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INTERCESSOR MINISTRIES

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Prayer First!

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~ Foreward ~

THE concept of this book, “Prayer First,” is taken from the examples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. The biblical text is taken from I Timothy 2:1.

When you look at the life of Jesus you find He was a man of prayer. As He started His ministry the first thing he did, after being baptized, was to pray (Luke 3:21). His entire life was surrounded by prayer.

Prayer is the first thing we also find Saul (Paul) doing after his conversion: “And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:11).

We learn the principle of “Prayer First” not only in the life of Jesus and Paul, but in I Timothy 2:1, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.” “First of all” means of primary importance, or utmost importance; therefore, it should be our top priority.

I pray this little book will be used to show the Christian that prayer should be FIRST in his or her life.

Dr. Benny L Beckum
Founder/President
Intercessor Ministries, Inc.



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Chapter One

Introduction

The Priority Of Prayer, Primacy Of Preaching, And The Preeminence of Soulwinning!

DR. Beckum and I have spent many hours discussing the topic I have been asked to address in this message. Our minds are in 100% agreement in this matter, and I've been asked to present this message as a statement of The Intercessor Ministries' position on the subject: the priority of prayer, the primacy of preaching, and the preeminence of soulwinning.

Dr. Beckum is a soulwinner. Hundreds have been saved in his meetings. Amazing testimonies of revival have followed his ministry in which hundreds have been saved and baptized. There is nothing in what he teaches that should be taken by anyone as undermining soulwinning. He be-

believes soulwinning is the preeminent work of the New Testament churches.

Dr. Beckum is a preacher. He strives to be sensitive to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in his preaching. For this reason, sometimes he is very quiet, and sometimes very demonstrative. Like most effective preachers, his style varies with the occasion and the message, and his delivery style is certainly unique—but he is a preacher. He believes preaching is the primary method God has ordained to do the preeminent work of soulwinning. No one who knows him would think anything he said undermines the primary role of preaching.

Dr. Beckum believes soulwinning is the preeminent work of the New Testament Church (Matthew 28:18-20), and that preaching is the primary method God has ordained to do that work (I Corinthians 1:21).

However, Dr. Beckum believes prayer is the priority. He believes we must put prayer first in our soulwinning and in our preaching, and in every other aspect of life and ministry.



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Chapter Two

The Prayer First Controversy

Why This Message Is Necessary

OUR emphasis on the priority of prayer is not new, nor is it novel, as we shall show. But it has been long neglected. Therefore, sometimes our emphasis on the importance of prayer raises questions. Most of the resistance to the *prayer first* doctrine is concern that it somehow diminishes soulwinning and preaching.

I'll overview these concerns in this chapter as I attempt to explain why this message is necessary.

Prayer first does not replace soulwinning.

Recently, when preaching at a preacher's conference in Southern California, I stressed the importance of prayer and fasting in a sermon on the

subject of prayer, titled *Meet Me At The Door!* Afterwards, I was approached by a fellow who was pleasant, but obviously had an issue, and he asked me if I thought prayer and fasting was helpful in soulwinning.

You had to be there to notice the tone, and his manner of expressing himself, and the spirit of the encounter to appreciate why I thought I discerned an ulterior motive; he was making a point with his question. Further conversation with him verified it: he believed the really important matter of soulwinning had been neglected in my message. I assured him that prayer and fasting have certainly improved my soulwinning passion and effectiveness.

So it happens when we are emphasizing an important doctrine, someone might get the idea we are neglecting another matter that is also very important.

This message is needed to clarify that the *prayer first doctrine* takes nothing away from any other important doctrine taught in the Bible, any more than teaching on any other doctrine does. Also, this message is needed in order to encourage all

who are interested in what Dr. Beckum is doing in his ministry to understand it is precisely because he believes soulwinning is preeminent and preaching is primary that he emphasizes the truth that prayer is the priority—prayer is first.

We believe prayer is essential to effective soulwinning and to effective preaching. We believe prayer comes before soulwinning and preaching. We believe our soulwinners need to pray before they go soulwinning, and while they are soulwinning. And we believe our preachers must pray as a key part of their preparation to preach.

Prayer first does not replace preaching!

When we say *prayer first* or when we emphasize prayer, it seems to some we exalt it as a priority over preaching.

If we say things like, *sometimes in a meeting I don't even get to preach; God seems to move in response to the prayerful attitude of the congregation and begins working His grace to the hearers through only a few brief exhortations of wholesome words ... some think we are saying, well, who needs preaching; it's of secondary value.*

But the fact is, even the short statements made by us in those meetings are declarations of God's mind by His Word to His people, and so, the word of God is certainly being ministered to God's people, even if the preacher does not get to deliver the full text of the message he came prepared to deliver.

All preachers who are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit have noticed this sometimes involves dramatically changing the course of our messages, sometimes cutting our message short, sometimes extending our comments beyond our planned message, and sometimes, albeit rarely, we say only a few words and the Spirit of God moves powerfully in the assembly, and people begin to testify, and fall on their knees in prayer—brethren, what are we supposed to do in such cases?

