

## Prayer Meetings:- “A critique of Peter Masters’ booklet”

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 09 February 2010 10:52

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This assessment of [‘The Power of Prayer Meetings’](#) by Dr. Peter Masters, should be read in conjunction with my own Article A-001 ‘Are Prayer Meetings Valid?’. Dr. Masters’ booklet, published by Sword and Trowel, is available through Christian bookshops, or direct from Metropolitan Tabernacle, Elephant and Castle, London, SE1 6SD.

It is possible that Dr Masters read my article before writing the booklet, published in 1995. I say this tentatively, because several phrases and ideas found in it appear to be taken from my Article, the second edition of which was published in 1994 (the first was published about ten years previously). Of course, the similarities might easily be coincidental; at any rate, this does not make any difference to the content of the critique. I have a deep belief that Christians must discuss their differences properly and fully. Sadly, many think this is not acceptable (especially if a famed preacher is being critiqued) and so any form of opposition or criticism is swept under the carpet. In Christ I am free to state my case, just as Dr Masters and others may state theirs.

It is not my aim to discredit Dr Masters or to cause others to think of him in a discourteous manner. The aim is simply to teach what scripture says which, I believe, I have done adequately in my own Article. In that Article, I openly invite others to show me any Biblical error, so that I can amend my treatise if necessary.

Soon after I wrote my article, the Evangelical Times kindly read it and said that though they accepted the main thrust of its argument, they were not so sure about one or two details (though they did not specify which details). I was grateful to them for giving the Article a brief mention in their ‘paper.

Now, I wish to show Christians why I continue to uphold my original treatise, by critiquing the work of Dr Masters. I use his work for the purpose because it so closely follows my own thinking in its earlier sections and because his booklet has been read by many Christians. Indeed, I was prompted to read this booklet because one of my readers wrote to me in confusion. He had accepted my own argument until he read the one by Dr Masters! Now, he is torn between the two presentations, because both appear to be correct!

Therefore, I had to respond, and the only way I could do so intelligently, was to read the booklet. As I began reading it, I wondered if I would, at last, have to recant, or at least rewrite, my own argument. But, it became obvious from the start that this would not occur. By the time I

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had finished the booklet I was very sure of my ground, and can say that, in my eyes, Dr Masters has got it wrong. I invite readers to examine both publications honestly and to check the scriptural evidences. If you think my own conclusions are incorrect, then so be it. All I ask is that you rely on God’s word and not tradition. (The very first problem I have with the booklet is the title, which is basically Arminian, for it extols the meeting and not God-given prayer itself).

### Two Kinds of Meeting Pages 3 and 4

Dr Masters sets out his belief in the first sentence:

“In order to grasp the unique place of a church prayer meeting we must appreciate that there were two distinct types of service in the early church, a pattern still followed today.” The two meetings he refers to are “the more public gatherings for worship and instruction” and “another, rather different, kind of meeting... the prayer meeting.”

By flowing from describing the first type to describing the second, the impression is given – and this seems to be the intent – that both are equal and of similar type. But this is not so, at least not in scripture. The idea that both share the same kind of platform is a biased\* assumption, based on Dr Masters’ initial assumption: that prayer meetings, the formal and scheduled type, are valid... something he has yet to prove. (\* By ‘biased’ I mean a pre-formed view based on a particular way of thinking. We all have a bias toward this or that approach to scripture, but one bias may be authentically scriptural and the other may be untenable, in which case it becomes a prejudice).

He again makes another great assumption in the first paragraph, when he claims that the first type of meeting was ‘led’ by “**people who were members of the pastoral or teaching team... which... included prophets and ‘junior’ prophets (the tongues-speakers) who functioned alongside the pastors and teachers**”.

This is a huge

presumption, without Biblical foundation.

These ‘leaders’, he says, constituted the ‘platform party’ who ‘led the worship’ in an ‘ordered, pre-arranged, premeditated and harmonious service (according to 1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40)’. Later in the booklet such men are spoken of as being ‘officers’ of the local church – a notion I strongly oppose, as my arguments elsewhere show. My own view is that in the early church as well as today, there are/were no ‘officers’, only ‘offices’. The difference is important to

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understand.

The assumption, that services were ‘led’ by ‘officers’ or a ‘platform party’ says more about typical Reformed (and Arminian) thinking than about what scripture truly says. Scripture does not talk about ‘officers’ or about ‘platform parties’ who ‘led’ meetings. Dr Masters has come to this conclusion with a traditional bias rather than by reading texts as they are written. Thus, with great respect for Dr Masters, it comes down to a wrong interpretation of scripture. He has written many fine articles and delivered many good sermons, but, on this occasion, he has got it wrong.

