

Ephesians 3:14-16a

0209

Listen to your prayer life, it will tell you a lot about yourself. It'll tell you a lot about your Spiritual condition because, you know what, what's important to you is what you pray for. What's not important to you, you won't pray for it consistently.

For this reason, Paul says, I bow my knees. So he now says, I bow my knees. And then from here from verse 15, he's going to get into the prayer. We won't get into the prayer yet. But I want to say just enough about the prayer to begin thinking about it.

And first of all, the first thing to see is just the Spiritual nature of the prayer, the Spiritual nature of the request. Paul is going to pray with this prayer that is just infused with just nothing but completely Spiritual request. Now, the Scriptures teach us and they teach us emphatically that everything is to be brought to the Lord, to our maker.

Paul says in Philippians, chapter four, verse six, and seven, and don't be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God, everything, and the peace of God which passes understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. So we are told to take all things before the Lord. We are told, furthermore, in First Peter, chapter five and verse nine, we're told to cast our cares upon Him because He cares for us. And Peter, in no way does he imply: cast your Spiritual cares upon Him and leave the material cares to the side. We're told to bring all of our cares to the Lord.

So in a real sense, we should think of this as our prayer, Paul's prayer, here's the context for us to talk about this. But we should think about our prayer, as being given giving to God all requests, physical and Spiritual. But here's the other thing. The scriptures, while they teach us to bring every request to God, also warn us of the danger of becoming preoccupied with material needs. And so this sort of thing shows up in a number of places, you think about what, for example, Jesus's words, Matthew five, you know, the Sermon on the Mount: Gentiles, those who don't know God, they're the ones who worry about what they're going to wear, what they're going to eat, not you. Why? Because your Father knows what you need. So seek first, the kingdom of God. And then your Father who sees all things and those things will take care of these other things, right.

So we're told that there's to be a preeminence placed upon the Spiritual. Again, if we had gotten a little further in the passage to talk about the inner man, we could easily look at what's in your notes, second Corinthians chapter four, verse 16, 17, 18, that passage there in which we're told very plainly that the outer man—which is the opposite of the inner man—the natural, the material, we're told that's dying. In fact, we're given the assurance, guess what your outer man is dying, your outer humanity is going to die. There's only one part of you that's going to live forever. Your outer man is going to be resurrected to newness of life, but your inner man, your inner humanity will never die. Your inner man is that part of you—you could call it soul, you could call it Spirit, you could call it heart, really, none of those three words, get it all, because it's bigger than all three of

those words—your inner man is what you most centrally are. It's you at your core, your inner man is what will still remain when your body is in the grave.

That's your inner man. And Paul says the opposite of that. I'm telling you is going to die is dying, because you're in the process of dying right now. But the inner man won't. So where are we to put our focus was the greatest need. The greatest need is clearly the inner man, right? Because the prayers that are lifted up for the inner man are making supplications and requests for that which will last forever. The prayers that are lifted up for the outer man are lifted up for requests and needs that are for that which won't live forever, in fact, in the grand scheme of eternity won't live very much longer period.

So we have this tendency to develop a preoccupation with material needs and that that has a way of being, getting to dominate our prayer life. Now, we have regular times in which we share prayer items and things that we need to pray for, we will have one at the conclusion of the service today, Wednesday, we'll have one we have that almost every day, there's that on our Facebook group where we talk about prayer. And that's almost exclusively, isn't it, dominated with material earthly requests.

Now, let me be quick to say this. Those are not your private prayer life. Those are your public prayer life. But the entire time that I've ever been connected to the church is, especially the time I've been in ministry, that's always the way it is, is those public prayer requests are dominated with material needs, with physical needs, with healings, with financial issues, with difficulties at work with looking for a job with this decision with that decision, all of them applying to the outer man. Again, we're told to bring those to the Lord. But if our public prayer life is an indicator of our private prayer life, and again, I don't know your private prayer life—that's why it's called Private because I don't know it and nobody else does, either—but if you can compare your private prayer life, to what's usually the public prayer requests, and there's any correlation, then that says to you that you also have become unhealthily preoccupied with the material in such a way that it begins to dominate your request that you lift up to God.

So Paul is here to serve as an example for us as one who prays and prays fervently for the Spiritual things. Here's a convicting question that I've, sometimes I've asked myself, maybe you can ask yourself this same question as you're trying to analyze, you know, where am I at with my prayer life. I've said this many times before: listen to your prayer life, it will tell you a lot about yourself. It'll tell you a lot about your Spiritual condition. Because you know, what, what's important to you is what you pray for. What's important to you is what you pray for, what's not important to you, you won't pray for it consistently. You might be reminded, and you might bring it up here or there, but you will not pray consistently for anything that's not important to you.

So what you pray for day in and day out is what's important to you. And what's more important to you, the inner man or the outer man, that's a very valid and very healthy question to ask yourself, What's more important to me, my outer man or my inner man? And so ask yourself this question right here. If God were to right now say to you, in some sort of audible voice, okay. Every single prayer you've prayed in the last seven days, been answered right now, completely and fully, if God were to say that, how many souls would be changed? How many people would be added to the kingdom? How many people would be Spiritually strengthened in their faith?