So, when we report on such a meeting, and we say, *Wow, I hardly got two words from my mouth before the folks began responding so movingly that it became clear the people needed to testify and pray and I had to preach my prepared message later*, some people become suspicious that we are dismissing the importance or value of preaching.

But that is absolutely not the case.

The bottom line is this. Prayer, preaching, and soulwinning are not mutually exclusive, nor are they independent of one another.

Preaching and soulwinning are interdependent.

By saying these things are not mutually exclusive, I mean it is not the case that if prayer, then not preaching, or if prayer, then not soulwinning.

What we are saying is that preaching and soulwinning without prayer is wrong.

We are saying you should pray in your preparation, and pray in your presentation, and pray in the invitation.

And when it comes to soulwinning, you should pray for the souls of men (Romans 10:1); you should pray for opportunities to speak to the souls of men (II Thessalonians 3:1); you should pray while you are speaking to them (I Thessalonians 5:17); and you should encourage them to pray to be saved (Romans 10:13).

Good night, man, prayer is all over preaching and soulwinning. I don't see any way to separate them.

If you don't put prayer in your preaching and in your soulwinning you are heading for disqualification from both of these things, as I shall show in chapter eight.

But the problem some have with this is they think we are saying prayer is a priority over these things.

Prayer is a priority in preaching and soulwinning—prayer is first!

Hear me out! Pay attention to what we are saying, and please don't make your conclusion before you hear us out in this matter.

When we say prayer is a priority in preaching and soulwinning, we would not stop there. We would say prayer is a priority in fathering and mothering and pastoring, and — get the idea?

If we are accused of saying prayer is first, we stand ready to confess it. And I intend to show you from the Scripture that is what God says about it. Because, the question is not what does Benny say; what is important to us is what does the Bible say.

Understand that prayer, preaching, and soul-winning are united like the Trinity.

Although within the Godhead we recognize a hierarchy, this takes nothing away from the equality of each Person in the Godhead, or the absolute necessity of each Person in the Godhead. All three must *be* in order for GOD to *be*, and prayer, preaching and soulwinning must be in order for ministry to be effective.

By the priority of prayer, we mean that prayer should be first in all that we do. We should lead with prayer (I Timothy 2:1).

By the primacy of preaching, we mean that God has especially chosen preaching as His method of doing the work of saving souls (I Corinthians 1:21).

And by the preeminence of soulwinning, we mean that this is the main work, the preeminent objective of praying and preaching (I Corinthians 1:21).

Conclusion: In summary

God ministers His grace by the Word of God through the prayer of faith into the preacher's heart, preparing that vessel in sanctification for His use.

The preacher cleanses his heart and his hands (James 4:8) and clears his mind (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:3; 4:17, 23; Philippians 3:19) of all corrupt communications (I Corinthians 15:33; Ephesians 4:29) in the prayer closet (Matthew 6:6) by the washing of the water of the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26) in the spirit of grace and of supplications (Zechariah 12:10) before GOD. So that, when, out of the abundance of his heart (Matthew 12:34), he speaks from the pulpit (Nehemiah 8:4), he will deliver the message through wholesome words by which GOD will release grace to his hearers (Ephesians 4:29).

Oh, brethren, when your words are set aflame by the fire of God's holiness in the prayer closet, they will penetrate the hearts of your hearers; they will light up the caverns of their hearts, and expose their sin. Sinners will be made to recognize their need for the Saviour and sinners and saints will fall on their faces and report "God is in you of a truth" (I Corinthians 14:25).



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Chapter Three

The Church A House Of Prayer

God's Priority For His House

INTERCESSOR Ministries is dedicated to calling all of God's people to revitalize their prayer closets, especially the prayer closets of God's preachers, to exhort all our churches, which serve Him as the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), and to remember Jesus said, "My Father's house shall be called the house of prayer." Matthew 21:13.

Not only is it appropriate to apply this to the House of God today, but it is certain that when it was said concerning the Old Testament Temple (Isaiah 56:7), God was in fact thinking especially of the New Testament Church.

For whatever happened to them and whatever was written down about it, happened to them and was written down for us, upon whom the ends of the world are come (I Corinthians 10:11 and Romans 15:4).

The Holy Spirit, in the book of Hebrews, enlightens us to know the Old Testament Tabernacle was a shadow cast by the New Testament Church.

The Bible says, “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).

God’s light is in the future shining back across time, from the end to the beginning. Indeed, we continue moving forward toward a brighter and brighter light toward the perfect day.

Therefore, what God said about His House in the Old Testament is a shadow cast by light hitting the Church in the New Testament. In that light we see clearly that the Father’s very specific purpose for the Church is that it should be known by all nations as a *house of prayer*.

One might object that Jesus does not say His Church is to be a house of prayer. I reply that

when He said His Father's House is to be a house of prayer, and then by His Spirit through Paul declared the church to be the House of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), He did by this most certainly declare the Church is to be known as a house of prayer; and we would do well to heed the Master's instructions.

