

Text: 1 Corinthians 14 & 1 Timothy 2

Introduction: This lesson is a sequel to 'Prayer As An Act Of Worship' by the author. It is designed to help answer two questions:

1. What is the scriptural purpose of coming together in worship to offer a prayer to God?
2. What is the scriptural modality for prayer in the assembly of the saints?

The Purpose of collective prayer by the church may be listed as:

a) AIMS

- Enjoy the fellowship and acknowledge the sovereignty of God our Father –Acts 2:42, 1 Jn 1:7
- Bear one another's burden and intercede for others including those absent, rulers, etc. Gal 6:2, Jms 5:14-16
- Pray in an acceptable manner, and not ask amiss –Acts 12:1-5
- Attain one accord or understanding of the request(s) and lift up their voice(s) as 'one man,' essentially making a unified appeal to their creator –Acts 4
- As soldiers of Christ, wrestle against the forces of darkness together not in isolation –Eph 6:12,18

b) OBJECTIVES

- Obey the scriptures via worship in spirit and in truth
- Receive answers from God through Jesus our High Priest
- Offer thanksgiving and glorify the Lord as he expands and preserves His kingdom.

For Modalities, *the goal of church or group prayer* is relatively more achievable when either:

1. One person audibly leads the prayer in a language everybody understands (otherwise there should be an interpreter), the rest being edified thereby, follows along mentally and at the end verbally assents with an 'Amen.' (Men should normally lead prayers in the church especially those perceived as faithful.)
2. Everyone in the assembly '*lifted up their voice to God with one accord,*' and say out the same expression (by spontaneity, divine inspiration or human prompt -Judges 10:15, Acts 4:24

Than when either:

1. Each person prays silently or wishes within him or herself
2. Each prays audibly to make disparate requests or present same request in varying fashion; perhaps in antagonistic manner!
3. Each prays audibly in a different language creating a disorderly or confusing scene

Please note that there is nothing wrong with people going into the meeting place or worship hall to pray individually at their own convenience, provided they do not hold that venue as sacred and efficacious in itself (John 4:20-24). For such individual prayers, people come in randomly and each should pray silently at his or her own pace (1 Sam 1:10,12-15). The fact of their disparate timing of coming and going, making varying requests, etc. NECESSITATES that the prayers be made quietly so as not to disturb others. In such cases, no one should abruptly or simultaneously compel them to bring

their prayers to a close. Unfortunately that happens in EVERY group prayer that is turned to individual silent or loud prayers -**someone usually interrupts** with an instruction or bell/ clap/ 'in Jesus name,' etc. to harmonize and/or restore sanity. With such prayer, one may possibly go home happier or justified than the other by reason of dissatisfaction, asking amiss (Luke 18:10-14), etc. Coming together for prayers as a group should be different and yield better results because there is power in the unity and agreement of the saints (Mt 18:19-20), the potency is exponential and non-linear (Joshua 23:10, Deuteronomy 32:30). There can't be true agreement if the requests are not disclosed or known.

The only times the entire congregation should speak out collectively BUT individually are when:

1. Reading a passage out, making a quotation, repeating a statement (or under inspiration).
2. Requested or naturally expected to answer in unison e.g. say 'Amen.' -1 Cor 14:16
3. Singing praises in order to glorify God, teach and admonish one another -Mt 26:30, Col 3:16, Heb 13:15.

Such situation depicts the proclamation of an agreed belief. This is because such words or songs are uniform and all can be understood at once by an observer apart from the speakers understanding themselves. Otherwise, the gathering would constitute a mob saying/doing disparate things (Acts 19:32) and may appear as mad to an observer (1 Cor 14:23). However, 1 Cor 14:33 declares: "*God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*" In Acts 4:23-31 when they '*lifted their voice,*' either the church voiced that prayer by human agreement / inspiration or they were led by one person and others assented. The latter probably happened hence the term '*with one accord.*' Even if the former occurred, we know the exact words spoken in that prayer -**so it was not a cacophonous or a silent praying session!** It couldn't have been otherwise since the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to guide the church & write 1 Cor 14.

Conclusion:

- No Christian should feel afraid, ashamed, secretive or proud to make a prayer request. To do that would be to cheat oneself and miss a divine opportunity for the support of the body of Christ - Jms 4:3-4, 1 Cor 12:25-27
- Individuals should present their requests in writing or verbally to the moderator. [There must of necessity be leaders in every gathering to coordinate activities (Mk 5:22, Lk 4:16-17, Acts 13:15). That is why the church has Preachers, Teachers, Pastors and Deacons.] Someone should be appointed to lead a prayer and such should speak in an audible manner, in plain terms not extensively with high sounding words or impressive grammar.
- God sees the prayer leader or speaker not as himself but as a priest or representative channel for the church at that moment. One should not be bothered much if he makes mistakes or is not his/her favourite. The Holy Spirit also intercedes for us more perfectly as well as Jesus our High Priest -Rm 8:26-28, Heb 7:22-28
- Those verbal requests are points of contact to present all before the Father who knows the need of every member of His family. His faithfulness is steadfast and His promises are sure; God is able to do more than we can ever imagine or request -Eph 3:20-21. He grants us what is needed at any time, according to His purpose.
- **Let all things be done decently and in order.** The Bible shows this is a **matter of faith** (not opinion). The principle behind Paul's inspired writing in 1 Cor 14 abides even where miraculous spiritual gifts are not exercised. Based on the commandments of the Lord, whenever a group, especially the church is assembled into one place, speakers (in teaching or prayer) should speak "*one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.*" Please note that distinct silent or loud prayers by individuals defeat the purpose of coming together publicly as a group or church, such should be done in private (e.g. at home before the assembly service).