

## Praying for Leaders, Even Wicked Ones

If you lived in the days of the early church, would you have prayed for Emperor Nero, as you were being burned at the stake? If you lived in Germany during World War 2, would you have prayed for Hitler? If you lived today, would you be praying for the leaders of your nation, no matter how wicked they may be?

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:1-4)*

This Scripture passage tells us that we must pray for leaders and those who are in authority. It would be so easy to ignore this passage - after all most people do. But then how can I call myself a follower of Jesus if I am not willing to do what he says? Verses such as these divide between the genuine disciples of Jesus and the fakes.

A genuine disciple is not perfect, but he is willing to strive for perfection. He knows that following Jesus takes effort, and he has committed his life to doing so. The fake, on the other hand, wants to go to heaven, but he is less interested in following Jesus. He will see verses such as these, possibly think about them for a while, perhaps even say he needs to do what they command... and then forget the matter. He may even try to obey such verses, for a short time; but he quickly loses momentum and stops. In contrast, though a disciple may lose momentum, his conscience (prompted by the Holy Spirit, using the message of the Word) will convict him of his error, and he will once again strive to follow Jesus.

It is just like James says (James 1:21-25). It is the Word of God which saves us - but only when hearing is combined with obeying. The person who only *hears* the Word of God but does not *obey* it is like a person who sees himself in the mirror, but then walks away and forgets what he looks like.

Paul says it this way: When God saves us he changes us - and this causes our values (the things we want to do) to change. Because of this, we will want to do what pleases God - after all, we are now new creations (2 Corinthians 5:14-17), no longer slaves to our old ways (Romans 6:16-23). Yes, we will still struggle with our old ways and habits (Romans 7:21-25); but it is because we *hate* our old ways, not because we *love* them.

What does this mean? I know what it means - even if I don't want to admit it. If I am a follower of Jesus, I will learn to follow him even in this matter. I do not want to choose the path that proves me to be a fake disciple.

Admittedly, it won't be easy. After all, it isn't easy to pray for someone you strongly dislike - and many leaders and authorities seem to oppose *everything* that is good and right. But Jesus did not tell us to pray only for *good* leaders, but to pray for *all* leaders and people in authority.

Again, I say it won't be easy. In fact, without God's help, it is totally impossible. But if God has begun a good work in me - in other words, if he has saved me - then it will happen.

After all, isn't that what being a follower of Jesus is all about - following him?