Another might object that this takes away from soulwinning, or preaching. I reply that prayer is essential to both; and without it, preaching will become mere academics, as dead as dried bones, at best, and at worst, entertainment—sentimental or sensational; while soulwinning without prayer unction will become mere marketing at best and manipulative salesmanship at worst.

Like the pig that kicks and squeals and runs when poked behind the ear with the prod, some, like dear Paul, kick against the pricks, when we goad them with statements such as these:

Jesus never declared His house was to be a house of preaching, but He did say it was to be a house of prayer.

Jesus never declared His house was to be a house of soulwinning, but He did say it was to be a house of prayer.

Kick — *you are minimizing soulwinning!* Squeal — *you are minimizing preaching!* And thusly they run from the true point.

No one has said or done any such thing. Preaching is primary and soulwinning is preeminent, but prayer is the priority.

And this we shall show in what follows.



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Chapter Four

Prayer First Is The Pattern Jesus Set By Precept And Example

THE example of our Lord Jesus Christ presents the most sublime examples of prayer and even a cursory overview of His prayer life reveals that He put prayer first.

Christ, the Son of God, the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Peter 1:19), taught us to put prayer first by His precept and His example.

By Precept

What is our first response when dealing with those who despitefully use us? Jesus would have us pray for them (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28).

What is the first thing we do when we need workers? Jesus told us the first thing we need to

do is to pray the LORD of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into the field (Matthew 9:38).

What should be the first thing we do before doing anything else to satisfy our desires in life? Jesus taught us to pray about it first (Mark 11:24).

What is our first recourse of defense against temptation? Jesus repeatedly encouraged us to pray lest we enter into temptation (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:46)! Obviously, that means we need to pray first.

Think about it; if we are told to pray without ceasing, doesn't that put prayer before anything and everything else we do? (Luke 11:5-10; see I Thessalonians 5:17).

By Example

Christ prayed while being baptized. "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying" (Luke 3:21). Does anyone doubt whether Jesus was in communion with the Father as He approached John about His baptism? Of course not. Jesus prayed about everything He did.

Before He called Lazarus from the grave, He

prayed, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 11:41-42).

Did you notice that He said, “that thou *hast heard Me*”? You see that He had already been praying about it.

Jesus put prayer first every day. “In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). This was His custom. He began every day with prayer. He put prayer first.

Christ prayed all night. “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). He put prayer before His necessary sleep.

Christ saw that Peter was going to face the greatest trial of his life and the first thing Jesus did was to pray for Peter: “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

He prays for us too (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).
Aren't you glad He puts prayer first?

As He prepared His disciples for His departure, and before He would leave them, He prayed for them: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."

And long before you were born, Jesus prayed for you: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:9, 20).

When He faced Golgotha, He first went to Gethsemane, where He prayed His most famous prayer: "And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:39-41).

He put prayer first, praying before He went into His suffering for us; and He instructed His disciples to pray first to avoid entering *into temptation*.

His first words from the Cross were a prayer: “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:33-34).

At the end of His ordeal on Calvary, before He gave up the Ghost, Jesus prayed again: “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46).

Christ is praying today. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). He is praying in advance of our every need.

Conclusion Maybe some will think the question is not whether Jesus prayed about everything before He did it, but rather whether Jesus taught that prayer was a priority over preaching or ful-

filling His mission to seek and to save the lost—soulwinning. I reply that as a matter of fact Jesus' teaching and example demonstrate clearly that He put prayer before everything else, and therefore, He established the pattern of *prayer first*.

You see, some who object to this doctrine, have not really thought it through. For some reason when we emphasize the importance of prayer and say it is a priority over soulwinning and preaching, they hear us saying preaching and soulwinning are of *less importance* than praying. But that is not what we are saying.

Jesus shows us that prayer is integrated with preaching and soulwinning so that they are inseparable. Further, He shows that prayer comes before these things, continues during the activity of these things, and follows these things.

Jesus set the example, and His Apostles followed in His steps. In the next chapter, we will see that prayer first was the pattern of the New Testament Church.



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Chapter Five

Prayer First Is The Pattern Set By The Example Of The New Testament Church

IT is impossible to read through the book of Acts, giving attention to the place prayer is given in the narrative, and fail to see that prayer is first. What we will notice, if proper attention is paid, is the inextricable bond that exists between prayer, preaching, and soulwinning.

Acts 1-2 Jesus told them to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power (Luke 24:49). How did they use this time? They were together in one accord *praying* when the power of God came down, and then they *preached* in this power to the people and 3,000 were *saved*.

Acts 4:31-33 The pattern was set. And it was repeated. Here we find the disciples gathered together, as was their custom, and they *prayed*, and the *power* came down, and the place was shaken, and then they *preached* with boldness. And “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul” and “with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” And they went door knocking in this power: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and *preach* Jesus Christ.” What was the result? “And in those days, ... the number of the disciples was multiplied” (Acts 6:1). Their *soulwinning* efforts were greatly blessed.