My own interpretation, which, I honestly believe, allows texts to speak for themselves, is that there were no officers or platform party; meetings were orderly and harmonious **not** because other men organised them to be that way,

**but because the Holy Spirit prompted men and women as He saw fit.**

Indeed, in other texts, we read of Christians meeting and praying with one accord – the meaning of which, when compared to current ideas of prayer meetings, is explosive and dynamic! Harmony in meetings is

**not**

a matter of being well organised by a platform party!

**It is achieved solely by the joining together of hearts and souls totally given over to the Lord in love, humility and obedience**

The assumption by Dr Masters plainly upholds the hierarchy idea of churches, whereas my own understanding of churches is that they should be congregations of saved men and women, all equal in status in God’s eyes, with no ‘platform party’, no ‘officers’, and no-one who ‘takes charge’. The pastor (whether one or several) is merely another church member with a particular function, the teacher (whether one or many) has another function, and so on. The pattern is found in the description of the Body of Christ given by Jesus Christ: each one in the Body has a different but equally important function, and the only Head is Himself!

(Some think that bishops are ‘senior pastors’. I have no problem with that - bearing in mind that ‘bishop’ is used in scripture as synonymous with ‘pastor’ and ‘elder’ - for experienced pastors surely can be a blessing to others. I do not accept that bishops are ‘higher’ than other pastors, or that they ‘rule’ the church in a management sense. Yes, a pastor must look after the flock and watch out for their spiritual welfare, but that does not equal a ‘boss’ or manager, or warrant a ‘platform party’).

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I detail this matter because, by talking about hierarchies in this way, Dr Masters is identifying himself as a traditionalist. It is thus fair to question his understanding of prayer meetings because of this predisposition, which, to me, is at odds with scripture.

Dr Masters believes that the ‘prayer meeting’ was less public and less formal. He says that it contained no teaching element and that all who attended were believers. In these assumptions he concurs with my own view. I have the feeling, which may be wrong of course, that he means by this that other meetings contained a mix of believers and unbelievers. This, too, would be correct, though I hope he agrees with me that the ‘Church’ itself could only consist of believers, even if unbelievers happened to attend meetings at times.

The prayer meetings in scripture did not contain teaching, simply because they were spontaneous gatherings instigated by the Holy Spirit and were not planned. Dr Masters does not, it seems, accept that this was so, though there is every indication in texts that I am right. In a sense, though, he agrees, because he acknowledges that such prayer meetings were “**convened in a hurry, by way of response to some pressing crisis...**”

His analysis is spot-on and agrees with my own findings. So, why, then, does he insist that current prayer meetings should be any different? **Why does he say the prayer meetings in the early churches were spontaneous, and yet demand that today’s meetings must be scheduled and formalised?**

reliance on tradition and not on scripture.

The answer is a

Dr Masters goes on to say that ‘such a meeting’ is found in Acts 1, when the disciples met together in an upper room. With respect, this was not a meeting that was scheduled as a standard church meeting. We find that they gathered for an urgent reason – to elect another apostle instead of Judas. It was not, then, a scheduled church meeting, but was a time when all of them had a burden thrust on them by God, a burden that led them to pray with ‘one accord’ (the key element as far as I am concerned). So, that incident cannot be used by Dr Masters as an example of a scheduled meeting in the normally accepted sense.

The next example he gives is of a spontaneous meeting for prayer directly demanded of them by God, and not as a matter of an entry in a diary... to pray about the order from the chief priests not to preach in the name of Christ. Dr Masters says that this meeting is an ‘example to

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be followed’. But, it is NOT... **it is an historical account of an event taking place at that time.** The text does, however, tell us that the apostles met with ‘one accord’ and ‘one mind’... and this happened every single time they met for urgent prayer! No schedule and no ‘leaders’.

Whilst he claims this is an example to follow, he disregards the sign ministry and prophetic utterances – which he believes did not continue beyond the lifetime of the apostles. Why insist on one part as an ‘example’ and disregard another part? Who gave him, or us, the authority to do so? And where in scripture is there freedom to differentiate in this way, accepting one thing and rejecting another? What are the criteria for rejection and acceptance? He does, however, accept that the prayers were given because of a serious threat to their testimony. Thus, Dr Masters unwittingly agrees with my own conclusions!

Sadly, in the last paragraph on page 4, Dr Masters’ interpretation of events goes a little haywire. He says, quite categorically, that the words of Jesus in Matthew 18: 19, 20 refer to the ‘special privileges and rules of church prayer meetings.’ Friends, this text says no such thing! The text says this: **“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”**

Nowhere in that text do we find an instruction to convene prayer meetings as scheduled events. Rather, it is a promise by Jesus that if we pray with ‘one accord’ then our prayers will be answered. Do not think for one moment that this refers to the kind of ‘prayer meetings’ we have come to know in our generation! Far from it! The kinds of prayer Jesus is referring to were full of life and certainty, prompted by the Holy Spirit, causing those who were to pray to think and speak with one mind! And such prayers were always spontaneous and urgent, not scheduled.