What difference would it make to this church?

Or how many people would be healed of something? How many people would have some problem resolved in their life? Again, let me be quick to say all of those should be taken to the Lord. But what I'm trying to describe is a preoccupation with the outer man that displaces what we should be preoccupied with, which is that part of us that's eternal. Now, Paul is the example for this. Paul wrote 13 books in the New Testament, in those 13 books, there are some 46 prayers recorded. And of those 46 prayers. Do you know how many are Spiritual? 46. And all 46 prayers, eight times this, Paul asked for prayer for himself, and 46 prayers. And all eight of those requests for himself have to do with his ability to continue preaching the gospel. Three times he will ask that people pray that he could be delivered from the hands of wicked people so that he can continue his gospel work. Five other times, he will ask for prayer for himself for strengthening so that he can continue his gospel work. In fact, four of those 13 letters, Paul, wrote from prison. And in those four letters, there are contained seven prayers. And so you would think if someone is ever going to want people to pray for him some sort of physical thing, you will think it's while he's in prison, right? Maybe deliverance, maybe some food, maybe some water, maybe some sanitary conditions of the seven prayers that Paul prayed in his prison epistles, none of them mentioned him at all.

And so Paul, stands for us as one who is, in a very healthy way, preoccupied with the inner man, not just his inner man, but the inner man of those to whom he is writing.

Now this is going to be expressed in his kneeling and his bowing before the Lord. He says, For this reason I bow my knees before the Lord. So here's the one those places where we come to just a mention of a physical posture while we're praying. Whenever the Scripture is talking about a physical posture, it's I think it's helpful to pause and just ask yourself, Okay, what posture? What physical posture do I pray in? And should I pray in? Is that even important? Does it matter? Does it not matter at all?

And so here in your notes, I put the statement that the importance, your posture, in prayer, your physical posture in prayer is important. And it's unimportant, all at the same time. It's meaningful, and it's not meaningful altogether. So here's what I mean by that is: first of all, we know that we can pray to God at any time and in any place. And in any put any posture whatsoever. You can pray to the Lord flat on your back, as you're being rolled into the surgery room. You can pray to God, as you're sitting in the car driving, you can pray to God in any physical position you want. And if you are in Christ, and you're assured that the Spirit is taking that prayer to the Father.

However, there is something that the scriptures have to say to us about physical posture, as we pray and what that means. So as Paul prays here, he says, I bow my knee and we have to take this literally, we have to say, he's not using some sort of metaphor to say, I metaphorically bow my knee, I'm going to take him literally and say, praying with, with bowed knees, he's kneeling as he prays this particular prayer.

So the common, the—by far—the most common posture for the Jewish man to pray, was the posture, not of kneeling, but a standing. By far, that's the greatest majority of instances that we see in the scriptures in which we're told a posture is to posture standing to pray.

Here's a couple of examples in your notes, Mark 11, Jesus says, Whenever you stand praying, forgive, or Luke 18, verse 11, we know the parable of the tax collector, and, and the Publican, how they were both standing to pray.

Okay, so by far we see that's the example of praying is standing. And I think that that comes from the Jewish understanding, rather, the ancient world's understanding of sitting down. In the Jewish mind to sit down was tantamount to authority. So, remember how the teachers would sit? Remember how Jesus would sit to teach? And so the sitting meant a position of authority. And so what would you not do before God? The Jewish man would not sit before God, which is the opposite of standing. In fact, I can find in the scriptures, various postures of praying: on your feet, kneeling, lying on your back, lying face down, but the one posture, I cannot find anywhere is sitting. Nobody in scripture that I can find prays to God, and we're specifically told they're sitting down. Why? Because I think that the Jewish mind thought of that is not only extremely disrespectful, but of anti-authoritarian to say, God, the master the king, he's the one sitting, he's sitting on his throne. I don't sit before him, I stand before him.

So I think it's kind of comes from that was his typical posture of standing. But we also find instances in the scriptures of people kneeling to pray. And if we look at those instances, and we trace a connection between them, I think that there's two connections that become apparent. The first connection is that when people pray in the scriptures, and we're told that they're kneeling, it seems to be a prayer that's particularly urgent, particularly driven by a deep Spiritual need. For example, Jesus going into the garden, on the night of his arrest, we're told that he knelt and prayed, he went away from the other disciples and knelt and prayed. Or Acts chapter 21. This is the final, tearful farewell between Paul and the Ephesian elders, and where they all know that this is the last time they'll see each other. And we're told that they all knelt and prayed and cried and wept. Or Ezra nine, you can look that in your scriptures as well in your notes as well. In the context there is fasting, tearing of the garments, extreme Spiritual distress, and kneeling to pray.

So that's what we see consistently is when individuals kneel, to pray, they seem to be in greater Spiritual distress. They seem to have a request to take to God that is of greater urgency, and greater need.