Acts 6:1-4 The Apostles needed assistance with ministry so they could devote their attention to their ministry priority, their primary function and their preeminent business: “But we will give ourselves continually to *prayer* and the *ministry of the word*” —prayer and preaching.

Dr. Beckum has brought our attention to the fact that the Apostles named prayer first — and those among us who take the Word of God seri-

ously will not fail to comprehend the significance of this. When all else is taken together, it is clear that in the mindset of the Apostles, prayer was their number one priority. Indeed, it should be obvious to anyone that prayer precedes preaching like breathing precedes talking.

Acts 9:40 Peter *prayed*, then the power came down, and the *preaching* was with power, for when Peter cleared the room where dead Dorcas lay, he *prayed*, and the power of God moved to heal the dead, and when word got out that the Word of God had power to heal dead bodies many came to believe on the Lord for the healing of their souls dead in trespasses and sin (*soulwinning*); and this tells me the preaching of the gospel attended the praying, for how can they hear without a preacher (Romans 10:14).

Acts 10-11 Here you read about a sinner named Cornelius who was *praying* to God alway. God would not hear Him because he was not a child of God, but the angels heard him, and set before God a memorial on his behalf. God directed an angel to instruct a *praying* lost man to call for a *preacher*, and it was while the *preacher* was

praying that God prepared him for the *preaching* assignment God had for him. Isn't it clear—isn't it almost embarrassingly obvious—*prayer, preaching* and *soulwinning* are interrelated, joined together, like the Trinity—with but one exception. One may preach without prayer, and one may go soulwinning without prayer, and that is the number one reason we have very little experience in the amazing workings of God like we see in this wonderful story. Not many *preachers* may be found *praying* on their rooftops during lunch these days.

Acts 12 Peter was in prison, and God's people prayed without ceasing (Acts 12:5). The angel of the Lord was dispatched to the dark dungeon where Peter lay still chained to the guards, and the angel poked Peter in his side, and raised him up from his sleep, and told him to get on his feet. Peter arose to his feet. The chains fell away. He followed the angel into the street. The angel left. Peter, confounded, amazed, "came to himself" and realized it was not a vision, or a dream. God's people *prayed* and Peter passed through iron gates to freedom so he could go on *preaching* so that many more could be *saved*.

Acts 13:3 and 14:25 They *prayed* with fasting to send forth *preachers* to *preach* — for, how can they hear without a *preacher*, and how can they *preach* except they be sent (Romans 10:15), so the *praying* led to the call of God upon the church to send the *preachers* into the mission field to do the work of *soulwinning*. What got it all started? Prayer first!

Acts 16:25-33 Paul and Silas *prayed* and sang and God shook the earth opening every prison door. The jailer fell on his knees and cried, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved.” Paul *preached* the shortest sermon in the Bible: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.” Don’t fail to notice that along with their *praying* there was *preaching* and *soulwinning* happening here.

Conclusion When Dr. Curtis Hutson, former editor of the Sword, read the book of Acts he noticed the pattern. I remember hearing him preach it. He repeated it at least three times:

The prayers went up; the power came down; the preaching went out; the people came in; the persecution came on; and the prayers went up. Repeat!

Beloved! By prayer they got preaching power.

By prayer they got preaching boldness.

By prayer they got preaching prepared.

By prayer they got preaching liberty.

The power so palpable in the early church is owing to the priority prayer had in the lives of its members.



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Chapter Six

*Throughout The Epistles We Find Testimony
That Prayer Is A Priority For Effective Preaching*

THROUGHOUT the word of GOD, especially in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, the Spirit of God expressly shows that prayer is an essential priority to preaching.

Paul recognized a need for *prayer* support for his *preaching*.

Prayer For Preaching Opportunities Paul understood the need of prayer for opportunities to preach — “Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds” (Colossians 4:3).

Prayer For Preaching Direction And Unction

Paul understood the need of prayer for what to preach, and for boldness to preach it. He asked the saints to *pray* for him, “that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly” (Ephesians 6:18-20).

Prayer For Preaching Liberty “Finally, brethren, *pray* for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course. And that we might be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all men have not faith” (II Thessalonians 3:1-2).

Paul recognized the need to support his preaching with *prayer* Everything Paul intended his hearers would get from his *preaching* he *prayed* that they would receive:

He preached and prayed for their sanctification

Paul *preached* for their sanctification, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.” (I Thessalonians 4:3-4).

And Paul *prayed* for their sanctification: “And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be

preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Thessalonians 5:23).

Everything he preached he prayed his hearers would receive (Open your Bible to Colossians 1:9-11).

Paul prayed his hearers would be filled with the knowledge of His will. (Colossians 1:9— “We ... cease not to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”)

Five times he preached “I would not have you ignorant” (Romans 1:13; 11:25; I Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; I Thessalonians 4:13).

He preached that we should serve the Lord “not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, *doing the will of God from the heart*” (Ephesians 6:6).