For Dr Masters to say this passage gives us ‘privileges and rules of church prayer meetings’ is to stretch credulity too far. It is a major error of interpretation. Read it again and search for what Dr Masters is saying and you will not find it. Indeed, the text does not specifically refer to prayer at all, or to group prayer, though we may assume it can refer to prayer, if we wish to interpret that way. Personally, I could accept such an interpretation if Dr Masters had not misinterpreted the meaning as ‘providing rules and privileges’, **for the text simply does not say that.**

It is very important for us to get this straight, for Dr Masters is building up his case for the existence of formal prayer meetings. We must not begin with speculation, which is what Dr Masters is doing. True Biblical interpretation is to hold to meanings that the texts themselves give us. In this case, Dr Masters has got it totally wrong and I must say so. Obviously, the text i

**S** referring to prayer, but in no way is it referring to rules and privileges. To say it does, is to extrapolate and project our own ideas onto a text.

As Dr Masters says: “**These passages, and others, form the basis of this booklet**”. Thus, we must establish if this ‘basis’ has any true foundation. I have shown that his basis does not have a sound foundation. Check for yourselves and you will see that I am right. But it is not me who is right; I am only interpreting scripture as it ought to be interpreted, without imposing upon it my own ideas or having and displaying a predisposed reliance on tradition.

### **The Special Status of Prayer Meetings** **Pages 5 – 8**

In this section Dr Masters quotes from Spurgeon, as though this validates his claims. But, here, too, we find a similar assumption – that prayer meetings should take place on a regular, scheduled basis even though no such thing is found in God’s word.

Spurgeon asked why so many Believers did not see the special significance in organised prayer meetings. I asked the very same question in my own detailed study and could only conclude that, like me, most Christians cannot see the significance because there **is** no significance in scheduled prayer meetings! Once I realised this, my guilt – imposed by religious zealots and not by scripture or by conscience – fell away and I was relieved. Why feel guilty for not accepting something that scripture does not extol or command?

In this section Dr Masters accurately pinpoints objections to the prayer meeting. His summation of these is like my own. But, his deductions are very different, because he is concerned with tradition rather than scripture. He says that, theoretically, “**Most believers agree that the prayer meeting is the ‘power house’ of the church. But how many really think so? If they did, all the church prayer meetings would be packed.**”

Precisely! Most people accept what they are told to accept by their pastors, and most pastors tell them that the prayer meeting is the ‘power house’. But, very few inwardly agree with that claim. Hence the very poor turn-out at prayer meetings. Why is there this anomaly? It is there because the majority of Believers are too afraid or anxious to voice what they really think. After all, if your pastor **tells** you the prayer meeting is the ‘power house’ and years of tradition says the same thing, **who will have the courage to say the opposite?** Not

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many, I can assure you!

To contradict your pastor, even in kindly manner, is to draw attention to yourself in a negative way. You will be viewed with suspicion and maybe even ostracised as a dangerous person, if not a potential heretic (as has been my own experience). Everyone knows that local churches are sub-societies who close ranks when threatened by change or different views. Everyone knows that vast numbers have legitimate queries and doubts they dare not speak about, for fear of losing face or being shunned. **That** is why ‘most’ people *appear* to agree with Dr Masters’ assumption but do not back it up with actual attendance!

In the past I have challenged Reformed folk to show me from scripture where I am wrong in my main teaching on the issue, and whilst some have said they ‘disagree’ with a few points, they have not given me concrete evidences that amount to proper Biblical proof. No doubt Dr Masters thought his booklet was ‘concrete’ proof – but it is far from proof, or even broad evidence. All I ask is that Christians review the scriptural evidences in totality, without applying human, traditional, knowledge. Without traditional knowledge they will come to starkly opposing conclusions to those of Dr Masters.

He says that he wrote the booklet to inspire Christians to a greater sense of the importance of prayer meetings. Obviously, with so many booklets being sold, he has succeeded. Even so, I categorically maintain, with scripture as my authority, that he is wrong on this matter. Successful author and preacher he may be, but his conclusions on this are not those of scripture.

### Page 5

On page 5 he very briefly introduces yet another startling assumption, far more serious than the ones he has made before: that Jesus Christ **commanded** corporate prayers. A reader will be forgiven for thinking, as I did, that to make such a claim Dr Masters must surely have solid scriptural evidence. I must admit that I was perplexed, because in my own examination I had studied **every single instance** in scripture (and there are many hundreds) that dealt with group prayer, **but did not find even one example** of being *commanded* to pray corporately on a scheduled basis.

Thus, when I read Dr Masters’ confident assertion, I felt sure he would teach me something I

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had clearly missed. **But when I reached the point where he dealt with it, I found no scriptural argument to support his view.**

What I found was an excellent example of human presumption dressed as Biblical command.

