

CHURCH – PRAY TO GOD IN REPENTANCE

THE PRAYER MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

Before leaving the earth, Jesus entrusted the future of the church into the hands of His disciples, granting them the authority and power of His name.

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”
Matt 28:18-19

Having been given responsibility for the church did not mean that we are left to our own devices. Jesus promised that if we loved Him and obeyed His word, He would dwell within us and make his will know to us, and be engaged in the work with us. Furthermore He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to teach us, and guide and help us.

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” John 14:23-24

“And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.” Mark 16:20

The Godhead does not interfere with our headship in the task they have set before us, leaving the initiative to us to turn to them in prayer. Having given us a free will, God waits for us to pray to Him before He acts. It is obvious that by ourselves, we do not have the capacity to bear fruit, or overcome the evil devices of Satan and Antichrist that continually oppose the true doctrine of Christ, and the ministry of the church in evangelising the world. The prayer ministry of the church is to direct continual prayer to the throne of God, seeking God’s guidance and power to cast down Satan’s strongholds, and to bring the true church into existence. God tells us in Isaiah,

“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem [symbolising the Church], which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem [the church] a praise in the earth.” Isa 62:6-7 KJV

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

The Pattern of the Early Church

To assess the true state of the current church, we must compare it with the pattern of the early church founded by the apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who was directed by Jesus Christ.

Unity

Any form of disunity in the church was expressively forbidden by the apostle Paul, who rebuked the church at Corinth for its divisions.

“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

“...for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?” 1 Cor 1:11-13 & 3:3-4

In the early Church, the only title given to distinguish between churches was that of location, so we have the church at Antioch, the church at Pergamos, or the church at Jerusalem and so on.

Today, the church is divided by doctrinal divisions into denominations, sects, and deviations from the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Assembling together

Early Christians fellowshiped in houses, and it was nearly a century before meeting halls and church buildings came into existence.

“Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” 1 Cor 16:19-20

Meeting halls developed into cathedrals and prestigious church buildings that became so lavished with stained glass windows, statues, paintings, and other ornamentation, that the church itself with its rituals, liturgies, ceremonies, clerical vestments, and formalised prayer, became the object of worship rather than God the Creator. Interestingly, there is a growing disenchantment with formal church worship, and there is a spontaneous home fellowship movement.

Leadership

In the early Church, ministerial leaders were prepared and set in place by the Lord.

“And He [Jesus] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers [or elders], for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”... Eph 4:11-12

Local churches were autonomous, and their oversight was entrusted to the elders [plural]. In the local church, prepared leaders from within the fellowship were recognised by the elders, who anointed them and set them in place. Although local churches were autonomous, they all adhered to the doctrine of Jesus Christ set forth by the original apostles.

By comparison, the oversight and running of present-day churches is usually entrusted to a single minister, who has attended a seminary and successfully completed the relevant courses that enable him to be ordained and qualified as a minister. The end result is that many young ministers do not have a personal relationship with the Lord, or real knowledge of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Denominational churches usually have a national or international chain of authority, where the highest positions of authority are determined by academic degrees, or are even politically motivated. The end result of adopting the world’s manner of headship, is that the headship of Jesus Christ expressed through His prepared leaders is greatly diminished, and there is no room for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Modern administrative leaders are usually chosen annually after the manner of the world – by consensus or democratic vote, rather than by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Ethics and Morality

Because the church has subjected itself to worldly precepts like equality and equal rights, the way has been paved for small groups to demand the right of women, and even homosexuals, to be ordained as ministers with oversight over churches. Paul set out a chain of authority reflecting God’s will concerning headship in the family and oversight of the church.

“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” 1 Cor 11:3-4

“And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” 1 Tim 2:12

This is not to say that men are superior to women, but that this is an allocation of roles according to God’s will. Other passages from Acts and Paul’s letters, show that women prayed and prophesied in the assembly, and were chosen as deacons. It was not that they were forbidden to participate, but that it should be under the covering of male oversight. This model for leadership does not apply to world organisations, but it is God’s will for family headship, and leadership in the church.

In the following end-time prophecy concerning the church, Isaiah condemns leaders for ignoring God’s will by submitting to the world’s demands for equal rights in the church.

“As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.” Isa 3:12

THE ORDINANCES OF MARRIAGE, BAPTISM AND COMMUNION

Marriage was instigated by God between man and woman, so that they might be made one in spirit, and bring forth godly children.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Gen 2:24

“But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring.” Mal 2:15

Many in the church have ignored the sanctity of the marriage covenantal vows instigated by God, and have bowed to the voices of the world demanding equal marriage rights for homosexuals. This is despite God’s consistent disapproval of homosexuality throughout the bible.

“Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Cor 6:9-10

Homosexuals are entitled to all legal and communal rights provided by government legislation to all citizens, but they have no right to equate their union with that of Christian marriage.

Baptism

In the early church baptism followed the confession of salvation. It was by full immersion in water, signifying the death and burial of the ‘old man,’ and being raised as a new creation, having a new life lived in union with Jesus Christ.

