

THE ISSUE OF PENTECOSTAL PRAYING

(Second Edition, 2022)

by
Kevin Rodgers

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INTRODUCTION

When one starts with such a dramatic title as “The Issue of Pentecostal Praying,” it is necessary to explain some things at the outset. I have chosen this title for several reasons, but first, let me explain what it DOES NOT mean. By choosing this title, I am not saying that Pentecostals are bad or non-Christian. On the contrary, while we disagree on certain areas of doctrine and practice, traditionally, Pentecostals have been evangelical. Many of them are born-again and our brothers in Christ. In addition, I am not referring to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues when I say, “Pentecostal praying.” Perhaps another book is needed to thoroughly discuss this issue of speaking in tongues and other distinctive practices in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. At this time, I am explicitly referring to a practice at a particular time in the worship service when everyone begins praying aloud together.

There are several reasons why I call this “Pentecostal Praying.” First of all, it is a tradition that has been borrowed from Pentecostal churches. Notice, I use the word tradition. Why? Because the practice is not found in the Bible. Baptists have a reputation in Africa for being “people of the Book.” This statement means that we love the Word of God, teach the Word of God, and emphasize it in every area of our lives. In fact, in my ministry, I have seen many Pentecostals want to study with our members because they know Baptists are stronger in Bible study than any other evangelical church. Much like the Bereans in Acts 17:11 who tested everything that Paul said with the Scriptures, Baptists have been very careful to test the doctrines of other churches by the standard of God’s Word. Yet, while we have been careful not to allow some of the wrong doctrines in other churches to infiltrate our churches, we have not been cautious with some of the practices. Doctrine is simply what you believe, and practice is what you do. While many of our

churches don't "believe" like Pentecostals, they have started "acting" like them in the practice of Pentecostal praying. Another reason for the term "Pentecostal praying" is that it is commonly understood among our members here in Africa. When we say "praying," we mean how we worship in church. By saying "Pentecostal praying," we mean praying in the manner that Pentecostal churches pray... specifically, the practice of all the members praying out loud at the same time in a disruptive way.

In this small book, I will attempt to explain precisely what the Scripture teaches about corporate prayer and why the practice of "Pentecostal praying" is not biblical. In this book, I will discuss seven reasons we should avoid this style of praying in our public worship services. It is not my desire to bring controversy or disruption to any church. As a Baptist, I firmly believe that a core principle of church autonomy is that a church is free to worship as God leads them. However, we know that the Lord will not lead us contrary to His written Word, and I believe this practice of "Pentecostal praying" does not agree with the Bible. I have personally witnessed this practice sweeping through our Baptist churches, and my desire is not to bring more confusion. Instead, my prayer is that by the Lord's power, He will use this book to try and clear up some of the confusion we are facing today.



FAITH AND ORDER

(1 Corinthians 14:40, Colossians 2:5)

As we look at the New Testament and consider the early church, two things were continually emphasized: faith and order. The New Testament writers emphasized the importance of faith over and over again. In Hebrews 11:6, the Bible says, “And without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Faith is crucial in every aspect of our relationship with God, and it is especially crucial when it comes to our worship. Yes, we are to worship in Spirit and truth, but we are also to worship Him in faith, believing that He exists and that He will meet with us in our public and private worship.

However, one interesting thing to note is that order is frequently linked together with faith. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul speaks to the church at Corinth, which had gone outside the bounds of proper worship. In chapter one, he explains how they had become factitious and jealous. Some claimed they were followers of one leader, while others claimed to follow another. In chapter five, we discover that they had allowed sexual impurity to run rampant among their members, and they were

quite proud of it. Then, in chapter eleven, we begin to see how all of this excess had affected their public worship. In general, they were raucous and unruly when coming together for worship. Some would come to the Lord's Supper drunk. Haughty women were trying to rule over the men in the public worship services, and they were all trying to appear super-spiritual to the rest of the group. In chapter twelve, Paul explains that they should be using their spiritual gifts for the betterment of the church instead of for personal gain and that they should not all try to speak and control the service but to learn in quietness and submission. Then finally, after emphasizing love, he sums up his argument in 14:40 by saying, "But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner."

By contrast, when we look at the church of Colossae in Colossians 2:5, we see a different picture. Here Paul says of their faith and order, "For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ." When Paul mentions "good discipline," he is actually using a military term that literally means "orderly array." He was happy to see that the Colossians were orderly like good soldiers in their private and public lives, unlike the Corinthians, who had no order in their private lives or public worship.