### Misinterpretation of Isaiah

On the same page (5) he gives a so-called ‘proof text’ from the Old Testament, Isaiah 56:7. But when we examine that text it says *nothing* in support of the claim! Rather, Dr Masters has made a very bad exegesis that is traditional but not scriptural. See for yourself, as I quote his argument and then provide a counter-argument....

“In Isaiah 56:7 there is a prophetic text on this subject. God states that the future Gospel-age Church will be characterised by communal prayer. He says: **‘For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.’**

This is clearly about when the Gentiles shall hear the word and be converted. They, says the Lord, shall rejoice

**‘in my house of prayer’**

. It is the will of the Lord and redeemer that His people should be conspicuous for their praying together... In this Isaiah passage the Lord presents the ministry of corporate prayer as an outstanding sign that people have been truly converted. What will be the best evidence of conversion in Gospel days? The Churches will be known for prayer. Believers will flock to pray, says the Lord, and it will give them great pleasure and assurance”.

Does that seem right? It probably does if we read it through blinkered, traditional glasses. But if we analyse it, we find glaring flaws. Let me explain: The entire context of this verse is to do with ‘strangers’ who worship God. This properly refers to those foreigners who took on the Jewish faith and obeyed the Lord as their God. Read the text again and you will see this to be the case.

We know this text applies to the immediate and near-future of the Jews and ‘adopted’ Jews, because Isaiah refers to them keeping the Jewish sabbath and not ‘polluting’ it with non-Jewish activities. It also refers to burnt sacrifices. That is the proper and immediate meaning of the text, though it could also apply to future Gentiles in principle, in an allegorical sense.

That is the first observation and it is important, for Dr Masters has made it seem to be an entirely far-future prophecy about the Christian Church, when it is, in reality, something else. Even if we ignore this poor exegesis, perhaps Dr Masters is right in his interpretation of ‘house of prayer’? Let us look at it more closely. ‘House’ can mean one of many things. It can mean the



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Temple itself. Or, a literal house for either animals or humans. It can refer to the human body. Or, to Sheol. Or, a place that has both light and dark. It can even refer to the land of Ephraim.

‘House’ can also mean a thing that holds something, e.g. a receptacle. It can mean a place housing a family, or it can refer to the household itself (the people). It can also refer to the descendants of that family, or to the family’s household affairs. It can mean ‘inwards’, ‘within’ or ‘inside’. So, with such a large array of possible meanings, which one is God referring to in this text?

Let us look at the word ‘prayer’. The word in the Hebrew can have several meanings: prayer, to pray a prayer, ‘house of prayer’, to hear prayer, and liturgical prayer. From a root word, it means to intervene, to mediate, to judge, to pray.

The reference to the altar (verse 7) clearly gives us the framework for our interpretation of ‘mine house’ – it must refer to the Temple. Let us bear in mind that the Temple is NOT the same as a local church, for the Temple was a place for formal, rite-centred worship. Allowing for this basic difference, how, then, can we interpret ‘house of prayer’?

Well, we already know that, from the words given, the text properly refers to the Jews and those who align themselves with God through Jewish influence. We know that this ‘house of prayer’ will be for both Jew and Gentile believer at that time. Whether or not it also applies to us in our day is open to debate, for we may only *suggest* such a meaning, given that the **primary** meaning is Jews and their proselytes.

If we put together all that we know about the possible meanings of the words ‘house of prayer’ we may only legitimately say that God intended that His Temple would be a place where Jews and adopted Jews (in Israel) prayed to/petitioned the Lord.

### Proper Interpretation

What I have given you above is a clear interpretation direct from the text and context. I have not elaborated upon it or tried to spiritualise it. If the text also applies to Gentiles in the far future, then it can only be in principle for it will be a secondary and implied meaning, not a direct one. Thus, the principle would be that a local church will contain people who pray to the Lord. Simple

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as that.

Therefore, when Dr Masters says ‘this is clearly about when the gentiles shall hear the word and be converted’, he is extending the meaning beyond what scripture actually says, for the text does NOT say that. Nor is such a meaning ‘clear’. Rather, the ‘clear’ meaning is that God is telling the Jews that they, and those who live with them as adopted Jews, will pray to Him in the Temple.

If Dr Masters had erred only in that single point, we could ignore it. But he then goes on to elaborate on it with an even greater assumption: that **“It is the will of our Lord and redeemer that his people shall be conspicuous for their praying together.”**

Nowhere in that text do we find this kind of thing. Read it properly and you will not find it! If we are to find a text that says that, it is certainly not found in Isaiah 56.

Just two sentences later, Dr Masters makes **three more** leaps of belief, without providing any linking evidence, that

**“In this Isaiah passage the Lord presents the ministry of corporate prayer as an outstanding sign that people have been truly converted.”**

By using the ‘if-then,’ form of argumentation, Dr Masters skilfully guides the reader along his own pathway.

