

Devoted to Prayer

September 5, 2010

As we have been looking at the church of the living God recently, I have been especially impressed with how much easier it is to go with the flow of traditional or current expectations in relation to how we conduct ourselves in the household of God, than it is to diligently walk by faith - taking God at His word, and embracing Scriptural expectations for His assembly.

It may be easier - but it is certainly less fulfilling. Whenever we allow human constructs to override divine revelation, we will inevitably miss out on the richest blessings - the sheer wonder and glory of our Savior as it meant to be seen and enjoyed in His church.

Taking God at His Word can seem like a very risky thing to do, or so our adversary would like us to think. For us to take seriously our individual responsibilities in the assembly we are going to need to be willing to embrace serious changes - even in the way we think.

Has our current study given you a new sense of personal responsibility and genuine zeal to see this local assembly functioning more fully in obedience to the Biblical pattern that has been revealed to us by God?

Are you and I intensely desiring to experience the unique blessings that we read about in the New Testament record?

Then we need to ask several fundamental questions:

Do we really want to actually grow up in all aspects into Christ together -- so that by the proper working of each individual part, we will experience the building up of the body of Christ in love?

Are we not only willing, but anxious to make the necessary changes that will bring each of us, and all of us much closer to the "measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ"?

Or are we instead willing to 'go to church' without really being intently engaged in the sublime reality of our calling by the Lord to be the pillar and support of the truth, making disciples of all the nations, being steadily prepared for the great day when we will be presented to the Lord -- blameless with great joy?

Are we really only willing to 'go to church' and rely on other members of the body to carry the entire weight of responsibility by themselves? After all, they seem to be doing alright, they are more qualified than I am, they have a much easier situation.

Today we come to one of the most important matters in the day to day function of the body - at least if the frequency with which the New Testament deals with it - is to be taken seriously.

It is the matter of prayer.

** How important is prayer in the life and function of the household of God?

1. In the first description of the saints being together after Jesus was taken up into heaven, we find that prayer is prominent.

Acts 1:14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

2. In the first description of the priorities of the Jerusalem church after Pentecost, prayer is prominent.

Acts 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

3. Prayer is prominent in the continuing record of the progress of the church in the Acts of the apostles.

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Acts 12:12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

Acts 16:25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

Acts 20:36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Acts 21:5 And when it came about that our days there were ended, we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. And after kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

4. Devotion to prayer is a very frequent admonition to the N.T. assemblies in the epistles.

Romans 12:12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

Colossians 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing;

1 Timothy 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

1 Timothy 2:8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

5. The prayers of the saints are given a unique importance in the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 5:8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Revelation 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Revelation 8:4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

If you were to try and remove the prominence of prayer in the function and life of the New Testament church as it is described in the Bible - it would be unrecognizable.

This leads us to another important question:

** Why is prayer so important in the body of Christ?

1. It demonstrates what we really think of God.

Prayer in the assembly can validate a deep and reverential respect for the Lord, an invigorating appreciation and love for the One who delivered Himself up for us, it can indicate a genuine and intimate relationship to the Lord of glory, or it can expose a shallow and self-serving relationship to the Lord, in prayer clichés, vain repetitions, self-centered requests, and a general lack of Scriptural inspiration.

Also in a failure to simply devote the time to praying

Try to carefully consider what an unfathomably privileged position has been bestowed upon us in Christ; though each of us entered this world as defiled and defiant sinners, as spiritually dead and depraved children of wrath, hopelessly wallowing in our own lusts, malice and envy though we were haters of God, and careening out of control toward certain and eternal condemnation, God - in the riches of His kindness, forbearance, and patience -

led us to repentance, and to faith in the Lord Jesus.

In the riches of His grace He made us alive together with Christ - even when we were dead in our transgressions - and He raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. In reconciling us to Himself, and granting to us the adoption as sons, demonstrating so great a love for us that we should be called children of God.