When we consider the attitudes and actions of many churches today, we have to admit that many of them look more like the Corinthian church than the Colossian church. In many Pentecostal churches (and even some Baptist), you find little order, but instead, everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. Often, everyone is praying aloud at the same time and shouting to be heard over the one who is praying beside him. Then others are running around, singing, dancing, shouting up at the front; yet you wonder if they are actually

worshipping the Lord or wanting to be seen by men. Other times, people are being “slain in the Spirit” (something which is not in the Bible) and falling onto the floor while others clap disruptively and shout the same words over and over again.

Unfortunately, these things are now beginning to creep into our Baptist churches. Perhaps it is due to former Pentecostals who have joined our churches, or perhaps it is something that our members have seen and liked about churches of other persuasions. Whatever the reason, we find that more and more Baptist churches also want to practice these disorderly traditions. This point does not mean we cannot dance, sing, shout, clap or enjoy ourselves in worship. What it does mean, however, is that whatever we do in our worship services must come out of faith and order, not from a desire to be prideful, but from a genuine spirit of worship. One time I was in a church, and they were having the time of “worship.” This worship time included people walking around, disturbing their neighbors, and laying hands on all parts of the building to cast out the demons from the walls and benches. They prayed out loud together in confusion, and to make matters worse, one of the choir members walked around clapping and chanting “Fire, Fire, Fire!” at the top of his voice. As I reflect on that experience, I have to say that it was not a time of orderly worship but confusion.

Please do not misunderstand; I am not trying to condone dry, boring worship either. That is also wrong and should be avoided. However, we sometimes get so lost in the emotionalism of worship that we fail to worship out of faith in an orderly fashion. Remember, “God is the rewarder of those who believe He is there.” This verse means that I have to know He is present by faith, not by my feelings only. When we allow our worship services to be disorderly, confusing and focused on

emotions only, we have stopped worshipping in faith and order. We all enjoy when the worship service “feels good,” but we should not worship Him in order to be pleased or to get a good feeling. Instead, we should be worshipping Christ to please Him. As I have discussed the issue of “Pentecostal Praying” with others, they have said, “We like to do it because it makes us feel good and closer to God.” My question to them is, “Do we worship to feel good or to please Him because He is worthy of our worship?” Sometimes, good feelings will come as we worship in Spirit and truth and with faith and order. However, emotions are not the reason we worship. When everyone is praying out loud together simultaneously, there is no order. Instead, it brings confusion, and Paul said that confusion has no place in the corporate worship of a local church.

2

RESPECT

Psalm 10:17, 1 Samuel 2:30, James 4:10

We know that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and worthy of our gratitude, thanksgiving, and respect. When we worship individually or when we worship together in church as a body of believers, we must come with respect. James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.” However, when we look at the issue of Pentecostal praying, we often see a lack of respect instead of biblically and culturally appropriate respect.

For instance, many people feel that they must command God as if he were a demon or something when they pray. With a raised voice and proud heart, they often command God to do this or that “in the name of Jesus.” In Psalm 66:1, the Bible says, “Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious.” The Bible teaches us that we can come in zeal to worship Him, but we must be very careful not to disrespect Him amid our zeal. As Hebrews 4:16 says, because of Jesus we can draw near the throne of grace “in confidence” to find help in our time of need. However,

we must be cautious to remember who He is and who we are. We are His saints, but only because of the sacrifice of Jesus. He is the Lord Almighty above all of the universe, and while He does love us, we must not forget He is still the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We don't command God to do anything, but instead, we come before his throne confidently, humble, and filled with respect, making our petitions known.

This problem is one of the significant problems with "Pentecostal praying." Often, in these prayers, people approach the Lord as if He is a shop owner, and they can just command Him to give them all the things they have on their list. The other problem comes in the area of shouting. When people meet together on Sunday for worship and all pray together aloud at the same time, they inevitably begin shouting. Why is that? Personally, I believe it is because of two reasons; pride or inability to concentrate. Some people shout when they pray because they have a commanding spirit, and they want to be seen as people who know how to pray with power. This attitude is simply pride. We can pray with power and authority without shouting disrespectfully at God. However, many times it is just a simple matter of concentration. For instance, I begin to pray aloud with my other church members. While I am praying, I am distracted by the other voices and prayers being made at the same time, so I must raise my voice to focus on my own prayers. Since I am now louder than the others, they also have to raise their voices to understand their own thoughts, which means that I, in turn, must raise my voice more. What ensues is an upward spiral of shouting voices ending in a crescendo of confusion.

