



Spurgeon Baptist Association Of Churches

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The Seeking Church, Part 1

It would be quite easy to continue using Scripture to show in place after place with example after example the true state of the professing Church in America and in other places as well. However, at some point it becomes necessary to start looking at how change must take place if it is going to take place at all. As noted with philosophers and theologians, it is easy to pick another position apart. It is far different and far harder, however, to set out a positive position that answers the questions of others. Quite simply and directly, apart from God changing the hearts and minds of the professing Church today there is no hope. Our problem is that God has turned His face from us and has turned us over to the power of our sins. We have become blind to the true state of spiritual things and we have replaced true spiritual life with activities and programs. The only thing that can truly change the professing Church is God Himself. In trying to answer the question of how God will turn His face to the professing Church and bless Her with Himself is a formidable task. The answer is first from Scripture and then secondly from history. The only way that God will turn His face to the Church is if the Church becomes a praying Church.

In one sense you could imagine a preacher saying that in a sermon. The very next thing would then be a series of things to do. There would be prayer meetings and other things to do. I am not saying that prayer is the only issue at hand, but I will look at how prayer can demonstrate to us what the real problem is. It is quite true that God will not return to the professing Church until it is truly praying. But is prayer just going before God and asking Him things? If so, all we need to do is to spend enough time asking God for things then all things will be set right. The absurdity of that view should need no real answers, but in fact that is where we are in America right now. We have arrived at the point where we think of prayer as simply spending time with our eyes closed and our tongues saying things to God. Remember Hannah in the Old Testament (I Samuel 1:9-18). She spoke in her heart but her lips moved. Eli thought she was drunk but she was lifting a burdened heart to the Lord. This is more of a picture of prayer. In order to pray truly we must obtain burdened hearts before the Lord. True prayer is from the heart above all. In other words, our hearts must become broken from self and burdened for the things of the Lord. While it is true that the professing Church must begin to pray, it must realize what

true prayer is before it can begin to pray. Hearts must be changed in order to see the true God and to see the true nature of the heart before God.

The answer in practice is certainly not easy. It will require a self-sufficient people to repent of its self-sufficiency in order to trust in His self-sufficiency. It will require a proud people who have hidden their pride beneath the guise of humility to be broken for and from their pride. It will require a selfish people to repent of their selfishness and live for God rather than themselves. It will require a self-centered people to repent of their self-centeredness to become God-centered in all ways. It will require a people who worship at the throne of the self-god to repent of the self-god (themselves) in order to worship and serve the living and true God. It will require a people to quit thinking of the "church" in terms of buildings and think of it in terms of God's real temple being the souls of human beings. It will require people to seek God in love rather than seek to do things in their own wisdom and strength with His name attached. It will require people to repent of their human centered views of God and worship the one and true God-centered God. It will require people to repent of thinking of grace as God helping people and trust in God who does all things as moved and motivated by His own glory. It will require people to repent of their many and various idolatries in thinking that their prayers and other religious duties are needed by God and are pleasing to Him just because they do Him. God opposes the proud and all that is from their selfishness and pride even if it is their "prayers." God is not pleased with anyone or anything other than Himself and His own glory. Human beings must wake up and realize who they are and who God is or true worship and true prayer is not possible. Humility is utterly necessary and not the kind that flows from the pens and pulpits in America today. The kind of humility that the Bible talks about is not a form of virtue that man works up, but instead is the emptiness of self and pride.

Let us look at some false kinds of prayer in an effort to examine our own hearts. After all, what we must realize is that if we are not praying from a humble heart seeking the true God in truth and love then we are not praying in a biblical manner seeking

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SBC Prayer Lines

Use these numbers year round to obtain current missions prayer requests.

North American Missions ~ 1-800-554-PRAY
International Missions ~ 1-800-395-PRAY

Richard Smith, Associational Missionary, Email: SmiEdward@att.net

PO Box 1179, Lawrence, KS, 66044

Eugene Jennings, Moderator ~ Curtis Knapp, Vice Moderator ~ Tony Mattia, Corresponding Secretary



The Seeking Church (Continued)