What is this ‘If-Then’ argument? It is when a writer says ‘If’ this is true, ‘then’ so is what follows. It is pure semantics, if not playing with sophistry. Thus far Dr Masters has not convinced us that his initial thesis is true (the ‘If’ part of the argument). So, his ‘Then’ part (that corporate prayer should exist, and that it is proof of conversion) is very open to debate!

Nor has he proved that this prayer is a ‘ministry’. In the text this prayer is not a ministry, but it is a promise of God. That is, He will give the love of prayer as a gift. This is, of course, a ministry of the Holy Spirit – but it is not depicted as a ministry of the people! To say this is to again stretch the interpretation of the text.

The Isaiah text does NOT prove that the prayer promised will be corporate. We do find people praying together in scripture – but **not** in this particular text. Nor are we to assume that it is a sign of conversion. Note what is being said here: **that we**

**can assume the salvation of every member of a group, merely because they pray ‘corporately’**

. Can you not see how dangerous and false such a conclusion is? What Dr Masters is doing, perhaps unwittingly, is to make corporate prayer a condition of salvation. Perhaps he did not mean to say it, but that is what he

**has**

said. This is an act of works, and it is therefore Arminian. It also means that

*any*

group that prays together is ‘saved’... JWs, Mormons, Roman Catholics, Buddhists...

Dr Masters may be right when he says that Christian churches should be known for their prayer. But this does not prove, one jot, that such prayer must, or ought to, be ‘corporate’. The text does not give us such a far ranging set of meanings, containing so many doctrinal claims.

## **Confusing ‘Prayer’ and ‘Prayer Meetings’**

Indeed, I believe Dr Masters is confusing prayer meetings with prayer itself, which is not acceptable as an argument. Prayer is different from prayer meetings. The former is to do with an **action** and the latter is to do with a **form** of that action. They are separate entities. This means that proving the validity of one does not prove the validity of the other. We are talking here about serious theology, not about making ad hoc statements from a traditional viewpoint that cannot be supported.

Dr Masters again misinterprets, this time Ezekiel 36:37, by insisting that it is prophecy of the gentile Church in the far future. Read it carefully and you will find it is about near-future Israel as a nation. To say that it is about God blessing Christian churches with many converts is again to stretch the meaning beyond its proper application. To add further injury to this misapplication, we are told that these extra converts will come only if the churches pray. This is more Arminian logic... ‘we must do this, before God will do that’. It is also part of charismatic dominion and latter rain theology. God nowhere says he will send more converts if we pray. He says, very plainly, that He chose the elect before the world was made. We cannot produce them by praying.

His next statement - that God sends His blessings if we pray - is certainly true and I cannot argue with that. But, to say that God’s blessings are **dependent** on prayer is Arminian. In the same second paragraph on page 6, Dr Masters makes yet another error, by claiming that **“The Lord longs to honour our evangelistic efforts. But there may be an obstacle, causing Him to hold back His blessing. Have we pleaded with Him in prayer?”**

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First thing to note is that Dr Masters is saying that our pleading can cause God to do something He may not have thought of doing before. This is Arminian and is not scriptural. Second thing is his view that God is yearning to bless our efforts but that there may be an obstacle. If there is an obstacle, this only proves that the ‘efforts’ are our own and do not belong to God! Also, this statement turns God’s work upside down. In scriptural reality, we must do what God gives us to do. This will come to us as a burden we cannot shake off. We then do whatever we have been commanded to do. Then God blesses us because we are complying with what He has commanded.

That, friends, is the ‘elect’ order of things. Dr Masters is advocating an Arminian approach, which means **we** devise a project and then ask God for His blessing on it. Regardless of this, the text has nothing to do with a ‘command’ to hold corporate prayer meetings.

### Praying as a House

In the text, Dr Masters says, is the command to pray as a house, or family. That is perfectly true; but it is still not proof of corporate prayer. Christians can pray as a family without doing so in physical proximity. The real meaning of praying as a ‘house’ is to pray in unity and with one accord, but not necessarily or primarily as a group. And even if it means as one group, this does not give us authority to hold regular, scheduled prayer meetings!

Dr Masters says we ‘must’ pray as a group. This is, as I have already said, Arminian. The **only** time we ‘must’ pray corporately, is when God places it upon

**each**

Christian in that group

**personally**

,

**immediately**

, and

**urgently**

, and with

**definite reasons**

for doing so, complete with the

**words**

to pray. This is the scriptural picture of group prayer, as an occasional ad hoc activity – which even Dr Masters acknowledges. Now, compare that with what he is calling for. There is no resemblance at all.