I have found that among the peoples in the world, Africans are some of the most respectful. Respect is an integral part of the culture, and Africans understand respect much better than many others. I once

lived in a rural part of Zambia under a wonderful Chieftainess. Can you imagine what would happen if I met with her, and once I was ushered into her presence, I began commanding her to do all the things I wanted her to do? I am sure I would have been chased from her land. Or suppose when I had an audience with her, I began shouting at the top of my voice in my conversation with her. Would that be respectful? Of course not, so why do we come to God in that manner and think He is pleased with our commands and shouting? He is not just an earthly chief, He is the Chief of Chiefs, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and He demands our utmost respect in prayer. When we approach His throne, we cannot come in tumultuous confusion or pride; but we must come in humility and respect.

In Africa, people are very respectful to their earthly fathers. When approaching them, they will usually bend to one knee, often bow their heads, and be careful not to make any disrespectful gesture like putting their hands in their pockets. When they converse with their father or an in-law, it is often in quiet, respectful tones, and they would never shout at them or raise their voice. If we can demonstrate such respect and honor for earthly fathers in our culture, why do some feel the need to shout at their Heavenly Father? Is it because they think He cannot hear, or do they not truly have faith to believe that He is real and listening? God is greater than our parents or our earthly leaders. We should show Him even more respect and reverence. You can pray with authority and respect at the same time. Whenever you pray, listen to yourself and ask, "Would I speak to my father, or in-law or a chief in this manner?" Your prayer life should reflect the awe and reverence you feel for God. There are no magic words or magic phrases we can use to manipulate Him. We cannot (and should not) command Him; we are His children, and it is our job to serve Him and not expect that He exists to serve us.

3

UNITY AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Ephesians 4:4-16, Acts 4:23-31

In these verses above and other verses in the New Testament, the local church is spoken of as the body of Christ. As individuals, we have a relationship with the Lord and must maintain that relationship with Him through private times of devotion and individual prayer. However, we also have a relationship with Him on a corporate level as members of a local New Testament church. This corporate relationship is why it is so essential that we be active and involved in a local church. As Christians, we are a part of the overall, worldwide “body of Christ,” but this body is expressed visibly on earth through local New Testament churches. If we are not involved in a local church, then it means that we are a body part that is missing, and we are weakening the overall body of which we are a member. God never intended for us to be Christians on an individual level with Him only, but also on a corporate level with other believers. We cannot be all that God wants us to be apart from a local fellowship of believers.

This fact has implications for our times of corporate worship,

especially on Sunday, The Lord's Day. As New Testament churches, we scatter throughout the world Monday through Saturday to do the work of the Lord and fulfill the Great Commission. However, on Sunday (the New Testament day of worship), we gather together to worship Christ as one body---unified---with one heart, one purpose, and one mind. Whenever we allow our members to all pray out loud at the same time in our worship services, what we are actually doing is undermining the unity of the body! Why is that? As 1 Corinthians 12:20 says, "There are many members, but one body." Paul continues to say that one part of the body cannot say to another part, "I don't need you." In church life, each member is crucial and plays a vital role. However, when we come together for worship, we worship as one body with one spirit, one mind, and even one mouth.

For example, after we take up the offering, we often ask one member to pray for the offering which we have corporately taken and are corporately giving to God. This person is not praying for himself only, but he is standing before Christ on behalf of all of us. He is praying for the entire body, representing us before the Lord, and asking the Lord to receive and bless the offering which we have given. At that time, he acts as the mouth for the body and expresses the heart of the entire body (all the members) in his prayer. Our job is not to pray individually at that time but instead to agree with him in prayer by saying "Amen" as he prays for us. As we worship on Sunday, we worship as one body, and only one person can be our mouth at a time. We don't have more than one mouth! Instead, we select different individuals to lead us in prayer, and at that time, they act as the mouth of the body and express the thoughts and feelings of the body to Christ.

Consider other things that we do in our regular worship services. We ask someone to lead the singing and worship. Suppose the song leader

asks us to turn to hymn 154 and begins leading, but I decide I would rather sing hymn 3. And perhaps at the same time, everyone else is singing their own individual hymn. Would that be worship? Of course not; it would instead be confusion. Or consider the choirs. What if each member of the choir decided they wanted to sing a different song and dance in a different way? Or perhaps the preacher? What if when the pastor stands to preach his message, five other people also stand and begin preaching a different message simultaneously? These things would not be orderly and would only bring confusion and disharmony to the body as we worshipped together. The question then is this: Why will we not allow all the people to sing different hymns, preach different messages, and give different testimonies simultaneously, but we will allow all of the people to pray out loud at the same time in our worship services? When we worship together as a body, we allow each member to play its part, which means that only one mouth preaches or gives a testimony or prays at a time. (See 1 Corinthians 14:26-27.)