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the biblical God. Prayer that flows from the brain that looks to form correct thoughts without true affections and love is not acceptable to God. Prayer that is for the fulfillment of our duty is not acceptable to God as performances of duty are not done out of love for God. The Pharisees were quite adept at performing their duty. What is different from our duties and those of the Pharisees? Ah, we say, but we are not legalists as they were. The very fact that we think our duty is acceptable to God should tell us that we are like the Pharisees. The fact that when we do our duty and find ourselves feeling good about ourselves or that a burden is gone because we have done our duty should set off the Pharisee alarm in our hearts. If we seek to “pray” in some way just to fulfill a duty and are satisfied in some way when the duty is done, that shows us that we are like the Pharisees in that we have prayed for reasons of self and have not sought God at all in the so-called prayer. All duty prayer (though hidden and disguised) demonstrates to us that we are not praying out of love but instead we are fulfilling a duty and as such we are modern Pharisees in this way.

Let us be as plain as we can be. Until we are seeking the Lord from the desires of the heart for Himself and not just the things He does for us, we are only seeking ourselves in prayer. II Chronicles 7:14 shows us the true pattern of prayer. It shows us that there must be humility (emptying of self & filling of Christ) in order to pray and that true prayer is seeking the face of God. If our prayers are only seeking God for wealth and health, we are doing nothing but seeking ourselves. Even if we are asking things with the right words, the heart of the matter is the heart. Without the heart seeking the face of God in prayer we are doing nothing but seeking ourselves. What this means is that we can organize prayer meetings until the buildings are full every minute of every day of the year and not one true prayer might be offered. We can have many formal prayer meetings that last the entire night, but not one true prayer might be offered. We have to face up to reality that true prayer requires a true heart in order to pray. The call to prayer, then, is also a call for people to begin to examine the motives and intents of the heart.

As we begin to examine the motives and intents of the heart, let us face the brutal reality of the prayer meeting of the professing Church. Our proud and selfish hearts want to deny the obvious, but let us not lie to God and ourselves. First of all there is really very little prayer in the corporate meetings of the local church. After all, we only have so much time and we must get on with the important things. Within the local church there is little or perhaps no prayer at all. We have gotten to the point where we want our services to run seamlessly and we want people to be entertained. There may be a brief time to offer up a short “prayer,” but to really pray would ruin the flow of the service. The few places that have what is called “prayer meetings” have

little time for prayer by the time the study is finished and the gossip and all the prayer requests have ended. What usually happens is that words are offered for the physical problems of people and God is not truly sought. To put it bluntly, that is not prayer at all. True prayer is seeking the presence of God Himself from the heart. Anything else is not prayer at all.

But there can be flowery words offered in prayer. There can be intelligent words offered up in prayer when people know enough correct theology or verses of the Bible to repeat. But that is not prayer that is earnestly seeking the Lord. Let us be honest with our own hearts. The Pharisees prayed in order to be honored by men. Let us not imagine that we have never done that. We can also pray in a way in order to get people to be pleased with us or to say amen to our prayer. We can have prayer meetings because we want to be conservative and we can go to prayer meetings in order to fulfill our duty or to show others we are serious about prayer. But do we truly pray? Do we really seek God in prayer from the desires and motives of the heart? Ah, now that is a different story.

Let us go again to the motives and intents of the heart in prayer. Do we really desire to know God and to be in His real presence when we pray? What is our real intent when we offer words in prayer? Be real and be honest as we all are plagued by a deceptive heart. If you pray for the Lord to show you the real intents and motives of your heart in prayer, do you really desire for Him to do what your words ask for? You know the words, but do you really want to see your own heart? Could it be that massive numbers of people are deceived about what prayer is and about what they offer up as prayer simply because they lie to themselves about their own so-called prayers? How will God return to a people who are in darkness about the darkness of their own hearts when they have no desire to really see the sin of their own hearts (which He hates)? How is it that we think God will bless us with Himself when we love sin in our hearts over Him and prefer deception in our hearts over His truth?

Let us be honest with God and with ourselves. Most of our prayers are really the prayers of self and are for self. We want to keep up the illusion that we are holy and that we are seeking God. We blame the world and carnal Christians when the real problem is that we are liars to ourselves about our own hearts and want to keep up some sort of pretense before others and God. Until we want God bad enough to have the truth of our own wicked hearts opened up to us, we will not seek God in truth. The place for each minister and for each person to start is brutal honesty about his or her own heart. You cannot fool God so don't try. He is not fooled now and He will not be fooled on judgment day. Until we are willing to have our hearts exposed, we will not seek God in true prayer.

Richard Smith