

22-October-2023 | Discussion Questions

A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Prayer | Acts 4:23-31 | 9marks.org (Pr. Mark)

1. Paul exhorts us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). How does a Christian's liberty in prayer make this possible?
2. What elements should be present in our personal and corporate prayers?
3. Is there a particular element you would like to focus on improving in your own prayer life?
4. How could you convince someone that Christians, though forgiven, should confess their sins before God?
5. Why is confession such a blessing for Christians?
6. Why is prayer for civil magistrates and the church worldwide important and what does it demonstrate about the Christian faith?

Lesson Notes: A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Prayer

A. All of our public prayer as a church should be an outgrowth of our private prayer.

1. The New Testament commands us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).
 - a. A pattern for prayer is established in a variety of circumstances that support the possibility of continuous prayer.
 - b. Praying without ceasing means that Christians must pray privately.
2. All basic aspects of prayer should be in our personal prayer time—praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and supplication.

B. A church's practice of prayer will vary because there is a natural liberty in prayer.

1. There is no set time for church prayer meetings; a church may meet on a Sunday or on a Wednesday or have a prayer time for specific demographics.
2. A church may decide to meet in response to events in the life of the church or in the life of the nation, giving itself to prayer for God's work around the world.

C. Specific language is helpful in leading a church in prayer.

1. The church is one body, so representative prayer uses plural pronouns.
 - a. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father" (Matt. 6:9–13).
 - b. Public prayer is an opportunity to lead the church into the presence of God, acting as a representative for one people.
 - c. The natural focus of public prayer is on matters of common concern.
2. The church is one body, so it identifies and agrees with representative prayer.
 - a. A congregation should say, "Amen," at the conclusion of prayers as a verbalized agreement and ownership of what has been prayed.
 - b. "Amen" is rooted in the Hebrew word for "this is true" or "I agree."
3. The church is one body, so the language used in prayer communicates the unity found among one people coming before God.

D. Different types of public prayer help a local church.

1. A church may have a combination of short and long, spontaneous and planned prayers, each serving a particular function within the church.
 - a. Prepared prayers are important considering the representative nature of public prayer.
 - b. People often equate spontaneity with sincerity, but prayers that are thought out beforehand are not necessarily insincere.
 - c. Short prayers take less time to prepare and are inherently flexible, so a church can pray for a variety of matters over a brief period of time.

E. Prayers on the Lord's Day should be specifically directed toward praising God.

1. The Bible gives us examples of prayers of praise.
 - a. Jesus taught us to pray, "Hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9–13).
 - b. David extols and commends God by reflecting on His grace, mercy, and goodness in Psalm 145.
2. Prayers of praise will help a church think about God throughout the week as the self-existing, ever-present, Almighty God of goodness, mercy, and love.
3. Prayers of praise can be supplemented with thanksgiving.
 - a. We thank God for what He has done (Rev. 4:11).
 - b. When the disciples gather to pray in Acts 4:23–31, their requests are overshadowed by praise.

F. Prayers on the Lord's Day should be specifically directed toward confession to God.

1. The Bible gives us examples of prayers of confession.
 - a. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:9–13).
 - b. The Psalms are filled with prayers of confession (Ps. 32:5), and the Bible commands us to confess our sins (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).
2. Confession is the continual practice of acknowledging the truth of God.
 - a. Christians are forgiven and yet continue to confess their sins to God because the daily nature of the Christian life is repentance and faith.
 - b. Confession is publically declaring that God is true, we have sinned against Him, and we need Jesus Christ.
 - c. Confession highlights the gospel of a holy God who lovingly receives our confession because of the person and work of His very own Son.
 - d. Confession exalts the mercy of God and gives us an opportunity to marvel at His wondrous love.

G. Prayers on the Lord's Day should be dedicated to asking for God's help.

1. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come" and "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:9–13).
2. Pastoral prayers may vary by context but should contain essential categories.
 - a. Prayers should represent those present in particular times of need or who sense their own need.
 - b. Prayers should resemble the concerns of the sermon and should be offered for governing authorities (1 Tim. 2:1–2).
 - c. Prayers should be made for other denominations, the preaching of the gospel, and our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.

H. Prayer should characterize the life of the church, and the entire congregation should meet for prayer.

1. Prayer should characterize more than just worship by being a regular part of the meetings and daily interactions within a church.
2. The life of a local church involves prayer, so doing the beneficial spiritual work of prayer should be commonplace for every member within a church.