

Day Fifteen

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." -Luke 18:10-14

The Postures of Prayer

In nearly every solemn discussion and study of prayer the topic of “what position should I pray in?” comes up. Must I pray on my knees? Can I pray while I drive? Do my eyes need to be closed? Should my hands be folded?

The reality is, the posture of our heart will likely determine the posture of our body. In our passage today, the proud Pharisee has no problem standing with a puffed up attitude to inform God of his lofty accomplishments. While the tax-gatherer realizes his sins and with eyes cast down lifts only his voice to God.

Where are we when we pray? I don't mean in what room or meeting house. I mean, what state of mind are we in? Have we checked our ego at the door?

It is protocol to rise when the national anthem is played of a country. It is customary to rise when meeting the president of a country. Why would we think that addressing the Creator of the Universe would be less important than they? Look at the reaction of those in God's presence as seen in the Book of Revelation: *the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."* -Revelation 4:10-11

Paul gives us an indication of our attitude in Ephesians: *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, -Ephesians 3:14-15.* This apparently was not uncommon for Paul. *When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. -Acts 20:36.* Even Jesus knelt when He addressed His Father; *And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, -Luke 22:41.* This was the same posture as Daniel in the Old Testament. *Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously. -Daniel 6:10*

If you would care to read further you will find Solomon knelt before God at the newly erected temple (I Kings 8:54, 2 Chronicles 6:13). Ezra arose from his humiliation with his garment and robe torn on his knees (Ezra 9:5) The Psalmist, David exhorted those in his day to kneel and worship (Psalm 95:6). The bowing of the knee is a sign of submission. Jesus said that every knee would bow before Him. They are not bowing to pray, they are submitting to His Kingship.

Having said that, is it improper to not bow our knees when we pray? As we see in our passage for the day the tax-gatherer 'stood' at a distance (emphasis mine). Further, Jesus says that the he rather than the Pharisee went away justified. So, was it his physical posture or the contriteness of the heart that was correct?

Much has been said of late about the lifting of hands to God. Let's look at what Paul tells Timothy; *Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. -1 Timothy 2:8.* If we are to be true to the letter we must do this in every place. So, if it is the literal lifting of the hands, then if men do not do it every time, it is a sin. It is more reasonable to believe that what Paul is meaning to say is in keeping with the symbolic gesture of purity that is applied here.

A look into the scriptures, which is where all authority on the subject of prayer must come, will shed much light in our way. Job relates prayer and clean hands in his life. *Although there is no*

violence in my hands, And my prayer is pure. -Job 16:17. David relates in his Psalm about injustice of hands. ***O LORD my God, if I have done this, If there is injustice in my hands, If I have rewarded evil to my friend, Or have plundered him who without cause was my adversary, -Psalms 7:3-4*** It is not the cleanliness of the physical hands that concerns God, it is symbolic of what we have done in our works, whether good or evil. Lifting clean hands is presenting a life that does not have at its heart evil deeds. Jesus said it would be the pure hearted that would see God. ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. -Matthew 5:8.***

What more could we say concerning sackcloth and ashes or prostrate, face down on the ground, and more, about our physical posture? They are all important, yet they are all symbolic in nature. Our prayers are not measured by the actions of the body as much as they are by the contents of the heart. We may contort the body all we like, yet, if our hearts are not ready, they are unacceptable in God's eyes. Consider what Paul says concerning the Lord's Supper when the hearts of those who shared the cup and bread were preoccupied by the fleshly desires of their feasts and not in the manner which it was intended; ***Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. -1 Corinthians 11:27***

In another devotional we shall consider what we do before others to be noticed. Suffice it to say that if our bodily positions are done for the benefit of others, we have missed the mark.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews speaks of going boldly before the throne of grace. ***Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. -1 Corinthians 11:27.*** While this primarily speaks of the relationship we now have with God as His children, it does also tell of our confidence to go to him at all times. Those who lie upon the bed of sickness need not worry that because they cannot go upon bended knee to Him that He will not hear them. Those who desire to pray while driving need not think that because their eyes are not shut that their prayers are not heard.

Our freedom to approach God Almighty should not be seen as a license to be irreverent towards the One who sustains us. All of scripture speaks of an attitude of awe and submission to our

God. There is not a single instance of frivolous behavior when any acceptable voices are raised to God in prayer.

Those who would impose a strict adherence to a given posture, although well meaning, are not to think they will be of more weight in God's eyes for their physical stance. Nor should those who would come to the Father with a lack of reverence feel their liberality gives license to any given mood that does not have at its heart the complete submission of body and mind and spirit to Him of Whom all praise is due.

"For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word. -Isaiah 66:2

Prayerful Thoughts: O Lord, We come to Thee with a humble heart bowed low to Thee.