A classic example of the unity of the body in corporate prayer is given to us in Acts chapter four. Peter and John are arrested for preaching the good news and healing a crippled beggar in this story. After their release, they returned to the body of believers and reported all that the Lord had done. The Bible goes on to say in verse 23 that they all “lifted their voices to God with one accord.” Many people who advocate Pentecostal praying often point to this verse to prove their position. However, a close examination of the context actually teaches against Pentecostal praying.

The Bible says they lifted their voices to God in one accord, and then it records the actual words of their prayer from verses 24b to 30.

Since the actual words they prayed are recorded for us in the Bible, that can only lead to two possibilities. Either every person had to pray the exact same words of that prayer together at the exact same time, or more likely, one person prayed that prayer on behalf of the whole body. Either way, when the Bible says they lifted their voices in one accord, it does not mean that each person was praying their own prayer to God out loud. Instead, it means that they were of one heart and one mind when they prayed; their praying was prayer that emphasized faith, order, and unity.

Now, of course, there could be times when we all would speak, but remember that we must maintain unity because we are not worshipping as individuals but worshipping as a body of believers. For example, when the song leader leads us to sing a particular hymn, we will all sing, dance, and clap, but we are singing THE SAME SONG. We are still of one mind and one body. Many people will sing when the choir sings a song, but they will be unified and singing THE SAME SONG. In some churches, they enjoy praying the Lord's Prayer together. Is this wrong? Of course not, because they are ALL PRAYING THE SAME PRAYER. However, when we have each individual doing what is right in his own eyes, praying aloud his own individual prayers, we do not have a corporate worship service. Instead, we have many individuals worshipping individually.

Please understand that I am not saying it is a sin to pray to God yourself while in the worship service. Often, when I know I will be called upon to preach, I will bow my head and pray in my heart as the worship service continues around me to make sure I am fully prepared for my task ahead. The important thing, though, is that I am praying in my heart and not distracting my brothers as they worship together in one heart and one spirit. Sometimes after giving my offering, I will pray

in my heart to the Lord a special prayer of gratitude and love to go with the money I have given. However, I am careful not to allow my personal prayer to take away from the overall purpose of the worship service—corporate worship. Most often, however, when someone is called upon to pray for us, we should be careful to listen to his prayer to God on our behalf so that we can agree with him by saying “Amen” when his prayer expresses the thoughts and desires of our heart. This method is how we pray together as one body in a worship service.

Before we finish this chapter, I think it is essential to mention one exception. I hope you have noticed that I continually emphasize regular worship service on Sundays and other times when the church is to pray as a body. Sometimes, we meet together as a church in other kinds of services. For instance, it is a tradition in Africa to have overnight prayer services. At these times, we meet just to pray together, and it is a little different situation than our corporate worship services on Sundays. It is not wrong to pray in different ways to give these meetings variety. For instance, you can break up into groups of three or four, share prayer requests and then pray for one another. If you do this, you will find more than one person praying aloud at a time, but it is not bad as long as they are not disturbing the other groups around them. Or perhaps you could say, “At this time, we are going to have a time of prayer where each one prays to the Lord himself, but please be careful not to distract the others who are around you.” Then you could allow the people to have a time of prayer like that.

Perhaps you are thinking, “What is the difference?” Well, there are at least two things. First of all, this is taking place at a specific time OTHER THAN the regular worship service on the Lord’s Day. That day and service are reserved for corporate worship together as one body. However, you can have special prayer services at any time, and

then you can employ other techniques like praying in groups or as individuals. Also, I have emphasized praying so that you don't distract those around you. You have defeated the purpose if you pray in groups but have to shout over one another to be heard. Or if you are having an individual time of prayer and confession but you are disturbing all of those around you, then you are again bringing only confusion. At these special prayer times, we must still emphasize faith and order; if we pray in ways other than as a unified group, we must be careful that we are praying in our hearts or at least softly enough that we won't bring confusion to the prayer service.

