

December 2007

Praying for the authorities

Many and varied are the solemn and privileged duties which are laid upon Christian believers by our God. Among them, and of great importance, is the duty to pray for those who are in authority. Paul puts it to Timothy in these words: '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' (1 Timothy 2:1-2). There is the general scope described ('for all men') and then a more particular scope defined (rulers and authorities).

In this, as in everything, it is one thing to be told our duty. But what, in particular should we pray – as we pray for the royal family and for the government? The apostle's response to that is clear: 'that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty' (2:2).

Does that surprise you? Do not misunderstand Paul. He is not suggesting that we should pray for a quiet life in the sense of an easy time so that we may lounge around or do our own thing undisturbed. That will never be the Christian's portion while here on earth. We are in the battle. Rather we are to pray that those who have the rule over us (humanly speaking) will so govern, so think, so act, so legislate that the Christian church, and individual Christians and their families, will be able to live and work in an atmosphere free from harassment, hindrance, obstruction and threat – that we may be encouraged thereby to be the obedient citizens we ought to be – that we may be able with a good conscience to submit to the ruling authorities – and that we may glorify God in every aspect of our lives and dealings, public and private.

Governments should (among other matters) restrain evil and evildoers, uphold the sanctity of true biblical marriage, support parents in their God-given responsibilities in the bringing up and disciplining of their children, preserve freedom for gospel proclamation both indoors and out of doors, do nothing to erode the Lord's Day, uphold the sanctity of life from conception, and do all things justly according to both truth and righteousness, seeking themselves to be examples in these things. A solemn and demanding task? Indeed it is – so how much the more do they need the continual prayers of God's people, whether they acknowledge that or not!

What it all adds up to is nothing less than this: the whole perspective of a government's governing should be that they function *before God*, receive their mandate *from God* and are answerable ultimately *to God*. Let us be thankful (and prayerful) for those of the Lord's people in circles of government, influence and responsibility who understand this – and seek God's face urgently and regularly for those who do not.