At the bottom of the page, Dr Masters again makes the same mistake. He says, “**The principle is that Almighty God, for special reasons, has ordained as a duty the practice of communal, corporate prayer for his people, and has attached unique promises to that duty.**”

However, he does not say what those ‘special reasons’ are, nor has he proven that God has ‘ordained the practice’ of communal prayer. Nor has he proven that such prayer attracts special promises; an idea that is Romanist in origin, used to describe the benefits of Mass.

In scripture we find exactly what Dr Masters initially acknowledges: that God calls us to special, group prayer on **irregular** occasions, to pray for **unique** and **urgent** matters, and those who are called to pray do so with

**one accord**

and with

**one mind**

. So, how can he possibly translate all that as meaning regular, common-or-garden, scheduled meetings, where few are called to attend, let alone to be of one mind?

Believe me, if you are called to such a meeting, God will let you know, without any doubt, that you **MUST** attend and pray! The fact that so few are thus called, shows us that the meetings we now have should not be convened at all.

## **Earnestness Not Proof**

On page 7 we are told that we must be earnest and sincere in our prayers together. Friends, this is all too obvious! But, our own earnestness and desire is **not** what God is looking for... He only looks for prayers that He Himself has given us to utter.

**As I have said elsewhere, the crux of prayer is that it is NOT something we do when we decide we want something**

– it is an act of obedience in response to what

**God**

calls us to pray for; it is this

*obedience*

that brings results, not our human sincerity.

In other words, Dr Masters has got it very wrong. It is he who has ‘missed the point’, not those who, with good conscience, refuse to attend scheduled prayer meetings!

Half way down page 7 we again see the Arminian thinking, when Dr Masters talks of us ‘making a difference’ in prayer. As is shown above, **we** do not make a difference by praying –**God** does, when we obey His requirement placed on our heart to pray. If we ‘pray’ without firstly being prompted to do so by God, then it is not prayer at all, but mere human fantasy.

Strangely, Dr Masters agrees with this assertion! (See lower down on page 8). He admits that praying is all part of God’s glorious, predestinated plan. He agrees that such prayers were all planned before time began. He says that corporate prayer is ‘more effective’ than individual prayer (which I do not agree with, if personal prayer is also prompted by the Holy Spirit), but I will leave that one aside for now. It is yet another charismatic-style/Arminian error.

Oddly (given his Arminianistic style) He also speaks of salvation as a work of grace alone. The rest of that section is predestination-centred and I thank God for that. But then he slides back into error by saying (page 8): **“We may make many mistakes in the Christian life, but the worst is to leave out prayer...”**

I suppose it is arguable if this is the ‘worst’, but it is certainly significant and serious. The point I wish to make here is that Dr Masters is talking in this sentence about ‘prayer’ NOT ‘prayer meetings’, but throughout the booklet he confuses the two as being the same.

### **Christ’s Command and Promise** **Pages 8 – 12**

“The most direct passage of all on the subject of corporate prayer is the great promise of Christ recorded in Matthew 18: 19, 20. Though expressed as a promise, it is really a command and a direction. Indeed, it is nothing less than an ordinance.”

Is this correct? Here Dr Masters is claiming the text has multi-layered meanings:

1. It is a proof text in support of corporate prayer (in his context he means as a regular, scheduled meeting)
2. It is a promise
3. It is a command

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4. It is a ‘direction’
5. It is an ordinance

Are these conclusions his own assumptions again, or do they have a basis in the text? Let us look at the text itself, so that we once more glean our interpretations direct from scripture, and not from tradition. It says this: **“Again, I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”**

This portion is not part of Jesus’ general discourse on church affairs and discipline, as Dr Masters claims. These two verses are set aside, a kind of additional note, in which Jesus is reminding the disciples of His promise that God will hear the pleas of Christians together – any number from two upwards. Then, He returns to the topic of discipline when Peter comes back to Him with a query.

But, does this text prove the ‘command’ to pray corporately on a scheduled basis? No, it does not. It has a very simple message: that if two or more Christians meet together with one accord, and they ask God for what they are called to pray about, then God will answer positively, because it is He Who put the prayer into their hearts in the first place. We can infer that this is about group prayers, but we cannot insist on it, for it can just as easily refer to **any** meeting of Christians.

Look at the text again and you will not see a specific reference to group prayer at all. It can certainly apply to group prayer, but it can also apply to **any** group meeting... and not necessarily a scheduled meeting, either. When we interpret we must do so strictly, for we are dealing with God’s word, not an ordinary book. What I most object to in this section is not that Dr Masters applies it to prayer meetings, but that he ignores any other reasonable interpretation. This is because the second interpretation properly applies and is part of the overall meaning.

There is also another point to make: the text shows us that the ones who gather together are of the same mind and heart. So, again, we see that this is of ‘one accord and one mind’. The **only** way this can happen is that the Holy Spirit places the same burden on several hearts at the same time and the burden is of such an urgency and weight that the people

**know**

they must pray together. In this text, then, we do

**not**

find a ‘command’ to pray corporately as part of a scheduled calendar of events.