4

AGREEMENT IN PRAYER

Deuteronomy 27:15-26, Nehemiah 8:6

1 Corinthians 14:16

Related to the idea of unity, and crucial to our understanding of corporate prayer, is the importance of agreeing together in prayer. When we come together as a body of believers, we are not just praying individually but praying together as one body so we can agree together in prayer. There is great power in the body of Christ agreeing together. The way that we agree together is when one member of the body prays, and we express our agreement by saying, “Amen!” If you look at the example in Deuteronomy where the children of Israel received the law, repeatedly as a law was declared, the body would agree by saying, “Amen.” Amen means, “We agree” or “Let it be so.” It is a way of expressing that what the one who is praying has said has struck a chord of agreement in your heart. You agree with them and encourage them by letting them know that they are praying the very thing you are thinking and feeling in your heart.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul expresses how their use of tongues is actually bringing problems to their corporate worship services. Why?

Paul explains that because they are praying in words the rest can't understand, they are "preventing the one who does not understand from saying the AMEN at their giving of thanks" (14:6). His point is that when we pray together as a body, we need to hear and understand each other so that the one who is listening can agree with the one who is praying and, if necessary, say, "Amen!" When we all pray together out loud and at the same time, we are actually preventing ourselves from being able to agree in prayer as we have been instructed. God has given the church authority and power on this earth. Still, the authority is not found in individuals doing what is right in their own eyes, but instead in the body exercising that authority in agreement.

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus explains the very famous passage on church discipline. The basic meaning of what He is saying is that whatever the church does on earth, God recognizes it in heaven. If a brother sins, then there is a specific process of church discipline which culminates, if necessary, with the person being brought before the church body. Then as the church acts on this and disciplines this person, God recognizes this in heaven. Thus the words of Jesus, "Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This verse is not referring to binding and loosing demons as many people often mistakenly think. It refers to church discipline and the authority of the local church. It is in this context that Jesus says, "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 18:19) The point is that there is authority and power in our agreeing together in prayer as a church body. This need for agreement is one reason why corporate worship, and especially corporate prayer, should be one believer going to the Lord on behalf of all the others, while the remainder agrees with him in their hearts and with their "Amen."



AUTHORITY

Matthew 28:18-20

When Jesus created the church and commissioned them to go out into the world and make disciples of all nations, He gave them the authority to carry out their task. We see this authority exercised in many ways in the New Testament. For example, they had authority over evil spirits. They were given the authority to administer the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They were given the authority to govern themselves as churches. As Christians and Baptists, we believe that the Lord has given the local New Testament church authority to govern itself. The three distinctions of a real church are that they are self-supporting, self-propagating (can reproduce themselves), and self-governing.

This authority and self-governance are based on at least two things. One is the authority that the Lord gave to the church to govern itself, administer the ordinances, and call leaders. The other is based on the priesthood of all believers. 1st Peter 2:9 says of all Christians that "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who

called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” This verse simply means that we are all on equal footing before God. Each believer has the Holy Spirit, and is neither above nor below his brother, but we are all equal. At the same time, we all have equal responsibility. As priests, we are all to be about the business of the Kingdom of God.

Each local church is comprised of members who all have the Holy Spirit and are all equal in standing; therefore, we can each hear from God and make decisions together as a body. In Baptist churches, we have leaders the members call to lead and serve, but Jesus is the overall head of the church. Therefore, Jesus guides the church through the leaders so that leaders and members can work together as a team of equals under the His authority. Consider the church in the book of Acts; how they chose someone to replace Judas, how they chose the first deacons (allowing the members to select them), and how they allowed each church to govern themselves. It is clear that the Lord has given the local church authority to govern itself. This is crucial in our understanding of corporate worship; we are under the local church’s authority when we worship the Lord together as one body. However, by allowing “Pentecostal praying,” we are actually undermining the authority of that church.

Perhaps that seems like a strange thing to say but think about it from the standpoint of authority. When someone is the presider for the service, he is given authority by the body of believers to control the worship service and see it runs smoothly. His job is to seek the Lord and find God’s will about the service and how it should progress through prayer. For example, he is not just to pick songs randomly but is to pray and select the songs the Lord leads him to select. Also, as he calls on others to pray, he should carefully consider who the Lord would have him to call on to pray for the entire body at each point

in the worship service. If you were presiding in your church Sunday and deciding who you were going to call on to pray for the message, would you call on someone known to be a drunkard? Would you call on a known prostitute to pray for the offering? Would you call on a demon-possessed person to pray the opening prayer? OF COURSE NOT!! Yet, when we allow “Pentecostal praying,” that is often what happens.