The second connection: we see this in places like Isaiah 45, verse 23, which is what Paul quotes in Philippians two verse 10 and 11, when he says, Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that's the context of global sovereignty of God is being recognized as globally sovereign.

And so, I put those two together and they seem to match up for me so. Here we're talking about the new humanity. We're gonna talk just a minute about the new family, but we're talking about the global sovereignty of God. But more so than that, we're talking about a deep Spiritual need. And here's why I wanted to get to Paul does not say to the Ephesians, as I'm on the way to synagogue, to listen to some good teaching, then I lift up this prayer to you, as I'm going about my tent making duties during the day, here's what I'm praying for you during the day.

Paul says, I had a deep, pressing need. And that need is for your ignition, to get turned on, so that what I've taught you finds home in your heart, you're given comprehension. And then you are given the Spiritual power

and the Spiritual tools to begin navigating the truth that I've told you. Paul says, that is so burdensome for me, that I don't just pray it as any old prayer. I pray it is something that I'm broken to pray, compelled to pray. This is a picture of a man who understood so very well, that the inner man is what was to occupy our attention, the inner man, the eternal part of us.

And again, we will all have eternal physical bodies, just not this one. But our inner man will never see death. Even those who aren't in Christ, your inner man lives forever. So that is the part that Paul says, this is so burdening to me that I fall on my knees to pray this prayer that, again, we won't get to the prayer yet today. But this prayer is such a Spiritual burden for me, that I kneel before the Lord to do this, okay.

So, with that being said, let me now say this, I may not get to everything I want to say today. But let me say this. Let me let me also point out something that will help us to kind of navigate to the prayer and that is this the, the Trinitarian nature of the prayer.

The Trinity, and we all I think, probably know, at least the basics of what I'm, what I'm speaking of: God is in three, God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. Each person of the Godhead is fully and equally God in and of himself. So God's not like a pie that has three pieces. And you put all three pieces together and you got God. Each person of the Trinity is fully in and of himself, all of God. Yet God exists in three persons.

Okay, so that's the that's the Spiritual reality, the Spiritual truth of the Trinity. This is something that we see in our scriptures quite frequently. And when we come across it, I try to point it out to you. But let me say this Ephesians is the most Trinitarian book of the New Testament, making it the most Trinitarian book of the Bible. The most Trinitarian book of the Bible is Ephesians. Paul has been talking about the Trinity since chapter one, verse three. If you think back, okay, there was the father, the father was the one who did the choosing who did the electing, who did the predestination who did the adopting, there was the son, the son was the one who did the redeeming the forgiving, there was the Spirit, the Spirit was the one who did the sealing.

So he's been talking about the Trinity since the beginning of the letter. But the prayer comes to us in a particular Trinitarian form. In the prayer, the father is the source, he's the forefather, he's the king, he's the master, he's the object of worship. The sun, is the great lover of our souls. The sun is the lover of our Spirits, the lover of us, the one who indwells us and fills us and communicates love to us. The Spirit is the enabler, the Spirit is the power source, the Spirit, the Spirit is the modifier. He's the working agent. And so the Trinitarian nature takes all this prayer, and it puts it to us in this form that says, here's what the father is doing. Here's what the son's doing, here's what the Spirits doing. And that's Trinitarian to its core.

So here's the point to make: when we think of the Trinity, I feel like that most believers think of the Trinity like this, something that's beyond our understanding. Here's one God, but He exists in three persons, we can understand this. But here's what the Trinity is: The Trinity is like a litmus test, right? Because we know that we're supposed to believe the Trinity is true. Because if we don't believe it's true, we're a heretic. And so we have to believe the Trinity is true, even though we don't really understand it, but we'll just affirm it and then sort of move on.

And let me suggest that if that is how you think of the Trinity, then at best, your understanding is deficient. At worst, the God that you think you know, you don't know that God.

And here's what I mean by that: God is the great teacher. God is the wise teacher who made us and knows us. And the great teacher, the wise teacher says to us, this is how you understand me. And so what we often do in our non-understanding of the Trinity, and we all affirm that, ultimately, the Trinity is beyond our full comprehension. But what we tend to do is, in our mind, whenever we come across this, we just substitute 'God' and keep on moving. Here's the father, okay, well, that's God, here's the Spirit, okay? He's God too, okay, here's the Son, he's God. And I'm saying all this is an encouragement to not view our scriptures this way. To not just think of the Trinity as some litmus test that you've got to check the right box or else you're a heretic, but instead, to approach it as what it is a doctrine that is beyond our real true comprehension, nevertheless, the great wise teacher says to us, this is how you, in your finite human mind, understand me. This is how I'm going to teach you that I am. My nature, my character, this is how I communicate it to you.

And so we should not be in any position to say, Okay, God, I don't really understand that, so I'm just going to call you God and keep on moving. So as we work through the prayer, we're also going to be working through what the father is doing. He's the source. He's the progenitor. He's the forefather. He is the object of worship. The Son, He is the great lover of us, and the Spirit. He is the great enabler. He's the great Empower.