

The Power of United Prayer

*".....if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask,
it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three are gathered in my name,
there am I among them*

Matthew 18:19-20

One of the first lessons of our Lord in His school of prayer was not to pray visibly. Go into your closet and be alone with the Father. When He has taught us that the meaning of prayer is personal, individual contact with God, He gives us a second lesson: You also need public, united prayer. He gives us a very special promise for the united prayer of two or three who agree in what they ask. As a tree has its root hidden in the ground and its stem growing up into the sunlight, so prayer needs secrecy in which the soul meets God alone and public fellowship with those who find their common meeting place in the Name of Jesus.

The reason why this must be so is plain. The bond that unites a man with his fellow men is no less real and close than that which unites him to God: He one with them. Grace renews not only our relationship with God, but our relationships with our fellow human beings, too. We not only learn to say "*My Father*." It would be unnatural for the children of family to always meet their father separately, never expressing their desires or their love jointly.

Believers are not only members of one family, but of one Body.

Just as each member of the Body depends on the other, the extent to which the Spirit can dwell in the Body depends on the union and cooperation of everyone. Christians cannot reach the full blessing God is ready to bestow through His Spirit until they seek and receive it in fellowship with each other. It was to the hundred and twenty praying together in total agreement under the same roof that the Spirit came from the throne of the glorified Lord. In the same way, it is in the union and fellowship of believers that the Spirit can manifest His full power.

The elements of true, united prayer are given to us in these words of our Lord. The first is agreement as to the thing asked. It isn't enough to generally consent to agree with anything another may ask. The object prayed for must be some special thing, a matter of distinct, united desire. The agreement must be, as in all prayer, in spirit and in truth. In such agreement exactly what we are asking for becomes very clear. We find out whether we can confidently ask for it according to God's will, and whether we are ready to believe that we have received it.

The second element is the gathering in the Name of Jesus. Later, we will learn much more about the necessity and the power of the Name of Jesus in prayer. Here our Lord teaches us that His Name must be the center and the bond of the union that makes them one, just as a home contains and unites all who are in it. "*The Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe*" (Proverbs 18:10). That Name is such a reality to those who understand and believe in it, that to meet within it is to have Him present.

Jesus is powerfully attracted by the love and unity of His disciples: "*Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matthew 18:20). The presence of Jesus, alive in the fellowship of His loving, praying disciples, gives united prayer its power.

The third element is the sure answer: "*It shall be done for them of my Father.*" Although a prayer meeting for maintaining religious fellowship, or for our own edification, may have its use, this was not the Savior's reason for recommending it. He meant it as a means of securing special answer to prayer. A prayer meeting without recognized answer to prayer ought to be the exception to the rule. When we feel too weak to exercise the faith necessary to attain a distinct desire, we ought to seek strength in the help of others. In the unity of faith, love, and the Spirit, the power of the Name and the presence of Jesus act more freely, and the answer comes more surely. The evidence that there has been true, united prayer is the fruit – the answer, the receiving of the thing for which we have asked. "*I say unto you, It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*"

What an extraordinary privilege united prayer is!

What a potential power it has!

Who can say why blessing might be gained:

- if the believing husband and wife knew they were joined together in the Name of Jesus to experience His presence and power in united prayer (1 Peter 3:3);
- if friends were aware of the mighty help two or three praying in concert could give each other;
- if in every prayer meeting the coming together in the Name, the faith in His presence, and the expectation of the answer stood in the foreground;
- if in every church united, effective prayer were regarded as one of the chief purposes for which they are banded together;
- if in the universal Church the coming of the Kingdom and of the King Himself were really matter of unceasing, united crying to God!

The Apostle Paul had great faith in the power of united prayer.

To the Romans he writes, "*I beseech you, brethren, by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayer to God for me*" (Romans 15:30). He expects in answer to be delivered from his enemies and to prosper in his work.

To the Corinthians he declares, "*God will still deliver us, ye also helping together on our behalf by your supplications*" (2 Corinthians 1:11). He expects their prayer to have a real share in his deliverance.

To the Ephesians he writes, "*With all prayer and supplication, praying at all seasons in the Spirit for all the saints and on my behalf, that utterance may be given unto me*" (Ephesians 6:18-19).

He makes the power and success in his ministry dependent on their prayers.

With the Philippians he expects that his trials will become his salvation and increase the progress of the gospel, "*through your supplications and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:19).

When telling the Colossians to continue praying constantly, he adds, "*Withal praying for us too, that God may open unto us a door for the word*" (Colossians 4:3).

And to the Thessalonians he writes, "*Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable men*" (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

It is quite evident that Paul perceived himself as the member of a Body whose sympathy and cooperation he depended on. He counted on the prayers of these churches to gain for him what otherwise might not be given. **The prayers of the Church were to him as real a factor in the work of the Kingdom as the power of God.**

Who can say what power a church could develop and exercise if it would assume the work of praying day and night for the coming of the Kingdom, for God's power, or for the salvation of souls? Most churches think their members gather simply to take care of and edify each other. They don't know that God rules the world by the prayers of His saints, that prayer is the power by which Satan is conquered, and that through prayer the Church on earth has access to the powers of the heavenly world. They do not remember that Jesus has, by His promise, made every assembly in His Name a gate to heaven, where His presence is to be felt, and His power experience by the Father fulfilling their desires.

We cannot sufficiently thank God for the blessed work of united prayer, with which Christendom, in our days, opens every year. It is of unspeakable value as proof of our unity and our faith in the power of united prayer, as a training school for the enlargement of our hearts to take in all the needs of the Church, and as a help to united persevering prayer. But it has been a special blessing as stimulus to continued union in prayer in the smaller circles. When God's people realize what it means to meet as one in the Name of Jesus, with His presence in the midst of a Body united in the Holy Spirit, they will boldly claim the promise that the Father will do what they agree to request.

Lord, teach us to pray.

Blessed Lord! You ask so earnestly for the unity of Your people. Teach us how to encourage our unity with Your precious promise regarding united prayer. Show us how to join together in love any desire, so that Your presence is in our faith in the Father's answer.

O Father! We pray for those smaller circles of people who meet together so that they may become one. Remove all selfishness and self-interest, all narrowness of heart and estrangement that hinders their unity. Cast out the spirit of the world and the flesh through which Your promise loses all its power. Let the thought of Your presence and the Father's favor draw us all nearer to each other.

Grant especially, blessed Lord, that Your Church may believe that it is by the power of united prayer that she can bind and loose in heaven, cast out Satan, save souls, remove mountains, and hasten the coming of the Kingdom. And grant, good Lord, that my prayer circle may indeed pray with the power through which Your Name and Word are glorified.
Amen.