Many different kinds of people visit our churches on Sunday morning, and many of them are lost and have many problems. We want them to be there and to hear the Word of God so Jesus can save them and restore their lives. However, we don’t usually call on them to pray for us because we want someone we know to be spiritual and walking with the Lord to lead in prayer. Yet, when we have a time where everyone prays aloud and at the same time, all of the people, saved and lost, are praying in the service. Therefore, during worship, we might have drunkards, prostitutes, lost people of all kinds, and even DEMONS praying in our worship service. At this point, the church has lost its authority and control over its own worship service.

To illustrate this, let me tell you a true story that happened to me one time. A few years ago, I was attending a Baptist church that allows the practice of “Pentecostal praying.” The service seemed to be very Baptist in appearance until they reached the time in the service they call “praise and worship.” This time really means that they will sing a few slow worshipful songs and then go into a time of “Pentecostal praying.” As they began the ritual of “Pentecostal praying,” I began to get very grieved in my spirit because pandemonium had broken out in the service. People were shouting, praying, walking around, and clapping, and I just felt that what was happening was not of the Lord. I became so troubled that I just sat down and began asking the

Lord to help me not feel so annoyed by what was taking place, but to help me concentrate and focus on Him. As I sat there, the Lord spoke to my heart and told me to lift my eyes and look at what was happening around me. When I did, I saw the confusion around me, and then I sensed something else that was out of place. I heard a woman making a strange noise which I had heard before in my life but just couldn't place what it was. As I looked over my shoulder to find out where the noise was coming from, I suddenly realized where I had heard the noise. Women often make this same noise when demons are manifesting in them. Sure enough, as I looked behind me, I saw an older woman, who was a first-time visitor that day, manifesting demons in the back of the church. What grieved me the most was that I was the only one in the church who realized what was happening. Everyone else was so caught up in the confusion that they could not see the reality of what was happening; demons were actually participating in the worship service in the presence of the members.

By allowing "Pentecostal praying," the church had abdicated its authority and was letting confusion reign instead of exercising Holy Spirit-led control over the service. If we don't pray appropriately in corporate worship and allow one at a time to lead us, there is no knowing who will be praying with us in our services. Do we want to open up the floor and allow drunkards, adulterers, and even demons to be praying for us, or do we want to use the wisdom and authority the Lord has given us to have a service that is holy and pleasing to Christ?

6

OUR TESTIMONY

Matthew 5 : 16, Matthew 6 : 5 - 8

One of the crucial things that many Christians neglect today is their testimony to the outside world. There are two extremes to this issue. Sometimes people do whatever they want without caring what others think. As a result, they are an embarrassment to the church, and their testimony brings shame and disgrace to the name of Christ. However, there is another equally bad extreme; when people do everything, **ONLY TO BE SEEN OF MEN**, and when they are more concerned with what others think than what God thinks. This is sometimes the case with Pentecostal-style praying.

On the one hand, we must ask the question, “What do others think when they see me worshipping in this manner?” Of course, we are to be more concerned with the thoughts of God than the thoughts of man. However, the Bible repeatedly teaches us to be good examples to the brethren as well as to outsiders. We are admonished to “let our lights so shine before men that they will see our good deeds and glorify our Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) Christians will always be thought of as strange because we are not like the world.

However, at the same time, we have to be careful that our conduct does not keep others out of the Kingdom of Heaven! When people see our worship, what do they see?

There have been times when I have brought visitors from America to pray in our Baptist churches here in Africa. It is always discouraging if we happen to be at a church that practices “Pentecostal praying” because even though the church doesn’t “believe” like Pentecostals and Charismatics, they act like it in their worship. Inevitably, because they can’t understand the language, the visitors will ask me embarrassing questions like; “Were they speaking in tongues?” or “Are they truly Baptist?” or “Did you teach them to pray like Pentecostals?” It usually takes me some time to convince these visitors that the church is actually Baptist and believes like a Baptist church; they are just confused in their style of worship. This form of worship is not Baptist and is not practiced by most Baptist churches in other parts of the world. Instead, it is something that the churches here have unknowingly picked from other Pentecostal and Charismatic churches around them. The problem is that when outsiders see us use Pentecostal style worship, we are giving the testimony that we are Pentecostal. Those outsiders will think that we also believe all the other errors that Pentecostal churches believe. We must remember that Colossians 4:5 tells us to “conduct ourselves with wisdom towards outsiders.”