## **Group Prayer – Spontaneous not Scheduled**

This text does not, as Dr Masters claims, give us ‘instructions’. It only gives a promise. When God calls us to pray as a group, urgently and with immense burden, there is no need to ‘instruct’ us to do so in advance – the urgency and weight alone drives us to seek each other out, and we do it anyway! If we are ‘instructed’ so well in advance, then it becomes scheduled and is not, by definition, ‘urgent’.

So, Jesus was NOT **“inaugurating the duty of corporate prayer”** (page 9). He was just promising that when Christians meet thus, God will listen. Other texts tell us the reason why He listens: because we respond to His prompting to pray in the first place and obey by praying. This is not, then, an inauguration of the duty to corporate prayer. It is a promise.

True corporate prayer is always spontaneous, irresistible and powerful, because it is instigated by the Holy Spirit for a special and unique purpose. Scheduled prayer meetings with no real purpose other than ‘duty’ is, by definition, not true corporate prayer. Yet, though Dr Masters has acknowledged the truth of this in part, he continues to state that we may meet regularly for ‘prayer’ even when we have to manufacture unity of mind. There is no other way we can take his words. He then goes back to proper understanding by saying that the promise of Jesus applies to anything we might ask for.

In the third paragraph of page 9, though, he again lapses into traditional thinking. He talks of **“the teaching of Christ that there is special power in the prayer of God’s people when they are assembled together.”**

It must be emphasised again that the power of prayer is not in ourselves, in our resolve to pray, in the geographic togetherness of groups, or even in the prayer itself. The power is in the fact that we respond obediently to the prompting of God to pray. Thus, the ‘power’ is in God, not in us or in the act of prayer. Can you see the vital difference? If you cannot see it, then you are thinking along Arminian lines. Dare I say it, but the idea of greater power in proximity is also found in charismatic and spiritist/pagan circles.

In the last paragraph on this page Dr Masters gives an accurate though truncated meaning of ‘agree’... to act in harmony and sameness. The rest of the section is good material and



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describes the way some try to use the prayer meeting for their own agenda. A small but significant matter is raised at the bottom of page 10, when Dr Masters says that someone who believes there is a problem in the local church should not speak of it in the prayer meeting, but should approach the ‘officers’ to be dealt with in the ‘proper way’. There are no ‘officers’ and the ‘proper way’ is to deal with it openly (in most cases). This is because we are all equal in the local church.

### Errors Multiplied

A degree of manipulation is then resorted to as Dr Masters talks of **”true Christians who opt out of the... prayer meeting... Do we deprive our church of its... blessing by our failure to support the prayer meeting?”**

This is the usual ‘guilt thing’. By assuming (wrongly) that we are commanded to pray together routinely and without special urgency, he thinks that we cause our church not to be blessed. He does not bother to think that it might be

**because**

of the dutiful and unwarranted prayer meeting that the church is not blessed! God will not bless mere duty or for doing things He has not authorised. No mention at all is made of His Son’s command to pray alone in our closets!! It is not our command to ‘support’ a meeting of any kind. The very word suggests something man-made.

Nor is the corporate prayer meeting, as viewed by Dr Masters, an ‘ordination’. There are only two ordinations: communion and baptism. To add a third is an error. If we take Dr Masters’ idea just a little farther, we can arrive at a new heresy, for he has already said that corporate prayer is a proof of being saved. And there is a hint of inconsistency on page 11, when Dr Masters says there are no elites in the Church... even though he refers to ‘officers’ who are the only ones to deal with matters and, earlier, he refers to an influential ‘platform party’. What are ‘officers’ if not an elite?

Also, on page 1, he displays a belief that *everyone* in a local church must attend corporate prayer. This effectively rules out God calling a particular few, suddenly and with urgency, as He sees fit, for a particular purpose. It also rules

*in*

the idea of regulated, scheduled prayer meetings for all. Then – something that gave me a slight smile – he said,

**“We must never interpret away our obligation to the prayer meeting, and make it an optional exercise.”**

It makes me smile, because he is making out that those who ‘opt out’ as he puts it, are choosing which of God’s commands to obey. He also implies by this, that not to attend a prayer meeting is a sin.

In reality, it is not we who ‘interpret away’ scheduled prayer meetings, but it is he who ‘interprets in’ what ought not be there! It is these scheduled, meaningless, prayer meetings that Christians will not attend. *True* group prayers, called suddenly by God for a special purpose, are something entirely different. It is these latter type that are ‘not optional’.

