A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SECRET PRAYER IN THE LIGHT OF MATTHEW 6:5-8 AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE SDA CHURCH PRAYER PROGRAMS

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Abstract

Prayer is not only a very basic activity of believers, but it is also a biblical religious practice both in the Old and New Testament respectively. The Gospel of Matthew 6:5-8 presents to us with three types of prayers: public, secret and repetitious prayers. Jesus here speaks more on secret prayer in order to admonish and correct the wrong practices of the Jewish religious leadership. The New Testament has clearly given the reader a guideline on how to go about secret prayer which was pioneered by Jesus Christ in contrast to the outward display of the Jewish leaders for personal glory. This research was a critical evaluation of secret prayer; the attitudes of the Jewish's public prayers and the prayer programs of the SDA church. The research looked at the elements of prayer as given in Baesler's theoretical framework through the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Intercession/Supplication) as the key guidelines in the secret prayer. The following objectives guided this research: To do a critical literary reading of secret prayer in the light of Matthew 6:5-8 in order to reveal the meaning and themes thereof; to evaluate the programs of the SDA church using the themes: public prayer, secret prayer, the venue of prayer, the posture, the mode and the motive of prayer in order to find out whether they are in line with Jesus' teaching about secret prayer and finally, to draw lessons from Jesus' teachings about secret prayer to effectively improve the prayer programs of the SDA church. This study drew lessons from Jesus' teaching and practice of secret prayer in order to inform and lead to the effective improvement and implementation of the right prayer programs. The research was approached through the reviewing of Library documentaries through a critical literary reading of secret prayer as the basis of hermeneutical study of the New Testament passage of Matthew 6:5-8. It was guided by the following hermeneutical method: Literary criticism method to evaluate the Biblical text in order to get the meaning and contextualization method in the interpretation of the text to the contemporary reader. The findings are as follows: First, Jesus did not condemn liturgical prayers but the emphasis of the text was that one should engage more on secret prayer before resorting into any kind of public prayers. Secondly, secret prayer was neither included nor emphasized among the SDA prayer programs; therefore, there was a need for proper teaching, training and implementation of elements of secret prayer which would lead into the effectiveness of the SDA prayer programs.

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