

Why Pray Together? – Acts 4:23-31

INTRODUCTION – We have been studying the doctrine of prayer since the beginning of this year. We have covered the hindrances to prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the frequency of prayer which is to pray without ceasing, why we must pray in Christ's name and the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Today we shall conclude our brief study on prayer by focussing on why we need to pray together.

To pray privately as a Christian is one of the first spiritual experiences we have been told to do when we accepted Christ as our Lord and Saviour. We have been praying ever since, although not according to the frequency of "without ceasing" as commanded by God. Nevertheless, we pray as believers on a regular basis. But to attend praying meetings and pray together with other believers, even from the same church, is a struggle for many, even for those who claim to have been believers for more than 20 years. Perhaps one of the most common reasons is the absence of a conviction of the significance of praying together, i.e. to experience corporate prayer.

Corporate praying or praying together ought to be a very common experience in every believer's life. All believers ought not to be afraid but to look forward to pray together with like minded brothers and sister in Christ or as a family. The following are four biblical reasons:-

I. Integral Part of Church Life – Acts 2:41-42

When the local church was born after Pentecost, the believers gathered together for their first meeting. There was no inherited order of service to guide them. They came together and the key elements of a local church were born. These key elements are found in **Acts 2:41-42** "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. **42** And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." [Emphasis added] One of these elements that must be found in any true church of Jesus Christ is praying together. Individual prayer as well as corporate prayer is an integral part of every believer's church life as the word "prayers" is in the plural. There ought to be an inward cry to God that cannot be fully explained. It is something very natural just as a child does not need to be taught to cry to his father, for he will just do it. He does not have to be taught to go to his father because he is born with this natural inclination. The believer who is born again in Christ will naturally seek his heavenly Father.

One additional observation is the fact that the Christian Faith teaches that all believers are priests and can approach God directly through the Lord Jesus Christ who is the great High Priest of all believers without distinction. This was what the first local church in Jerusalem did. There was no "teaching" instructing them to incorporate prayer into their church life. They just prayed together! It was the most natural outcome of being born again in Christ . . . to cry to the heavenly Father for help in time of need or to pray together as a body of believers in times of common struggle.

II. Strength in Times of Need – Acts 1:12-14; 12:1-5

Before Pentecost and while they waited for the filling of the Holy Spirit to empower them, the disciples were instructed by Christ to remain together in Jerusalem, the same city that crucified Christ. They were not to flee to a safer city to hide. They trusted the Lord and obeyed and waited. While they waited, the Bible says that they prayed together. **Acts 1:12-14** "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. **13** And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son of Alphaeus*, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother of James*. **14** These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." [Emphasis added] All of them were in the same predicament as they had seen the

persecution, crucifixion, death and resurrection of their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. They were afraid and yet trusting. The mixed feelings they had caused them to pray "with one accord." This phrase "with one accord" means "with the same passion." The intensity of their emotions and mental challenge, coupled with a great sense of anticipation as the Lord had asked them to wait in Jerusalem, drove them to their intense corporate prayer.

They needed to encourage one another in this critical moment of the transition from national witness to church witness. They must not fail their Lord. They all needed the same strength that the Lord alone could give them. If one of them succumbed to fear it might result in a domino effect, resulting in others also capitulating. The work of God would be thwarted. The local church would not start. The world would be doomed. Divine strength from above caused them to come together in fervent united prayer. There was no need to tell them to do it. They did it as the only spiritual response in time of great need. The Lord answered their prayers. As they say – the rest is history. The Pentecost experience came a few days later and the birth of the first local church resulted amazingly in the speaking in tongues and three thousand converts.

After the local church was founded, the believers faced their first martyrdom of one of the twelve Apostles. **Acts 12:1-5** "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. **2** And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. **3** And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) **4** And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. **5** Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." [Emphasis added] Peter was to be killed next. Herod, the evil provincial king, was crazed with pleasing the people of Israel. Since the killing of James pleased the Jews, why not kill Peter too?! But God has His time for each and every one of His children when their service on earth will end. Peter's time was not yet. The disciples did not know that at the time.

When Peter was taken, they prayed as a church for God's mercy to be upon Peter. They needed him at this early stage of the church. There was much work to be done to strengthen the faith of the believers. They prayed together and their prayers were heard by God. The church did not believe at first that God would answer their prayers so quickly. When Peter went to the church to let them know the good news that he was freed, they could not believe this amazing deliverance. But God did deliver. The people prayed and were strengthened.

