

February 02, 2025 - I Thessalonians 5:14-18 - "Prayer our Path to Growing"

Introduction:

Today I want to talk with you for a few minutes on the subject of the state of the church and Prayer our path to Growing. In a little while we will have our congregational meeting and we will take some time to look together at the fiscal state of our church. But what is even more important is the spiritual state of our church and we would all do well to look to it and respond accordingly. First, let me make some general observations about the state of the church at "large" compiled by Barna Research Group.

For many years they have been studying cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors within the church. They suggested that the church seems mired in spiritual complacency. It has been for years and the covid pandemic had only added to this complacency and drop outs. Barna did a survey based on national random samples of 1000 + Christian defined as born again adults. These are just a few of their findings. Out of 1000+ surveyed only 42 % attended a church services. Only 20% volunteered at their church; 19% attended a Sunday school class; only 16% participated in prayed meeting that met for religious purposes or Bible study.

Only 4% had a private time to pray and read the Bible. 43% of the Christians polled have an average church attendance of once a month. That is the state of the Church in America; sad to say that these figures pretty much match our own and again they have becoming worse for many churches.

Folks the church is the most blessed institution on the earth, the only one built by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is the only institution Christ promised to build and bless. God has blessed Dover First Baptist Church in a number of ways. I commend our church on its' giving and efforts in supporting missions. I commend our church for its caring of the people that make up this assembly. In theses I compliment and praise you. For example currently the Harrington's and Pastor Shott; throughout the years this has been a wonderful blessing of our Church. In giving you are so gracious and second to none as I have been told...

However, we have to look at the whole makeup of the church and what makes it strive. Consider a house that is falling apart but the kitchen is immaculate. Resources of time, energy, and money need to be invested in the other area or it will fall apart and the kitchen will go with it.

I like us to look at the church in Thessalonica because it was a good church. They were in the process of maturing. They were moving in the right direction. They were moving toward the direction of holiness. Yet, there was need for growth. So it is with our church and this passage will help us to identified area to sure up. -- Pr.27:23

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, [and] look well to thy herds.

I. Encourage Unity vv.14-15

1. Note the key word in verse 14 is the word "brethren." While there is a responsibility on the part of the shepherds to exercise his authority in confronting difficult Christians, the lines between the shepherd and the sheep in this regard are very fluent. The word "warn" is the Greek verb "noutheteo" (*newt's a tay o*) means to put sense into, to come alongside and put some sense into their heads. And basically it is instruction with a view toward correction. He tells the brethren "to admonish the unruly". This Greek word "ataktos" (at a toss) often was used in a military sense.

2. When used in a military sense it had the idea of a soldier who was out of line, a soldier who was out of rank, a soldier who was guilty of disorderly conduct, who was insubordinate, not following through on his duty.

In verse 15, Paul is saying, "Returning evil for evil will never grow the church. You only overcome evil with good. We must encourage unity and fidelity there cannot be open sin in the camp. That destroys unity.

II. Encourage Joy vv.16

1. Rejoicing comes from joy. Joy is not a result of feelings. It's a result of the knowledge of the truth. It means you trust in the truth and promises of God. The Christian can rejoice always because their joy isn't based on circumstances, but always in our Father. Circumstances change He doesn't.

Satan wants to steal your joy. I believe Peter says it best when he says Satan goes around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We need to work together: more and better to encourage fellowship and unity in our church. How do we? By exercising loving support and be at the church functions and services. It is discouraging to me and others when there is poor attendance and support. Maybe we should encourage one another more to adhere to the church constitution. It reads: *to give the church a sacred pre-eminence over all*

institution of human origin; by attending all the regular services of the church...
Do we find more joy elsewhere than church?

2. "I am bound to mention among the curiosities of the churches, that I have known many spiritual Christian people who have been afraid to rejoice. Some take a view of religion that it is to them a sacred duty to be gloomy." (Spurgeon)
Last, the one thing I want to spend the remaining time on is...

III. Encourage Prayer - I Thess.5:17

1. Folks, Prayer is not an option, it is a necessity. Paul instructed us to - "Pray without ceasing". The question we need to ask is: Why do we struggle to pray as we should? Without ceasing" The verse teaches us the value of united prayer -- the church coming together in prayer. God's appointed way is to wait for the people of God to pray for Him to act. (2 Chron. 7:14)

2. If we are to follow the New Testament pattern there needs to be: continual prayer. This is what happened in the early church. When they realized that James had been put to death, and that this vicious attack of the enemy could be successful, it suddenly crystallized in their minds that they had a part to play in God's program. Satan has launched a vicious attack against the 21st century church, apathy then the pandemic, to laziness and to busyness.

Application:

We may fail to pray because we believe the busyness of everyday life is more important than time talking to God. We think using the worlds methods are more secure and relevant. Calling a friend or going to a text book figures to be more credible. However we rob ourselves of the greatest resource we have. Jesus said, JOHN 15:5 - "I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. We need to bear fruit to grow the Church...

3. Forsaking prayer because it is hard to do has grave consequence. This generation avoids pain at all cost... Prayer is simple to understand but it is hard to do. Anything worthwhile takes an effort. You will only mature and succeed by praying. When we do not feel like praying is precisely the time we ought to pray. Folks there are no short cuts but Jesus showed us the way. Jesus provides the model for our prayer life. Christ prayers came with vehement cries and tears and he was heard by the father. Remember the garden prayer?

Yes, things in your life may be upside down and in turmoil. Just making it another day seems harsh. We can make it! Dr. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission once said, “you go forward on your knees”.

3. Don't sell out to the lie - I don't feel like I can pray so I won't. Prayer is not a feeling it is a choice, make the choice to pray. We choose to pray even in spiritual dryness because the scripture tell us to do this. Even the greatest of God servants have had these times. The just shall live by faith Romans 1:17.

4. If we are to receive the blessings that God has for us, we must persist in prayer, both privately and corporately. We must come to God on His terms not ours.

Illustration:

A missionary to Haiti was told by a doctor that it was likely she had cancer. A biopsy was performed and sent away for analysis. As she waited for the results, she was filled with fear and could find no peace of mind. As she reflected on all of this, it occurred to her that it was Wednesday evening--prayer meeting at her home church back in the United States. She also realized that it was the first Wednesday night after friends had been notified of her potential crisis.

These facts convinced this faithful missionary that God had given her an opportunity to be encouraged in the prayers of others. The medical report soon came back with the welcome news that there was no cancer.

5. We here at Dover first Baptist have seen the power praying together. We have come together and prayed for our Sister Jayne and she is a walking miracle. We recently prayed for Lorraine's friend who grandson Ryan was in a car accident, he is home and back to work. We prayed for Sidney Speller's bone marrow treatments and to gain weight and get his strength back up. God has healed by the power of our prayers. --- James 5:15

6. May I suggest to you prayer is needed for your church. Our church is sick, yes it is sick; it's growth has been stunned and it needs all God's to come pray together. We must care enough to invest in pray in your church.

Conclusion:

What is keeping you from prayer? Whatever it is that is keeping you from prayer is not worthy to be compared to what God has for your church by the power of prayer. I have no other solution for the church growth than to start with a united prayer front.