer and our prayer meeting.

Just quickly at the end here. Just a word of encouragement as to, why the delays. We pray and we pray and either it doesn't happen or there's a delay. I think it was C.S. Lewis who said--no, it was Sir Robert Anderson who said the greatest trial we face as Christians is the silence of heaven. We pray, we cry, we intercede, and heaven is silent. The difficulty of delays. I would hardly for a moment stand up here and tell you that I have the answers. I can just give you some examples from

scripture. Number one, it furthers conformity to Christ. Let me give you an example from the old testament. Why was it that Hanna, year after year after year prayed for a child. And the burden kept increasing. Well, there were at least two reasons. Number one is, she was made to recognize a rival who seemed to be winning. God had a rival in the nation who seemed to be winning. They were bowing down to idols. She was barren. The nation was barren. God was grieving over a barren nation. She was grieving over a barren womb. So that as she passes through that experience she is learning the heart of God. She is learning what God is feeling. Until finally she's not thinking of herself anymore. She's not thinking of her rival anymore. She's simply thinking of the nation and she wants a child to give back to God to be a blessing to the nation. It brought her into conformity to the very heart of God.

But again I think of Paul in prison. Second Timothy chapter four. Not now a matter of conformity. Not now a matter of furthering conformity but testing confidence. Paul is about to go out and die at the hands of an unrighteous judge. And Paul says, I'm looking forward to the day when the Lord, the righteous judge, will deliver me from every evil work. Paul, wait a minute—in a couple of days, Paul, you going to lose your head. That's pretty evil, isn't it? But it's nothing compared to his caving in and denying God at the end of life. There are things that are better than losing your testimony. Could I say it's better to lose your head than lose your testimony. God will preserve me. I've got absolute confidence in God. So conformity and confidence. And when you think of men like Abraham and Samuel and others it molded character in them.

As they prayed, as they waited for God, Samuel that great man of prayer; Elijah the great man of prayer; created character, conformity, confidence. All of that as a result of the delays of God. And so as we gather together as assemblies, and as we pray and as we struggle with the silence of heaven at times, as we know the will of God better, as we seek to come into the presence of God with a genuine burden for the will of God, just to be absolutely confident we come to a God who does not need to be persuaded.

It's not that we are persuading him to our way of thinking. He's actually bringing us to his way of thinking. And we see here the tremendous value of an assembly prayer meeting when the believers are gathered together, recognizing the command of God, knowing the character of God, appreciating the concerns of God; praying with consistency before God; having absolute confidence in our God in our prayer life.