By comparison, most modern churches adopt infant baptism before a person is capable of making a decision. It is done by sprinkling, which hasn’t got the same spiritual significance.

Communion

Early Christians followed the Lord’s instruction to partake of bread and wine [symbolising His sacrificed body and shed blood] together, in remembrance of Him.

“This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” 1 Cor 11:25

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Acts 2:42-43.

In some churches, the Lord's Supper is taken infrequently, or not at all, whilst the Catholic Church has deprived it of its simplicity by introducing the doctrine of transubstantiation, and denying the general congregation the privilege of partaking of the wine.

A TREE IS KNOWN BY ITS FRUIT

Apart from the deviation from the pattern of the early church, the real test of the modern church is the fruit it has created. **“For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit.”** Luke 6:43-44

Although the church has lost the vitality and power of the early church, and has gradually deteriorated throughout the centuries, it has managed to evangelise the whole world. It is in the last decades that the degeneration of the church has accelerated to the point where it must face God's severe judgment.

The first five chapters of Isaiah outlines God's view of the church in the last days. Although addressed to Judah and Jerusalem, these are symbols portraying spiritual Israel, or the church. In these last days Judah no longer exists. Chapter 1, verses 5-7, vividly portrays the real condition of the church.

“...the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.” Isa 1:5-7.KJV

In the following New Testament passage, Paul is telling Timothy about the state of the end-time church and the moral condition of some of its attendees.

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.” 2 Tim 3:1-5.

They have a form of godliness in that they attend church, but have rejected the Holy Spirit and His power to change lives. Because the church has become powerless, it has fallen prey to Satan, Antichrist, and hosts of demonic spirits, that have flooded the church with apostasies, and all manner of moral decline.

A CALL TO REPENTANCE

Even a brief study of the bible shows us that Israel and Judah have regularly been in the same position of the present day church. Having forsaken God, they were overtaken by idolatry, disobedience, wickedness, and every kind of evil. In the face of such evil, some of their leaders took the burden of Israel and Judah upon themselves, confessing the sins of the nations, seeking God's forgiveness and intervention in their circumstances. E.g.

Daniel

“And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments...

Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake...

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.” Daniel 9:3-19 KJV

Isaiah

“You are indeed angry, for we have sinned — In these ways we continue; and we need to be saved. But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is no one who calls on Your name,

But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand. Do not be furious, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever; indeed, please look — we all are Your people!” Isa 64:5-9 NKJV

Joel

Although Joel’s prophecy is addressed to Judah in the last days, spiritually it is referring to the end-time church. The first chapter describes how swarms of locusts devour all vegetation, and leave the land desolate. Spiritually, the locusts are symbols for demon spirits, and so this is a picture of the end-time church sorely oppressed and left desolate by Satan’s demonic spirits. Being desolate is not a physical description, for she has been made spiritually desolate, bereft of spiritual power, and left spiritually dead and lifeless.

“Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten... The field is wasted, the land mourns; for the grain [symbolically: the word of truth] is ruined, the new wine [symbolically: joy] is dried up, the oil [symbolically: the Holy Spirit] fails. Joel 1:1-10

The Second Chapter opens with a warning that the day of the Lord is at hand.

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand: A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness... For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

This is followed by a call to repentance.

“Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm...

Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, “Spare Your people, O Lord.”

Next there is an assurance that the Lord God will hear and answer their prayers, restore the church, removing from it all traces of apostasy, idolatry, lawlessness, immorality, and worldliness.

Then the Lord will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. The Lord will answer and say to His people, "Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

God will pour out His Spirit on the church. The former rain that fell at Pentecost will be followed by an outpouring of the latter rain. The latter rain usually falls about a month before harvest, giving it an impetus that fills out the grain, ensuring a bountiful harvest. The latter rain of the Spirit will fall on the church, empowering it to receive a huge harvest of souls, called to repentance by the horrendous shaking of God's last day's judgment.

Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you — the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month..." Joel 2:1-23 NKJV

THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH AND JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED

In God's judgment of the world, the church will be judged first.

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" 1 Peter 4:17-18 NKJV

The church must face God's refining judgment and be set in order before it can be a beacon to the world. When every part of the world order is shaken in God's terrible judgment, and men's hearts shake with fear, the church will be a light to the nations, and many souls will flow into it.

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side." Isa 60:1-4 KJV

When will God's judgment fall on the church, and when will He pour out His Spirit on her? If we look closely, we can discern where God's judgment has already started. But what is holding back God's restoration? God is waiting for the church to turn to Him in repentance, like Daniel and Isaiah, confessing our sins in repentance, asking God to intervene and restore the Lord's church.

This parallel prophecy from Isaiah telling of Israel's indifference and reluctance to turn to God in repentance, also applies to those in the end-time church.

"But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore." Isa 42:22 KJV

God has always prepared a remnant who has remained faithful to the Lord, and grieved over its apostasies. Now is the time for the faithful remnant to cry out to the Lord on behalf of the church, so that God may come to her aid, destroying her enemies, and glorifying the name of the Lord Jesus throughout the earth.