He has provided for us an access into His very presence through prayer! (Ephesians 2:18)

(Hebrews 4:14-16)

Surely this is one of the most blessed privileges possible for saints who are now aliens and strangers in a defiled and dying world.

We are struggling on a pilgrimage that will soon lead us into the everlasting presence and perfections of our heavenly Father!

But in the mean time, we can communicate with our holy and righteous Father directly, and at any time, or in any place.

The One Who purchased the church with His very Own blood has made it possible for us to enjoy a legitimate and personal contact (genuine and close fellowship) with almighty God in prayer.

Now try to carefully consider the sheer folly and ungratefulness we exhibit by not being serious about prayer.

What does our praying demonstrate in this assembly?

- in our personal lives
- in our corporate life - when we are gathered together

What kind of relationship do we have with God in this church?

What do we really think about God?

How do we demonstrate that in our praying?

2. It draws us nearer to the Lord.

Do any of us need to draw nearer to the Lord?

Do any of us really long to draw nearer to the Lord?

Why?

Maybe we have become dull to the revelation of the glory of God in the face of His Christ.

Maybe we have become mesmerized by the shallow but subtle deception of the glory of man.

Whatever the case, drawing near to the Lord is what we really need.

"But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;" (Psalm 73:28a)

"I said to the Lord, "Thou art my Lord; I have no good besides Thee." (Psalm 16:2)

Not only personally, but together as uniquely designed members of Christ's body.

Each of us as God's children are complete in Christ, and only in Christ, and only as members of His body.

Prayer is a very critical part of drawing nearer to the Lord.

a. Prayer draws us nearer in dependence

This is especially clear in the beginning of the church Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:29, 12:5

b. Prayer draws us nearer in purpose

Our access is in one Spirit (Eph. 2:18), and through an unfathomable interceding of the Spirit Himself (Romans 8:26-27)

This is a wonder beyond our comprehending - but in individual and corporate prayer - God brings our desires more into line with His perfect will.

This is extremely important in cultivating a like-mindedness in God's people

Acts 4:31-32 (purpose and priorities)

c. Prayer draws us nearer in confidence/faith.

Again notice Acts 4:29-31.

"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." (James 5:16b)

d. Prayer draws us nearer in love. Romans 15:30 Matthew 5:44

3. Prayer is a necessary companion to the ministry of the Word.

It is no mere coincidence that the apostles spoke of their determination to be devoted to both prayer and the ministry of the word in the same breath. (Acts 6:4)

It is not enough for those who have been given the responsibility to teach to be devoted to prayer in regard to their teaching - it is part of our responsibility and privilege together.

Notice how important this was even to Paul -- Eph. 6:19, Col. 4:3, I Thess. 5:25

4. Prayer is an integral component of spiritual progress and alertness.
 - a. In relation to temptation Matthew 26:41
 - b. In relation to the ever-pressing tendency to be ungrateful Col. 4:2
 - c. In relation to spiritual warfare - struggle with the world forces of this darkness
Ephesians 6:18
 - d. In relation to false teachers, and the special dangers of the last time
Jude 1:17-21 I Peter 4:7
5. Prayer brings God glory.

"To pray and not work, is to mock God, to work and not pray is to rob God of His glory"

So, where do we - as a local assembly - stand in this matter of prayer? I believe this is one area where we are failing - and failing badly.

There are a number of areas where we have a yearning to do more for the Lord, but not enough to make the sacrifice, or put out the effort to devote ourselves together to pray for the Lord to guide us in the way that He would have us to go.

Let's face it, as remarkable a privilege as prayer is, it is hard to be devoted to it. It is just plain difficult.

We don't like to give up our time, we don't have enough experience in spending significant periods of time together doing nothing but praying. But I believe we are messing up and missing out on so much of God's greatness and goodness in failing to be devoted to prayer together.

Praying as we should is so difficult that it requires a striving - Romans 15:30

May God help us learn how to be devoted to prayer.