III. Mutual Encouragement and Sharing of Lives – Hebrews 10:23-25; Romans 15:30-33

As we serve and witness for Christ on this earth, there are dangers and pitfalls that the god of this world will inflict on all of God's people. We are not indestructible in terms of not succumbing to temptations. We will still fall into the sins of the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. These will plague all believers all the days of their lives as long as they serve the LORD in this mortal flesh. Temptations that come our way include sicknesses, persecutions, seduction though the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of the world. They are very real. We need one another as believers to mutually encourage one another so that we can serve the Lord faithfully as a united body of Christ. Hence the injunction from God in **Hebrews 10:23-25** "Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;) **24** And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: **25** Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

The purpose of coming together is to help one another to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. It is not the loss of salvation but the loss of testimony for Christ that is at stake. This is a very vital stake in every believer's life. Our loved ones whom God sends into our lives

depend on our witness for Christ. When we are holy and righteous, they see Christ clearly. When we are in sin the image of Christ is badly marred. They will be stumbled instead of being blessed. Coming together helps us overcome this dangerous and sinful problem. One of the best purposes to gather together is not for fellowship with one another which is very important but to pray together before God's throne of grace and mercies. "Praying together for one another" builds a closeness that has to be experienced in order to know the joy and inward relationships that believers have with each other through Christ. There is no other way to experience this. This was Paul's request too in **Romans 15:30-33** "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me: **31** That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints; **32** That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed. **33** Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen." [Emphasis added] The Apostle Paul understood the spiritual benefits and reality of corporate prayer and that was why he requested the Christians in the Roman church to pray with him. They were able to identify themselves with Paul and also shared his concerns and desires with him when they prayed for him and with him before God's throne of grace and mercies. The three purposes that reveal this sharing are listed in verses 31 and 32.

IV. An Example of Praying Together – Acts 4:23-31

Peter and John were arrested by the Sanhedrin Council members. They were imprisoned for one day. The next day they were warned not to preach Christ anymore. But Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and declared boldly before the Council members the gospel of Jesus Christ. They were chided to keep silent and not speak or teach anymore in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John refused and replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. **20** For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20) This boldness encouraged the believers to pray and praise together before God almighty.

When God's people experience the same deliverance or commit to God the common spiritual struggles after they pray together in fervent prayer, the spiritual experience that results in united praise in worship before God is priceless. This was the case in **Acts 4:23-31** "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. **24** And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: **25** Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? **26** The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. **27** For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, **28** For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. **29** And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, **30** By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. **31** And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." [Emphasis added] – They were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God boldly! The result of praying together was greater spiritual blessings.

Another result of praying together was the knowledge that they were indeed one family in Christ. They would fight God's battle together and also shared what they had with one another. **Acts 4:32-35** "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said

any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. **33** And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. **34** Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, **35** And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." The closeness they experienced was based upon a common battle and praise and prayer. Their lives were indeed one in Christ.

APPLICATION – Individual prayers and corporate prayers are part and parcel of every believer's life. This has been the intention of God from the beginning when the church was born. Witnessing for Christ on earth is fraught with dangers to the holy witness of every believer. Praying together will avail believers the right kind of strength resulting in a sustained holy and godly witness for Christ. Yes we need to depend on the Holy Spirit and Christ to keep us. But God has also given to us fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to provoke one another unto love and more goods works. Praying together is one of the best ways to accomplish this. What better way to share lives than to share it before God's throne of grace and mercies in prayer as one body of Christ! The intimacy and mutual love and bond that are for all believers are made possible only through praying together. We share the load of our burdens. We help because of the love we have for one another in Christ. There is a sincerity to give and help others with our time, energy and substance expecting nothing in return which is like heaven on earth! This is true Christian fellowship. This is the fruit of praying together before God. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the hindrances believers face when it comes to attending the weekly church prayer meeting? What can be done to overcome them?
2. Do you think that the church weekly prayer meeting attendance is a good indicator of the church's spiritual well being? Give reasons for your answer.
3. What are some examples of "praying together" that will provide long term blessings to the ones who pray together?
4. A secondary school believer is invited by his friends to join them in praying together for the salvation of their classmates. It is held after school in one of the classrooms. In what situations can he and can he not attend? Give reasons for your answer. Apply this to the work place as well.
5. "Families that pray together stay together!" Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer.