My dear fellow redeemed,

In my travels over the streets and freeways of the metropolitan Phoenix area, I have become an avid reader of bumper stickers. The messages conveyed by those bumper stickers range from the absurd to the obscene, from a statement of fact to an expression of opinion. Some are humorous, some are not. Some carry a word of warning, like the one I saw a couple of weeks ago on a luxury car that was being driven by a very distinguished-looking elderly lady. It said: “WARNING! This car is protected by a savage pit bull....with AIDS.”

Many of the bumper stickers I see, however, are ones that ask a question with regard to hugging. “Have you hugged your child today?” one might ask. Or “Have you hugged your horse today?” “Have you hugged your dachshund? Your dishwasher? Your brand new Dodge Dart GT” and so on and so forth.

Let’s suppose for a moment that you’re driving down the freeway right behind the Apostle Paul, and he too has a sticker plastered on the bumper of his chariot. What do you think it might say? Well, if we were to reduce the gist of these words of his which are now before us, it too might be in the form of one of those hugging questions. “Have You Hugged Your Politician Today?” On one of my secular calendars, I noticed that this Sunday is designated as “Citizenship Sunday,” so I think this might be a good time to reflect on that question, namely, “HAVE YOU HUGGED YOUR POLITICIAN TODAY?” First, when it comes to our politicians, the Apostle Paul urges us as Christian citizens to I. GIVE THEM “A PRAYER HUG.”

Recently when someone asked a certain man what he thought of the candidates from the two major political parties for the upcoming presidential election, he simply replied, “Not much. Not much at all. I think one of them is a liar,” he said, “and the other is a fruitcake. I’d like to strangle them both!” I suspect that man probably speaks for a lot of Americans, doesn’t he? But instead of “strangling” our politicians, instead of lashing out against them in bitter criticism, angry complaint, or even violent rebellion, the Apostle Paul suggests something different. He urges us Christians to GIVE THEM “A PRAYER HUG.” Or to put it very simply, pray for them. According to the Bible, all government leaders do deserve our respect and should be included in our prayers to God because they are His representatives - the authorities He Himself has placed over us with our best interests in mind. His intention for civil authorities is to maintain order, uphold justice, punish wrong-doing, and restrict the practice of evil, and we Christians are to “submit to the governing authorities,” God tells us in His Word.

“But don’t forget to give them a prayer hug too,” Paul reminds us. Remember them daily in your personal prayers. Paul tells us here that we should pray “for kings,” that is, for government leaders in the position of highest authority and who wield great power, like our own President, whomever he or she may be, and for the rulers of other nations around the world. But Paul doesn’t stop there. No, he also urges “a prayer hug” for “all those in authority” — for everyone in the government who exercises authority over us. This would include our governor, senators, and representatives, the mayor and city council members. It would also include the members of our state and national Supreme Court, county judges, even the local justice of the peace; police officers, Sheriff Joe, and highway patrolmen. Pray for these people, Paul says. Don’t just sit back and constantly bellyache about them — pray for them! “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer,” Paul says, “without
anger or disputing," v.8. Have you hugged your politician today, my friends? If so, great! If not, the day isn’t over yet.

Paul uses four different words to describe how we should approach God on behalf of our civil authorities. He tells us to bring “requests” to our Lord, which are those prayers that spring from a sense of need in some specific situations. When applied to the political arena, these may include the appeals we Christians make to our Lord that a certain law might be passed or that a judge would rule in a God-pleasing way. The “prayers” Paul mentions here refer to ongoing needs of good government, like wisdom and justice, the protection of citizens thru efforts to curtail crime, economic health and stability. “Intercessions” are the special pleas we make to God on behalf of specific individuals and their specific needs to carry out their office as God’s representative. And “thanksgiving,” of course, refers to our expressions of gratitude for the many blessings we enjoy because of the form of government God has placed over us. Instead of always focusing on what’s wrong and in need of improvement, I think we need to take more time to thank God for what we do enjoy in our country because of the political system we have.

“Give your politicians ‘a prayer hug,’” Paul says. Pray for those in authority! But what if they happen to be evil and corrupt? What about that ding-a-ling over in North Korea or some of those wackos in the Middle East? Should we give them “a prayer hug” too? Definitely. By all means. For the most part, the Roman emperors back in Paul’s day were people like that, and yet Paul urged his Christians to pray for them. This doesn’t mean that we have to like them or approve of their evil ways, but we definitely should continue to pray for them – to pray that God will work in their hearts and change their thinking, so that they might govern wisely and promote truth and justice. Throughout history there have always been world leaders who were enemies of our Lord Jesus and His soul-saving gospel of full and free salvation, and today it’s no different. If these leaders continue in their godless ways and anti-Christian attitudes, however, then prayers against them become appropriate. In the Bible we find examples of this.

