

'Prayer Meetings' Revisited

Written by K B Napier

Friday, 13 February 2015 09:33

I have been in ministry for all of my Christian life, and 'formalised' it in 1985, when I also became a pastor. Soon after that date I studied and summarised the whole subject of prayer meetings, and presented the study in easily-digested form to a not-too-eager Christian public. They were not eager, because the paper contradicted a treasured reformed position. But, what could I do? Pretend I had no knowledge of the teaching of God's word?

Soon after I presented the paper, I had a personal visit from a Christian medical doctor who lived 200 miles away. He had taken time off from his very busy practice to see me. In a letter he enthused over the 'fresh air' he said he found in my work. His visit to my home lasted many hours, as he bubbled over with the same enthusiasm. He wanted to 'spread the word' that my ministry was fresh and vital, and he finally left, full of praise and promises, because he had found someone who taught doctrine as it is found in scripture. He also promised to support the ministry in a big way.

But, his enthusiasm was only skin deep! I have often noted that most people choose a church or a ministry, rather than allow God to lead them. They choose on the basis of personal feelings and beliefs. Thus, they ignore or leave a church that teaches sound doctrine, in favour of gatherings that best fit their personal ideas and wishes.

My doctor friend wrote to me soon after his visit, thanking me for the wonderful time he had had. Then, he suggested that we met up again to discuss details, 'in prayer'. He 'felt' that we ought to pray together for several hours.

I had spent many, many months searching scripture when I examined the subject of prayer meetings, and my findings were there to read. He had read them himself! I was compelled to write back thanking him for his interest, but that I could not meet for what would be 'concentrated' communal prayer, and, I had no calling to have such a time. How could I go back on what God had shown me? Needless to say, I had no response and the 'friendship' disappeared immediately! Thus, I lost a possible large income, because I preferred to adhere to scripture. He did not even ask me to elaborate on my findings. So much for genuine fellowship.

One of my other observations is that countless folks wish to be my friend. They read everything I write. When we meet they recognise the soundness of the doctrine. But, from long experience, I know that many who are ultra-enthusiastic will eventually walk away, as though I had nothing

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good to say. Why? Because their acceptance of what I say is based not on soundness, but on their own perception of how I ought to act and teach. Once I step on their toes they quickly run the other way.

By that I mean they can accept 99% of what I say, but once I cross their favoured belief or practice, they back off and go the other way. Nothing I teach is opposed to scripture or to vital aspects of salvation, etc., so why act in that way? They are willing to leave soundness in order to maintain their own beliefs, even when they have no true basis on which to found them.

On one occasion when Peter visited Paul, Paul had to admonish Peter for teaching what amounted to heresy. This was a very public affair. Yet, both men remained friends. Things became heated for a while, but they each recognised that the other was called by God to ministry, and both shared the same faith. So, they did not just walk away from each other. They stayed friends, brothers in the Gospel. Sadly, this kind of reality is rarely found in the churches!

Over the years I have met with huge numbers of Christians, and many of them have unsubstantiated beliefs. Yes, we share the same beliefs on salvation, etc., but there are definite differences over certain issues. Yet, I do not shun them or walk away.

I have revisited the subject of prayer meetings (remember – this has nothing to do with prayer itself). I have looked again at why people meet for prayer, whether they meet as formal churches, in small groups of friends, or even two at a time. I have searched scripture yet again. And, do you know... my conclusions remain the same! Therefore, I will not move from my stance.

What bothers me is that men and women think it is acceptable to walk away from sound doctrine simply because they 'feel' I am wrong on this matter. Though I ask them pointedly to tell me from scripture why they believe they may attend prayer meetings, they cannot! Instead, they become quite petulant, and say things like, "I believe what I believe", or "I know inside", or "I feel the need to pray with others", and so on. Any reason but a Biblical one! Christ was very clear when He said that we should pray alone in private.

The only other times of prayer taught by God are found in the article I wrote. I cannot change it, because I cannot change scripture! Those who insist on meeting for prayer, even when God

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has not given them one mind and one purpose, and when there is nothing particularly urgent to pray for, pressed upon them individually, they nevertheless meet together regularly to pray! Friends, I cannot fathom that.

I dutifully met for prayer for years. And then God gave me the Bible to read instead of the ideas of men. I had always read it from the angle of other men's ideas. Now, I read it free from those shackles. The differences are amazing. I have said elsewhere that those who maintain their prayer-meeting stance do so from a personal basis, and not from the basis of scripture. This is so obvious as to be painful.

I have no doubt whatever that people insist on their prayer meetings out of a sense of tradition. Many have personal issues, such as a psychological desire to 'spill the beans' to others. Some 'feel' better by saying things that are private to a group. Others want to 'roam the world' and pray for people and things they know little about. Yet others want to 'call on God', and feel the only way to do so is with others. This is nothing but a magical rite. Feeling better about it does not make it true! And others (we have all met them!) pray because they love to elongate the hems of their garments, the sound of their own voice filling them with much self-admiration.

In essence, then, folks are willing to shun a ministry, or back away from it, on the basis of personal feelings, even when they have no support in God's word. And even when they may agree with 99.9% of the other teachings. Logically, this can be for one of two reasons: either Satan has subtly persuaded them to believe a lie, or they have psychological problems that override soundness of doctrine. How else can we explain the phenomenon? If scripture teaches something and a Christian refuses point-blank to accept it, then it is not the fault of the one doing the teaching.

Scripture teaches that we should pray alone in private. These are Christ's own words. We may meet together for prayer on rare occasions and for very specific reasons. These times have already been described in the article, and they are rare. I do not find, anywhere in scripture, the idea of praying in groups, of any size, on a regular basis. None at all. Indeed, such notions are against scripture and are indicative of an Arminian spirit. The ones who have a particular problem with all this tend to be charismatic at heart... they must 'do' something.

I know this from the communications I receive from all around the world, which bear similar traits and perceptions. Christians who have come away from charismatic churches seem to have a 'residual effect' that causes them to retain Arminian thinking. This can range from great

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to small. It is inevitable that such folk will walk away from sound teaching at some time, because they have never been fully cleansed of their former ways. They still cannot grasp the importance of scripture-only (though they claim otherwise).

But, whatever the cause, I cannot go back on my teaching on prayer meetings, for they are rooted firmly in scripture. What is your belief rooted in?

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