He exhorted us concerning the necessity that we do the will of God in Hebrews 10:36 “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”

Paul prayed his hearers would walk worthy. (Colossians 1:10 — “We ... cease not to pray for you

... that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.”

Paul preached to the Ephesians: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”

Paul prayed for his hearers to be fruitful in every good work. (Colossians 1:10b — “we ... cease not to pray for you ... [to be] fruitful in every good work.”)

And he preached that they would be fruitful in every good work: he enlightened the Romans with the understanding that we “are also become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that [we] should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Romans 7:4).

Paul prayed his hearers would be strengthened. (Colossians 1:11 — “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power.”)

To the Ephesians he preached: “My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10).

Paul prayed his hearers would be patient. (Colossians 1:11b — “we ... cease not to pray for you ... that ye might be strengthened ... unto all patience and longsuffering and joyfulness.”)

And to the Hebrews he preached “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Paul complimented the Thessalonians for their testimony of patience and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations (II Thessalonians 1:3-4).

And to the Philippians he preached, “rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

Conclusion Not only Paul, but Peter also, and John, all prayed and preached together and each *prayed* with their *preaching* that those to whom they *preached* would benefit by the grace God ministered to their hearts by their preaching.

And not only the Apostles, but Epaphras too. In Colossians 4:12, we read Paul’s testimony that dear pastor Epaphras prayed earnestly for those to whom he preached that they would receive the grace ministered to them by the preaching that went from his heart to theirs.

Someone says, *well then, how does someone know to pray if he did not receive that instruction through preaching.* To which I reply, let us *pray* the preacher *prayed* before he *preached* so that his hearers could hear and receive the instruction to *pray first.*



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Chapter Seven

The Great Danger Of Failing To Bathe Your Preaching With Praying

THERE is a great danger in failing to bathe our preaching with praying. What E. M. Bounds said 108 years ago is still true today: “Preaching never edifies a prayerless soul”; but not more true than this, “Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to men for God who has not learned well how to talk to God for men. More than this, prayerless words in the pulpit and out of it are deadening words.”¹ Prayerless preaching is flesh preaching, and flesh preaching is death preaching.

¹ Bounds, E.M., *Power Through Prayer*, quoted in Dr. Beckum’s book, *Prayer For Revival*, p. 294, revised first edition.

Prayerless preaching is letter preaching.

Paul warned of that sort of preaching that is “of the letter” but not “of the Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:6). He warned that letter preaching kills.

Those who live after the letter of the Law trust the flesh, depend upon their self-righteousness to recommend them to God; but God rejects such righteousness as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). *Life* comes only by the *Spirit*, and not by the *letter*.

Those who preach in the flesh depend on it's energy, it's intellect, it's cleverness, trusting their talents will recommend them to their hearers. It might. Indeed, it often does. And that is the tragedy, for it ministers death. There is nothing in the flesh God can use, will use. The vessel *unsanctified* is not fit for the Master's use (II Timothy 2:21). The body must be set before Him a *living sacrifice* before it can be put to *life giving service*. There is *good* and *bad* done in this body (II Corinthians 5:9-11); only what is *good* can produce *good*, and nobody lets go of his body to good service who has not denied himself and taken up his cross, and nobody does that who does not pray, and pray, and pray!

Prayerless preaching is without unction:

Prayerless preaching leads to preaching that is bereft of *unction* — that is, such preaching is not “of the Spirit.”

I John 2:20 puzzles us. “But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.”

Of course, other Scriptures qualify our understanding of this verse so that we don’t conclude it teaches we are omniscient. (For example, Romans 8:26 tells us we “know not what we should pray for,” and James reminds us that “we know not what shall be on the morrow” (James 4:14).

Nevertheless, there is an *unction* (the word means anointing, a derivative of the word that speaks of Christ’s anointing, or *Christening*), and this unction is the Holy Spirit, given to us to guide us to all truth (John 16:13).

The Holy Ghost breathed the life of God into the Word of God (II Timothy 3:16).

Our job is to get alone with the LORD and meet Him in His word, till His words surround our proud hearts and minds and advance against our defenses till all is surrendered, and our mind

yields, and our heart melts, and we find our body kneeling to His holy heart and mind, entering into holy communion with the Holy Ghost, for only then may we follow Him — the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, our Guide to “all truth” — to the truth that is in His Word. Then, with Spirit directed exegesis, our exposition of His Holy Word will exhale through our preaching what the LORD has breathed into it. That’s the preaching that ministers grace to our hearers (Ephesians 4:29).

This kind of preaching, preaching with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven kind of preaching (I Peter 1:12), cannot come but by much prayer.

Prayerless preaching is without the Spirit.

Jesus taught us a lesson on prayer in Luke 11:1-13; the entire lesson had this purpose, that we would know how to gain the greater measure of His Spirit for our service (See Luke 11:1-2, 13). Jesus taught us to *ask* the Father for the Spirit.

