

The Practice to Which the Church Must Return

by John Franklin

The church must return to the practice of corporate prayer in order to experience a deeper relationship with God, love Him more, depend on Him, obey His commands, and see God's power and favor exercised on their behalf.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 18:20, Acts 1:8, Acts 6:1, James 5:16

Topics: "Corporate Prayer", "Repentance"

Description

John Franklin discusses the root cause of moral collapse in America and the church, attributing it to the loss of the fear of God. He emphasizes the need for repentance and restoration of fellowship with God to see His favor and power manifested. Franklin highlights the importance of corporate prayer as an essential practice for churches to regain favor and power with God, drawing from the example of the early church in Acts.

Transcript

This series of articles has been arguing that the root cause of the moral collapse in America and more specifically the church has been the loss of the fear of God. My primary appeal to this fact is that on the whole those calling themselves Christians are basically doing the same things in the same proportions as the world. In the last article I contended that God is calling His people to account for their sin as evidenced by the fact that our enemies are winning. This issue I seek to answer the question, "If we are to repent and restore fellowship with God, if we are to see God's favor and power exercised on our behalf again, then where do we start?"

The Bible, of course, is the plumb line the Holy Spirit uses to measure obedience and practice. Since all Scripture was written for our benefit, and since the early church had power and favor with God, then could we not rightly assume that God left their record as an example of how our churches should also please Him? Does it not make sense to ask, "What did they do? Why did God use them so mightily? How did they conduct their relationship with God?" I used to answer that question by appealing to Acts 1:8 in which Jesus commanded them to be witnesses. Since they eagerly obeyed and God moved powerfully I concluded that evangelism and missions were the practices that determined a powerful relationship with God. After careful study of the book, I no longer believe that.

Don't get me wrong. Missions and evangelism remain the preeminent task of the church. Jesus' fervor in stating the Great Commission four times after His resurrection proves that. But they don't create a healthy

church life; they reveal a healthy church life. They are not the cause, but the effect. And the apostles knew it because missions and evangelism were what they did in the marketplace, but with the people of God they primarily practiced two other things. One of them we still practice, but the other one we don't. I believe the neglect of this second practice is the greatest contributor to our loss of favor and power with God.

So what are they? The choosing of first deacons in Acts 6:1-4 reveal them. Let's recap the story briefly. A great problem arose in the early church because favoritism crept into the ministry of feeding widows. The apostles agreed that correcting this problem is important, but they refused to personally oversee the ministry because it would interfere with their two primary ministries. What were they? The apostle's statement in verses three and four prove they believed the two primary jobs of church leadership were to corporately teach/preach/interpret the Word, and to lead the church in corporate prayer.

Why do I say these verses speak of corporate ministry? Two reasons - First the Greek is clear. It literally says "Look...for men... whom we will appoint over this business, but we to the prayer and the ministry of the Word, will steadfastly continue." It is obvious that verses 3 and 4 are contrasting the ministry the seven deacons will oversee with the two ministries the apostle will oversee, all of which deal with church life, not their personal life. Second, a survey of Acts 1-5 reveals what they practiced. I read the first five chapters and looked for every example relating to the word and prayer. Every single time it dealt with the corporate life of the church. (For the Word see 1:16-22, 2:14-40, 2:42, 3:11-26, 4:23-31, 5:20-25, 5:42. For examples of prayer see 1:14, 1:24, 2:42, 3:1, 4:23-31)

As Southern Baptist we do fairly well in the corporate ministry of the Word. Preaching is the centerpiece of worship services. Sunday School has been our legacy for over 100 years. More recently we have led the way in discipleship courses. While there is always room for improvement, we practice the corporate ministry of the Word.

What we don't practice is corporate prayer. Until we do, we will not see significant change in our denomination. Please don't misunderstand me - I am not saying until we practice personal prayer (as vital as that is). No, I am boldly saying corporate prayer - prayer meetings in church, in homes, even in our world. I base this on 3 facts from the Bible. First, as we have already mentioned, the apostles listed corporate prayer as one of their two indispensable ministries. Second, the overwhelming majority of commands to pray in the New Testament are given to the church, not the individual. Jesus Himself taught on prayer in 37 verses on 14 different occasions. Of those 37 verses, only four are addressed to the individual. In the other 33 He corporately addresses His disciples. Third, the mighty moves of God after the cross primarily occur when the church prays, not an individual. Before the cross God worked most often in conjunction with the prayer lives of individuals like Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Daniel etc, but in the book of Acts He most often works through the prayer life of the church.

Two other facts also give strong evidence of the necessity of corporate prayer. History records that when God turned a culture upside down, the Christians practiced corporate prayer. I do not know of a single time since the cross that the church influenced the culture more than the culture influenced the church apart from the church practicing corporate prayer. Likewise, everywhere Christianity is making great strides today - Korea, China, India, Africa, Latin America, etc - corporate prayer is regularly practiced. I have risked overkill to indelibly drive home the point - God will not exercise His power and favor on our behalf against our culture until we return to the practice of corporate prayer.

Now why is that? If you were God, why from your perspective would you withhold your favor and power when your people ceased to pray together? Why would you view prayerlessness as one of the most heinous sins a church can commit?

Prayerlessness produces a minimum of five deadly consequences for the church - a lack of relationship with God, of love for Him, of dependence on Him, of obedience to Him and of the proper fear of Him. First, if we don't pray together, how can the church even say she has a relationship with God? She's not relating because she's not communicating. The whole purpose for which God saved the church is that we might know Him by experience, but prayerlessness robs that. Second, how can the church say she loves God if she doesn't spend time with Him? Those whom we love, we seek. Prayerlessness indicates a cold heart. When our love grows cold, what else would God want? He doesn't need our service; He could only desire a love relationship. Third, if we don't call on God, then how can we say we depend on Him? We must be turning to something else - perhaps programs, preaching, promotion or the latest business principles from Wall Street, but in the end it's not God. Fourth, God commanded prayer. A failure to do it is disobedience, pure and simple. Fifth, whenever the people of God no longer experience the presence of God, they lose the fear of God. The lack of encountering God creates amnesia of His holiness and a willingness to disregard Him and our accountability for sin. Hence we have the problem of those claiming to be Christians doing basically the same things in the same proportion as the world.

Most prayer meetings in churches have only a fraction of the membership present. Perhaps it's because we no longer know the importance of prayer. Perhaps it's because many prayer meetings are dead. Perhaps it's because we do not view prayer as a priority. Whatever the case the bottom line remains the same - until we return to corporate prayer, we will continue to lose. The good news, however, is that many churches are rediscovering prayer and are seeing their church life revolutionized. Testimonies abound how God has responded to the cries of His people. These churches have experienced spiritual growth, numerical growth, debt retirement through prayer alone, God healing members, and many others manifestations of grace. God's working indicates His invitation for His people to return. The time is now. Let's us wholeheartedly do whatever it takes until our all churches in our denomination can truly be called "a house of prayer." If we do that God will be faithful to His promise. He will hear from heaven, forgive our sin, and heal our land.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-franklin/the-practice-to-which-the-church-must-return/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net