## **First Prayer Meeting?**

Dr Masters cites the very first (known) ‘prayer meeting’, Acts 1:14, as proof that every church everywhere should have scheduled prayer meetings, though he has no proof whatever. That prayer meeting in Acts was urgent and called by God. Nothing like the usual treadmill scheduled by churches nowadays. The key words, as always, are ‘with one accord’. When Dr Masters can prove to me that this is what happens in every single prayer meeting, I will be convinced! But, I know he cannot, for I have attended enough of them to know!

Yet another assumption is made by Dr Masters, at the bottom of page 11. Though the next group prayer meeting is recorded 14 years later, he assumes, without any proof, that this was “**undoubtedly typical of their regular meetings**”.

How does he know, if scripture itself does not say? Possibly, the Christians in the early church did have a large number of spontaneous prayer meetings for urgent matters. But, even if they did, it is not proof that they held

*scheduled*

prayer meetings on a

*regular*

basis, without urgent needs being made known to them directly by God.

About this prayer meeting, he cites Spurgeon, who comments: “**Peter thought to himself, ‘Where shall I go?’ Then he remembered that it was prayer meeting night down at John Mark’s mother’s house. That was the place to go. They were not gathered to hear a sermon but to pray.**”

(Acts

12:12).

If you read this whole passage you will read of special and urgent prayer being made, because Peter was in prison. Peter was the man they all looked to, because he had been with Jesus. He was an elder of the early church and much needed. So, God had called them all together to pray for his situation. This was a unique and urgent matter. It was not a typical meeting, nor was it scheduled. For Dr Masters to say this is not acceptable is itself not acceptable, for his is a

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very loose, inaccurate rendition of the text.

There is no evidence at all in this text that the prayer meeting was ‘typical’ of scheduled meetings. Look hard and you will not find it! Peter did not think ‘Ah, it is prayer meeting night at John Mark’s!’ No, he went there because he knew his friends would be there. It was only when he arrived that he found them all at prayer – for him. That is all there as to it. The text says nothing to support Dr Masters’ interpretation.

Dr Masters goes on to make further erroneous claims in the first paragraph on page 12. He says, **“By practice, by conviction and by instinct, the people of God gathered together to pray for great matters... The early church certainly knew that the Saviour had ordained corporate prayer for all.”**

Reader, this is an abuse of interpretation. The text does NOT tell us anything like this. Nor does it tell us that Jesus ‘ordained’ us to meet together, even for urgent prayer, ‘by practice’, ‘conviction’ or ‘instinct’. All of this is Arminian, not scriptural.

### **Dr Masters - Wrong**

When we are called to such urgent prayer together, each is called as an individual and the burden is overwhelming. It is not down to instinct, or conviction, or practice, but is down to the Holy Spirit calling us personally as the need arises. THAT is the only pattern we find in scripture concerning group prayer. It is spontaneous, urgent, and ad hoc. It is NOT scheduled without urgent reason.

The argument by Dr Masters is obliterated in the first 12 pages, for he has not shown, in even one instance, that his thesis is correct. He has misused scripture and makes many assumptions that do not hold water. On this matter he has shown his exegetical ability to be seriously flawed. He finishes this section by quoting Spurgeon... but even that great man had his flaws! He says that churches that hold combined prayer and Bible study meetings are less blessed than those holding separate meetings. How does he know? How does he qualify the statement? Where is his proof?

The rest of the booklet tells us of the supposed unique ‘divine purposes’ behind prayer

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meetings, even though Dr Masters has failed to give one shred of evidence, let alone proof, for their use! The various sections will not be dealt with in this Article because, frankly, they are concocted and have no bearing on the issue.

### Arminian Leanings

Suffice to say that Dr Masters shows us his Arminianism in this subject, not his understanding of scripture. In the section entitled ‘What should We Pray For?’ he opposes his own acceptance of the fact that in the early churches prayer meetings were called for urgent and precise reasons, when they were needed! The fact that he wrote this section, with its title, shows that he does not really understand. If we need to ask what to pray about, then the meeting is NOT like those in earlier times, when they all met with ‘one accord’ and a precise, urgent reason!

The same banal attitude is shown when he writes on ‘how’ we should pray. If men and women are called together with one mind, they will not need to be shown ‘how’ to pray, because the Holy Spirit has already filled them with words and desires!

He again shows an Arminian leaning on page 22, when he says that there ought to be ‘many contributors’ to the corporate prayer meeting. Surely, if he believes in predestination, he should know that it is God, not our own desire to rely on many contributors, that brings the ‘result’? If God is calling the meeting, He will also cause us to pray, and those called to pray will be the exact number, saying the exact words!

The second half of the booklet needs a separate Article, but the need is to be queried. The main fact is, the booklet does not give us any reason to hold corporate prayer meetings. Dr Masters has completely misinterpreted texts so that he could uphold his traditional view, even though scripture does not do so. It is therefore my continued view that corporate prayer meetings, as we now have them, as scheduled regular meetings, are not of God, and as such are useless and without worth. Christians need not, then, attend them, with good conscience.

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