If we have received the Spirit at salvation, why must we ask for the Spirit? Obviously, we receive the Spirit of Christ into our hearts crying “Abba,

Father.” At that blessed moment grace meets faith in our hearts (Romans 8:9-11, 15; Galatians 3:16; Romans 10:9-13). And yet thereafter we must be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18-20), and for that Jesus taught us to pray!

Prayerless preaching comes from prayerless preparing.

Oh, Samson might shake himself a time or two and find his strength, but the day finally comes when his strength is gone and he comes wholly under the power of his sin.

One great danger of prayerless preaching is letter preaching — using the Sword of the Spirit in the flesh, to serve some carnal purpose. Such preaching kills. Such preaching maims God’s sheep, starves God’s sheep, cannot nurture or nourish God’s sheep.

Prayerless preaching will be preaching in the shallows.

For all the reasons already mentioned, a believer must be guided by the Holy Ghost to truth (John 16:13), and only when the preacher’s spirit is in tune with the Holy Spirit, by much prayer, can

he enter into and enjoy that holy communion (II Corinthians 13:14).

Unless the preacher has studied deeply enough to get past himself and to the point of desperate need for the Spirit to illuminate the passage for him, he is preaching in the shallows, and his superficial preaching will produce superficial Christians.

Daniel knew what to do when he came across a revelation beyond his skills to comprehend. He prayed and fasted till he got the needed insight (Daniel 9-10).

It is the glory of GOD to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search it out (Proverbs 25:2). You are a king (Revelation 1:5-6).

Conclusion We are in danger of filling our churches with “lord, lords.” Flesh preaching can produce converts to religion. Flesh preaching can be energized, inspiring, stirring, moving, and compelling. The human mind can be greatly affected by “great swelling words” (II Peter 2:18), and the souls of men can be deeply impressed by a motivational speaker to turn over the “new

leaf,” when all they have done is replace old leaves with new ones, neither of which covers their nakedness (Genesis 3:7). Surprised they might be when they discover too late that Jesus will refuse to acknowledge them (Matthew 7:22). Depend not on the flesh. Trust in the LORD. Nothing says you trust God more than prayer, and prayer, and prayer.

Preaching with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven is what is needed. Peter spoke of that kind of preaching (I Peter 1:12). He is our example. It comes only from time spent “up upon the house-top” praying (Acts 10:9).



TOC

Chapter Eight

Prayerless Preaching Will Finally Disqualify The Preacher

P RAYERLESS preaching will finally disqualify the preacher: Jeremiah 10:21 “For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.”

Would you hear the cry of God’s heart on this matter? I cannot forget the day the Father spoke to me from Jeremiah’s prophecy: Jeremiah 10:17-25

Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress.

For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them, that they may find it so.

Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it.

My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they are not: there is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains.

For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.

Behold, the noise of the bruit is come, and a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah desolate, and a den of dragons.

O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.

Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.

My brother was not in his room, so I decided to read some Scripture while I waited for him to return. I needed to speak with him on a subject, but now I don't recall what it was. But I'll never forget the encounter I had with God that morning.

By that time, I had read Jeremiah something like ten times, and always assumed verse 19 was another of the many laments of Jeremiah that the Spirit gave us in his prophecy: "Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it." But this day was different. As I began reading verse 20, "My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken ..." a question rose up in my mind and demanded my attention: *whose tabernacle is spoiled, Jerry?*

I read it again, "My tabernacle is spoiled, and all *my* cords are broken." My mind fixated on the word *my* and the realization that, of course, we are talking about GOD's tabernacle. And the reason that fascinated me was because I suddenly realized the *my* in verse 20 meant GOD was sharing His heart with us, with *me*, in verse 19. In that moment, GOD opened His heart to me and let me see His hurt.

It was a very confusing moment for me, because I realized that my concept of God had been of One aloof, and detached, but suddenly He became personal and intimate — *real!* Flooded with a sudden sense of God's presence, I rejoiced that GOD would open up His heart to me.

Having checked the time and concluded Ronald was likely gone for the day, I decided to get on with mine. Stepping through the door from his room, an unaccountable trembling came upon me, and melting to my knees, I wept upon the floor of the hallway. What I prayed about in that hour or two is not important to my present purpose, except for this.

I read verses 20-21 over and over with a brokenness I had not up till then experienced. The Spirit pressed heavily upon my mind the reason His heart was breaking: the New Testament Christian, the Temple of God (I Corinthians 6:19) was neglected. Failing to perform their priesthood responsibilities, God's children allowed the Temple to be *spoiled* of that worship belonging to Him. The reason fell hard upon my conscience: it was because, "The pastors are become brutish (beast

like, controlled by their appetites), and HAVE NOT SOUGHT THE LORD.” God’s heart is breaking because His pastors, those charged with the duty to feed His flock (I Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28), have not sought the LORD.

Brutish pastors are dumb like an ox. They disqualify themselves. Oh, they might retain their title, but make no mistake, they are disqualified! Set aside, dismissed, “They shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.”