There is the problem of being unconcerned with our testimony and the opinions of others. Yet, as I mentioned before, there is the other extreme of ONLY being concerned with the opinions of others. In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus is talking about how we should pray in our private prayer lives. However, there are a couple of issues found in

these verses which can help us to understand the proper attitude for prayer at all times: public and private.

First, He says that when we pray, we must not pray as the hypocrites “to be seen of men.” While the context admonishes us to pray privately, it does not prohibit us from publicly praying. There were many times when Jesus prayed publicly, and we are encouraged to do this in many places in Scripture. Yet, the same rule still applies; do not pray as the hypocrites to be seen of men. I am afraid, though, that is exactly what we Christians are doing many times. We want people to think we are spiritual, so we try to use big words or fancy prayers to impress our friends. Or perhaps others will only pray in English instead of their own heart language because they think somehow English sounds more educated and more spiritual. When we pray, we are to be praying to God as our Father and as our friend. We are not to be praying to our fellow members. Now, it is true that often when we pray publicly, we are praying for them or on their behalf; but we must realize that we are talking to God, and we should be the same publicly as we are when we pray in our prayer closet.

This show for others is often the case with “Pentecostal praying.” People are sometimes praying to impress those around them. They want to be seen as “spiritual” and as those who can pray with power, so they love the time of Pentecostal praying when they can impress their friends with how well they pray. Some people in these churches pray that way because of their friends, but from a different motivation. For them, it is fear of embarrassment or shame. They don’t truly feel that this is the right way to publicly worship, but because they don’t want their friends to think they don’t love Jesus, they participate in “Pentecostal praying” anyway. Both are hypocrisy: to pray a certain way because of pride or to pray a certain way because of wanting

to be a part of the group. When we come into God's presence, we must worship in "Spirit and in truth." But if we pray differently in public than in private, we are not worshipping in truth but instead in hypocrisy. He is the same God in private and public, and while our direction and purpose might be different in public and private prayer, our attitudes should be the same. He deserves the same respect and heart publicly as He does privately. To pray differently because your friends are listening is to be praying to them and not to God.

Jesus also mentions, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words." Often in "Pentecostal praying," this is what people are doing. They will just repeat the same words or phrases repeatedly, assuming that perhaps the more they say them, the more power they will have. For instance, I have been in churches where I have heard people praying out loud all at the same time, yet they were just saying "Fire, Fire, Fire," or "Yes Lord, Yes Lord, Yes Lord" or perhaps repeating the name of Jesus or the words "the Blood of Jesus" over and over again. Nowhere does the Bible tell us to pray like this, and Jesus specifically tells us not to use "meaningless repetition." We must be cautious about our motives when we pray. We should ask the questions, "Why do I pray the way I pray?" and "What do others think about me when they hear me praying?" We must be careful that we are not damaging our testimony or the church's testimony by our public prayers.



OPENING THE DOOR TO OTHER KINDS OF ERROR

This last chapter is more an appeal to common sense than to any specific verse of the Bible. James 1:5 teaches us that if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God, and God will give that wisdom to him. Over and over again in the book of Proverbs, we are exhorted to “get wisdom” and to value wisdom above many other things. At this time, I am simply appealing to your God-given wisdom to look at this last issue logically. This issue is what some have called the “Pandora’s box.” This phrase refers to an old Greek myth about a woman named Pandora who saw a beautiful box, and although she was warned not to open it, she could not resist and opened the box. That one act of opening the box allowed all of the terrible things in Pandora’s box to come out into the world.

Although this is just an ancient story and not true, it illustrates what is happening in many churches today. Because of the success of TBN in Africa and the cultural appeal of Pentecostal style praying, many churches have seen no harm in adapting those things into their church services. Unfortunately, these churches have unknowingly

opened their own “Pandora’s box.” What often happens is that they see something another church is doing in their area, and it looks enjoyable and fun. As a result, they just pick it and start using it in their church, without examining the Bible to see if it is proper or not. Then before they realize it, that tradition is so firmly rooted in their church that they cannot remove it without much pain. Then other practices and traditions creep into the church, and they are powerless to stop them. What they have done is open their own “Pandora’s box.”

