



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
LESSON 112 – MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH – PART 3
WRITTEN BY PHILLIP M WAY

UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, ALL SCRIPTURE TAKEN FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION. COPYRIGHT © 1982 BY THOMAS NELSON, INC.. USED BY PERMISSION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Seven Marks of a Healthy Church

- ▶ What then are the marks of a sound church according to the Bible? We will summarize them into seven points over the next few weeks. These seven things must be present for a church to claim rightly that they are a church that is obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ▶ 1. God is worshipped in spirit and truth – Rom.12:1; Philip.3:3; John 4:5-26
- ▶ 2. Prayer is central – Acts 2:42, 1Thes.5:17
- ▶ 3. Love for Christ and the Brethren is demonstrated – 1 Pet.1:22, Jam.1:22
- ▶ 4. The Word of God is faithfully preached, taught, and heard – Acts 6:4, 13:44; Rom.10:17; 2Tim.4:2
- ▶ 5. The Ordinances of Baptism and Communion are administered – Acts 2:42; Mat.28:19
- ▶ 6. Discipline of the membership is Biblically administered – 1 Cor.5:10-13; Mat.18:15-17
- ▶ 7. Church government and leadership as instituted by the Apostles is established – Acts 14:23, 6:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ The Second Mark - Prayer is Central – Acts 2:42, 1 Thes.5:17
- ▶ Acts 2:42 – “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
- ▶ 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “pray without ceasing,”
- ▶ When the church in the Book of Acts identified itself by faith and practice as a sound church, they were approved by God and used by Him to expand the work of the gospel. One of the signature marks seen in the Book of Acts was the mark of continual prayer. The church in Jerusalem continued steadfastly in prayer.
- ▶ To understand this we must understand what it means to pray. The Bible commands that the believer “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Can we pray without ceasing and truly make prayer a central part of our lives and our churches and still have time for other activities? Yes. To pray without ceasing does not mean to always be uttering a prayer of some sort. Prayer itself is communion. It is a dialogue between God and us. We talk; He listens. He talks; we listen. To pray without ceasing is to ever be in communion (open communication) with God. It is to be aware of His presence and dependent upon His power moment by moment.

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ A Christian cannot pray without ceasing and at the same time rely upon himself and his own resources to deal with whatever trials or temptations he may encounter. Instead, we must be ever aware of our relationship with God. That relationship defines who we are as Christians.
- ▶ It was preached by Del Fehsenfeld, Jr., that being a Christian was not based on what you did, what you said, what you believed, or how you lived. Being a Christian is just that – being! It is what you ARE. Because you are His child and have a relationship with Him, you should naturally commune with Him often.
- ▶ In the New Testament we learn that even Jesus would go off by Himself to pray to the Father. If He, being God in the flesh, needed to pray often and for long periods of time then how much more do we, as fallen human beings, need that time alone with God? And time alone with God produces a deep prayer life.

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ The evidence of prayer for most people though is found in what they utter from their mouths when they are called upon to lead in prayer during a church service. This is not any evidence whatsoever of the depth or magnitude of one's prayer life. And if we think we can prove our spirituality by the way we pray in public then we have fallen for the same lie that the Pharisee did in Luke 18:10-14.
- ▶ Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ In this text we learn the both the false and the true nature of prayer. False prayer, which is just empty talking and wind, is proud, full of self, and condemning of others. True prayer is humble, penitent, and answered! False prayer is forced. True prayer is the natural flow of conversation with God just as communication between two people who love each other.
- ▶ The Pharisee here stood for all to see and prayed for all to hear. “Thank you God, that I am so much better than all these sinners around me!” He prayed with pride, comparing his goodness to those around him. He was puffed up and full of himself. And God did not lend him an ear. As a matter of fact, if ever we pray like this, without a proper heart attitude, our prayer is an abomination to God! That’s right. Read Proverbs 28:9. If a person refuses to hear the Word of God and then thinks he can pray to God about whatever he wants, that person’s prayer is abominable to God.

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ The tax collector humbly approached the throne of grace, not even daring to look up to heaven in his humility and unworthiness. He cried out expressing his deep need, believing that only God could meet the need. And God did what he asked. He showed him mercy and justified him!
- ▶ The self-righteous, religious Pharisee was shunned. The humble sinner was saved. True prayer contains within it a proper view of God and a proper view of self. True prayer is born out of dependence and humility, reverence and need. True prayer is a delight.
- ▶ We do not pray humbly because we are worthless, but because we know our own unworthiness. Our salvation, and every other gift God gives us, is completely of His choosing and grace. He does not reward any merit He sees in us. He gives us grace despite ourselves. And when we express our gratitude in prayer, we must do so with a focus on Him, not on us.

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ Prayer does involve intercession. Pleading with God to meet the needs we have and others have. But that intercession is never to be made with the expectation that just because we ask and end the prayer in “Jesus Name” that we will get what we want. True prayer expresses to God our understanding that His will is going to be done. And when we deny ourselves and follow Him, we want His will, not our own.
- ▶ Corporate prayer then does not have to fit a formula or be long winded. The most powerful prayers ever recorded have been short and to the point, dripping in both praise and faith. We are to pray with expectation. And part of that prayer that is central to a true church is prayer for one another. We should be ready in an instant to stop what we are doing and pray for a fellow believer in need.

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ Prayer must be central in the church because it must be central in the life of every believer. How do we expect to have a relationship with One with whom we never talk? Our services should begin and end with prayer, and be full of prayer in between as we seek His will, His provision, His blessing, and His grace as we serve Him as His church.
- ▶ The New Testament church was born in prayer. It must live in prayer and continue in prayer. As soon as we stop communicating with our Lord and Master, we cease to be His church. Any church that does not give proper place to public prayer and foster opportunity for its members to pray together and for one another often is not a true church. For a true church prays constantly to take advantage of every moment spent in communion with her Lord.

Second Mark – Prayer is Central

- ▶ To sum up the importance and place of prayer, let me quote briefly from the writings of Leonard Ravenhill, a man who prayed. He wrote,
- ▶ “No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying. Poverty stricken as the church is today, she is most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere. In the matter of New Testament, Spirit-inspired, hell-shaking, world-breaking prayer, never has so much been left by so many to so few. For this kind of prayer there is no substitute. We do it – or die.”
- ▶ (*Why Revival Tarries*, chapter 2).