But, say many such pastors, *I have prospered!* I dare say there are a great many prayerless pastors who enjoy a far greater measure of the tokens of prosperity than did Jeremiah, Elijah, or a great many of God’s praying preachers. I think we would all agree that Hananiah was considered by the majority in his day as the model of a successful pastor, while Jeremiah was much of the time viewed as a curiosity, an outsider!

Be careful, O vain man, how you measure prosperity. Laodicea had it all and had nothing! Sardis had a name, and that’s all she had. You can boast all the physical tokens of success and be a miserable failure.

When you look out over your congregation do you find that you are pastoring dogs, goats, and pigs — or sheep? Dogs can get baptized, goats can teach Sunday School, and pigs can be very aggressive *soulwinners*. But these are dogs, and goats, and pigs nonetheless.

Only the gospel preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven has the power to convert those dogs and goats and pigs to sheep.

Prayerless preaching will finally disqualify the prayerless preacher. The fleshly facade will finally break down and the corruption it hides will show through it. Woe be the day the sheep discover the filthy vessel from which they have drunk Sunday after Sunday. More sheep have been poisoned by flesh-preaching than this world knows.

God counts these prayerless preachers with the pagan priests who worship the host of heaven, that swear by the false gods of the heathen, with the backsliders: He cries against prayerless preachers as “those that have not sought the LORD” — Zephaniah 1:1-6

The word of the LORD which came unto
Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of

Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.

I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

And them that are turned back from the LORD; **and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.** (Emphasis added)

Only such preaching as is bathed in genuine fervent prayer can minister grace to our hearers. The irony is that prayerless preachers often boast

themselves to be preachers of grace, but *grace preaching* that is *prayerless preaching* is perilous preaching — for prayerless preaching will sink into flesh preaching, and flesh distorts grace, turns it instead into lasciviousness (Jude 4).

Flesh preaching may garner fame, and even fortune, along with the applause and affection of even God's sheep. These accolades only serve to reinforce the prayerless preacher's dependency upon his talents, and foster an addiction to admiring affirmation, which corrupts the relationship between pastor and flock. Finally the sheep the Holy Ghost appointed to shepherd His flock begins feeding on the flock he is appointed to feed to satisfy his own lusts. A sheep eating sheep is a sick sheep indeed.

Only by prayer, and much of it, can any pastor hope to discharge his sacred duty, and if he fails to pray he will surely begin to prey.



TOC

Chapter Nine

If Prayer Is Not First, What Is?

~ Conclusion ~

IF prayer is not first, what is? Is preaching first? Do you preach and then pray about what you should preach? Don't you pray about what you are going to preach? And don't you pray before you preach? Then you put prayer first.

Is soulwinning first? Don't you pray over the area where you will knock doors? Don't you pray God will prepare hearts for the gospel before you go out visiting? Well then, if you reject the prayer first doctrine, at least your behavior belies your position — most of those who deny the doctrine at least practice it.

But of course, what is objected to is not that we should pray before we preach, or go soulwinning, or prepare our sermons, or eat our meals. The objection is that some fear if we say prayer is first, we mean preaching or soulwinning is second. The objection is that by emphasizing the importance of prayer, by insisting, for example, that in fact it is more important than preaching or soulwinning, some fear we will communicate the idea to our churches that all they need to do is pray — no need to preach or go soulwinning.

But that is not a true representation of this important doctrine. So, in my conclusion, allow me to offer a clarifying summary.

By way of example, which would you say is more important, preaching or soulwinning? I'm sure most would agree that soulwinning involves preaching the gospel. It is impossible to separate preaching from soulwinning.

Yet preaching (prophesying) serves to edify the flock of God, to instruct those baptized to “do whatsoever [Christ has] commanded” (Matthew 28:18-20). It is arguable, on that ground, that preaching is primary to soulwinning.

On the other hand, what is ultimately the end of *preaching* if it is not to further the cause of Christ to seek and to save that which was lost (I Corinthians 1:18-23; Luke 19:10). So it is clear that soulwinning is preeminent. Howbeit, it cannot be done without preaching. You get the point.

Paul called on the saints to pray for preaching opportunities (II Thessalonians 3:1). Jesus instructed us to pray for laborers to go into the harvest fields (Matthew 9:38). It is obvious that this praying is to be done in advance of the preaching and the harvesting, and so the priority must be given to what comes prior. I hope I've already made the case for why prayer must be prior to all things. But in case one reader needs reminding, remember the exhortation is "in every thing by prayer and supplication" (Philippians 4:6), and if every thing means, well, *every thing*, then prayer has to come before every thing; it must be first — the priority.

Hence, the priority of prayer, the primacy of preaching, and the preeminence of soulwinning.

Putting prayer first does not denigrate preaching or soulwinning, but putting prayer last does.

Emphasizing prayer in our ministries will help our preaching and our soulwinning. Failing to do so will certainly hurt them.

If your vision is to have a church that is a preaching house, or a soulwinning station, then obey Christ and make it first and foremost the “house of prayer” (Matthew 21:13; I Timothy 3:15). After all, Jesus never said, “It is written, My house shall be called the house of preaching.” And He never said, “It is written, My house shall be called a soulwinning station.” But He did say, “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer.”