The prophet Samuel, for example, learned that if he was going to pray according to God’s will, he could no longer pray for the success of Saul, the first king of Israel. You see, after a while King Saul’s power had gone to his head and he ignored God’s way of doing things, (1 Samuel 13&15). When the Lord announced that He would no longer bless Saul’s rule and was going to replace him, Samuel prayed all night in anguish. From that point on, however, he prayed for and supported Saul’s God-appointed replacement, the shepherd-boy David. In like manner, many of the psalms of David himself include prayers against those who perverted justice, promoted evil, and opposed God. Then too, the prophet Jeremiah was told not to pray for people whom God told him were incorrigible (7:16, 11:14). God had already decided to judge them, He said, and praying for them would have been futile. One of our own WELS theologians has said this: “The key reason for praying against those in government should always be our concern for God’s purpose and what He says is true, just, and right. We can’t presume to know or dictate what God will do to wicked rulers, but we can pray that He will uphold His honor and that He will create an environment where the good news of our Lord Jesus can be proclaimed boldly and freely.”

II.

This, you see, is really THE GOAL OF THE “PRAYER HUGS” we give our own politicians and those in other world governments. Paul says that the goal of our praying in this respect is that we as believers in Jesus “may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness,” v.2b. In a peaceful atmosphere under good government, we Christians are free to live and share our saving faith. “This is good and pleases God our Savior,” Paul says. “who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men,” v.3-6a. The ultimate goal of our
prayers for political leaders, then, is that God would bless us with national and world leaders under whom the gospel may be freely spread, so that thru the good news of Jesus countless people everywhere might be led by the Holy Spirit to know Jesus as their Savior who sacrificed Himself to pay their debt of sin and thru whom alone they will be blessed with everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven.

And we really need this in our world today, don’t we? It is said that when Sir Winston Churchill was lying on his deathbed, he reflected on the conditions in the world he had so heroically helped rescue. “There is no hope,” he sighed. “There is no hope.” And with that despairing observation, he died. In reality, Churchill’s dying words could very easily be applied to the political situations we see in many areas of our own world today. It really does look pretty hopeless, doesn’t it? Millions of Syrians, for example, have been forced to flee from their homeland and seek refuge in other countries because of the political instability there. Hundreds of thousands of Christians in various parts of the world are being persecuted and murdered by radical Islamists. Right here in our own country we have our own political quagmire. The House of Representatives, the Senate, and our President have a hard time working together for the good of the nation because of political ideologies. Their petty squabbles and constant bickering oftentimes cause the common people to suffer.

In his book entitled, “Kingdoms in Conflict,” Charles Colson says, “At this point in the world’s history, a great irony persists. Technology has given man power he has never known before. Giant institutions offer panaceas for all human ills. But never,” Colson says, “never has man seemed less able to devise political strategies to produce order and harmony among people.” Could it be that Winston Churchill’s dying words really are the epitaph for our day and age? Is there no hope? Well, if we cling to the idea that ultimate peace and harmony, that freedom from repression, oppression, and various types of tyranny can be achieved entirely thru human efforts and designs, then we’re kidding ourselves. That’s nothing more than a utopian illusion. If we stake our hopes on political structures alone to accomplish all these things, then, as Churchill said, “There is no hope.” That’s not the answer. The only real hope for seemingly hopeless national and international situations is our Lord Jesus and His rule in the human heart.

The Apostle Paul realized the importance of bringing people to Jesus, from the lowliest peasant to the most powerful potentate. “For this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle – “ he says, “I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles,” v.7. Paul knew that Jesus was the only real solution for the deplorable conditions in the world of his day, and it’s no different in our own world today. You see, when Jesus rules in the human heart, that’s when people realize they are at peace with God – that they have the peace which was gained for all people by Jesus, the one and only Savior. with His holy life here on earth as their Substitute and His innocent death on the cross of Calvary in their place. When Jesus rules in the human heart, that’s when the cycles of violence, vice, and evil are broken – that’s when people are truly set free from the bondage of sin, self, and Satan. When Jesus rules in the human heart, that’s when people love God and their neighbor. That’s when they want to live in peace and harmony with each other and are actually empowered to do this. And that’s precisely why Paul urges us to pray that God would bless us with national and international leaders under whom we Christians can freely live and boldly share our faith in Jesus. It’s so that thru the power of the gospel the Holy Spirit will lead other people to Jesus and bless them with the eternal peace and salvation we have found in Him.

So, have you hugged your politician today, my friends? Try to remember to give them “a prayer hug” each and every day, so that as Christian citizens in the United States of America we may continue to live “peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” and that thru our Christian witness many others will “come to a knowledge of the truth” about Jesus, their Savior and ours. God bless you in doing this. AMEN