For example, let’s say that a particular church (we will call it Blessed Baptist Church) is progressing in its work and love for the Lord. Then something happens that causes confusion to come in. Perhaps the pastor watches television and thinks his church should pray like those on television. As a result of that influence or perhaps another pastor friend of his, he leads the church to start “Pentecostal praying.” Another way it happens is perhaps when Blessed has several visitors who come one Sunday morning because they have just moved into the area. These people are all Pentecostal, but they decide to join Blessed because there is no other evangelical church around. Then, without carefully instructing these new people on Baptist beliefs, these people are received as members and start introducing new ways of worship, like Pentecostal praying. Another common way is through overnight prayer meetings. Blessed decides to have an overnight prayer meeting, but they invite other churches to come and pray because they want fellowship. Yet, these churches are Pentecostal and have other strange beliefs. The church enjoys the way they pray and decides to adopt it without carefully examining the Scriptures. All of these are ways that churches can start this unwise practice and, in so doing, open the “Pandora’s box.”

The crucial question now is what comes out of the box after it has been opened? Often, when churches freely accept such errors as “Pentecostal praying,” they are susceptible and open to other kinds of error. For instance, you find that a church may be Baptist in its beliefs, but eventually, they allow their members to worship like Pentecostals. Soon some of the members want to experiment with other Pentecostal practices like speaking in tongues and being “slain in the Spirit.” Being slain in the Spirit is where the pastor touches them on the head, and they pass out on the floor (a practice never found in the Bible). Often, the members will wonder, “How did we go so far to becoming like a Pentecostal church?” They don’t realize that they opened the door with Pentecostal-style praying.

Another thing that often happens is that when a church starts “Pentecostal praying,” they attract other people to their church who like that style. As I said before, I have had many people from Pentecostal and Charismatic backgrounds want to come and join our churches because of our emphasis on Bible teaching and training. Yet, they usually complain that we don’t pray the same way they do. What we try to do then is to show them in the Bible why we worship the way we do and that actually, we believe that all are free to worship in their own way as long as it does not violate Scripture. But when a Pentecostal finds a Baptist church that prays as they do, it is a strong attraction, and they will want to join. There is no problem with them joining. We want our churches to grow, and we love to receive new members. However, the problem is that if we do not teach them properly when they join, they will start to bring other forms of error and strange beliefs into our church.

This observation is accurate with all types of people from other kinds of churches. For example, suppose someone is saved from a

Zionist, Jehovah's Witness, or New Apostolic background. In that case, they must be taught Baptist beliefs initially so they will not try to incorporate their false doctrines from their old churches. We need to realize that wisdom tells us not to open the "Pandora's box." Don't allow "Pentecostal praying" to come into the church, and then you will not have a problem with other bad things trying to come in behind it.

CONCLUSION

As I have said before, Pentecostals and Charismatics are not our enemies, but instead, they are our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are on the same team to fulfill the Great Commission and in the same battle together against sin, the world, and the devil. Even though we disagree on certain areas of theology and practice, we can still partner together and work together in the Kingdom of God. Indeed, some of these churches preach the gospel, and some Pentecostal brothers and sisters are fervently serving the Lord. However, while we can work together in the Kingdom of God, we must be careful to “agree to disagree” on specific areas of doctrine and practice. One of these areas is in the area of worship.

While it is not a mistake to love our Pentecostal and Charismatic brothers, it would be a serious mistake to adopt all they do, say, and believe wholeheartedly. When we measure what we practice and believe, we do not measure it by other churches but by the Bible. We must be very careful to allow Jesus, through the Scriptures, to guide and lead our beliefs. While it is not wrong to work with Pentecostals, it would be wrong to adopt their style of worship because it is “enjoyable” or because it is “what others are doing.” As Baptists and Christians, we believe that the Bible is the only infallible rule for living and worship.

I have attempted to show that this thing of “Pentecostal praying” is not supported or taught in the Bible. The practice of all the members praying individually, aloud, all together at the same time, or the practice of shouting at God without respect and praying so loudly as if He is unable to hear our prayers are in direct violation of God’s Word. We would do well to examine our practices and make sure we align

with the Bible and not just the church next door.

When I think of these churches which practice these things, the words which come to my mind are “excess” or “extremes.” I think of churches that will go to any length, do anything, or accept any practice. Many Pentecostal churches in Africa are known for having no boundaries and will do anything at all that seems right in their own eyes. Do we genuinely want to be like that? I don’t believe so. God has not called us to that, but to a different standard. He has called our churches to love Him, serve Him, and worship Him in Spirit and Truth. We have not been called to undermine our authority, our unity, and our testimony through doing such things as “Pentecostal praying.” Instead, we are called to worship together as He has prescribed in His Word. Let us be very careful to remember who we are as Christians and as Baptists, and let us be very careful to love our brothers without joining them in their confusion.