~END ~



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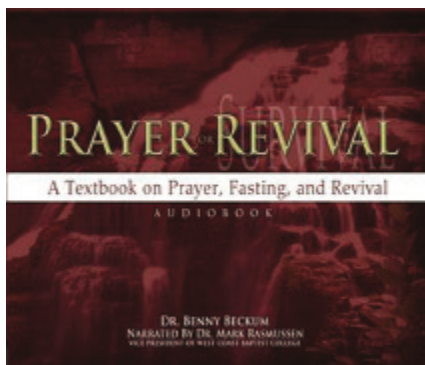
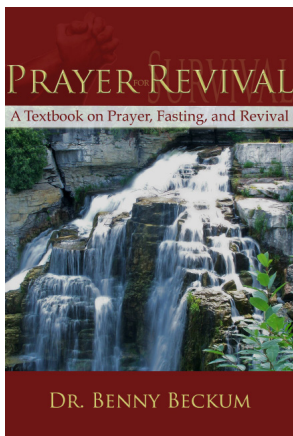
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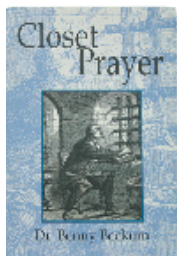


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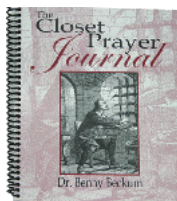


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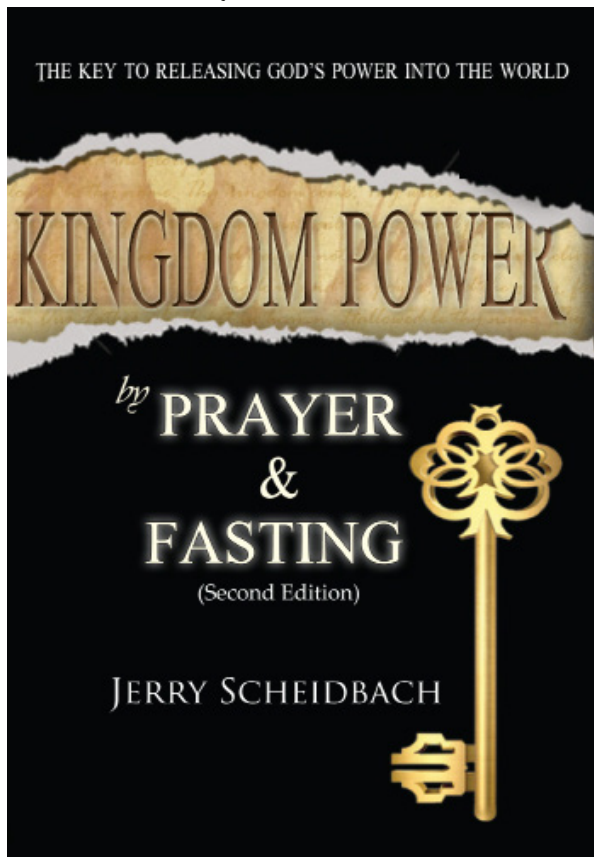


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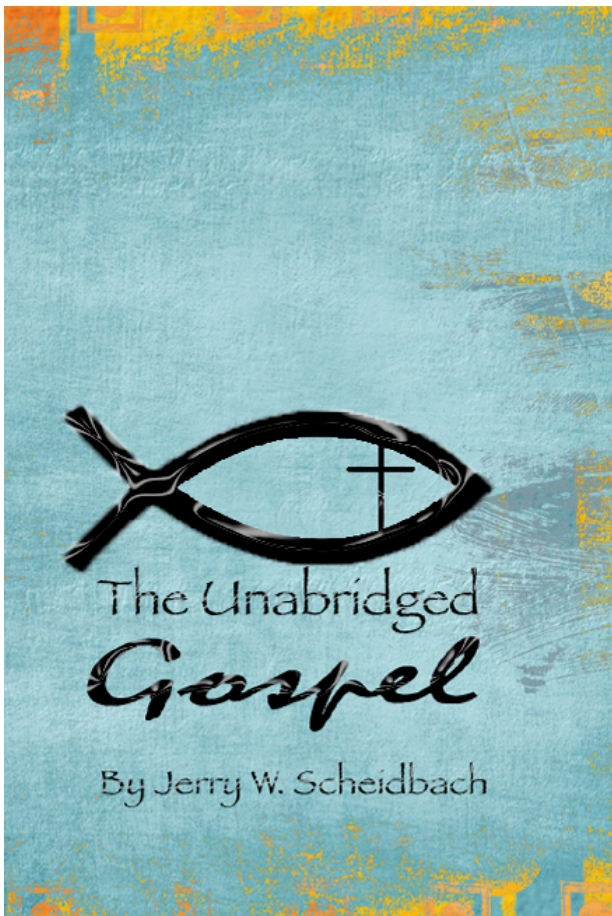
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