

TREASURING OUR HUMAN VIRTUES FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

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WE HAVE RECEIVED THE DIVINE LIFE WITH ITS CAPABILITY, ATTRIBUTES, AND VIRTUES

When we received the Lord Jesus as our Savior we were regenerated with the divine life, and in this life we received many capabilities, attributes and virtues. Every life has its ability, so the divine life we have within us also has its ability, or capability. In this life we receive God's attributes, such as righteousness, holiness, love and light. When these attributes are realized by us, they become our virtues. Therefore, the only way to have a truly virtuous humanity is to be born again, because it is only through the divine life that genuine virtue can be exercised.

Our ability in our exercise to produce something for God must coincide with the development of the virtues which come forth from the operation of the divine attributes. If this is not the case, what we produce out of our ability will be of no value to the Lord. In fact, our exercise will only produce problems in the church life.

Many pastors and evangelists possess a great amount of talent and are able to carry out a large work. Among these, some have not paid attention to the divine attributes, such as righteousness and holiness, and therefore their virtues did not develop properly. Such a person's capability only puts the Lord to shame. This should be a warning to us also. It is your humanity that proves where you really are. If you are a person manifesting the divine attributes through human virtues, you are qualified to exercise according to your ability and to build up the Body of Christ. It is your virtues that determine whether or not your ability in the church life will be profitable.

If we were asked what makes a brother useful to the Lord, we would probably answer zeal, spiritual knowledge, or experience. Brothers possessing these qualities, however, are those who cause turmoil in the church. Few who are cold or backslidden damage the church. When damage comes about, it is nearly always due to zealous, desirous, capable full-timers, elders, or other manifested ones. Of course, we need the full-timers, the elders, and those who are manifested among us. Without the human virtues to back up his service, however, a person can be very prevailing, rich, exercised, and influential, but his exercise will still be inadequate and can even be damaging. Eventually, we all must realize that our spiritual labor and exercise has to be backed up by a high and fine humanity full of the human virtues.

The following virtues are most crucial for your exercise as a brother in the church life. In each of these three pairs, the first item serves as a base, and the second item is a kind of exercise. Every genuine believer, through the life he received at regeneration, is: 1. pure and trusting. 2. longing after the Lord and pursuing the Lord and the things of the Lord. 3. poor in spirit and open.

SATAN'S STRATEGY

Satan's strategy is simply to damage these virtues. He doesn't care about the means, whether good or evil, worldly or spiritual; his goal is to corrupt the relationship with Christ and the other believers that is kept by these virtues. As we grow in the church life, opportunity after opportunity comes up for Satan to damage our virtues. This is why we must guard the virtues we have received, being aware of what Satan is after. His strategy is to get us to lose our purity, our longing, our being poor in spirit, and our simplicity, because without these virtues we cannot be used by the Lord to fulfill His desire.

We commonly think that Satan's strategy is to tempt us to sin. Actually, temptation and failure often drive us to the Lord. It is our spiritual success that is more often our downfall. For

instance, a brother who smokes knows shame. But how about a brother who feels he is so prevailing and is secretly proud? Which brother can damage the church more? Those who think they are overcomers are more likely to fall into Satan's trap. Those who serve the Lord and give conferences are more susceptible to lose their virtue, because they become more concerned about their own effectiveness or field of labor than the Lord's interest. Satan's goal is to cause us to live by or for something other than God alone. To do this, he must rob us of the virtues that keep us healthy and normal as brothers in the church life. If, as a full-timer, your aim is solely Christ, you can become a great blessing to the church. Because you are a full-timer, however, you are more likely to do spiritual things apart from Christ than those who are young or less involved in the church life. The more we desire to serve the Lord and become active in the church life, the more we need to hear this word.

1. Pure and Trusting

A. The Pure in Heart Enjoy a Pure God

God Himself is a pure God. He is not complicated. Among all the virtues, this is the foremost. In Matthew 5:8 the Lord says that the pure in heart are blessed because they shall see God. In other words, when you are pure, you are rewarded with God Himself.

In order to guard this purity, we must be on the alert that no other desire creeps in. No other desire, even the desire for spiritual attainment, should replace our desire for God. Any other desire that develops in our hearts will damage our desire for God. If we are able to come to God with such a pure heart, whatever we do will be purely for God. When we testify, it will be for God. When we read the Bible, we will read the Bible for God. When we go to the meetings, we will go to the meetings for God. Our whole existence will just be for God alone. In return, God will reward us with more of Himself and we will grow in

this experience. In such a way our purity, our desire, and our ability for God will develop.

A pure person experiences a pure God, and a complicated person experiences a complicated God. For example, Judas seemed to experience a Jesus who rewarded his stealing. Judas was the one in charge of the money among Jesus' disciples. To Judas, Jesus seemed to be one who kept giving him money to steal, because Jesus knew he was a thief. He experienced Christ, but He experienced a seemingly complicated Christ, because he himself was so complicated. This is the one that betrayed the Lord. If you are complicated, you will experience a complicated God. If you are pure, you will experience a pure God.

When we are pure, we see God in all things. If things go our way, we will see God in it. If things do not go our way, we still see God in it. Whether we receive an answer to our prayer or not, we will see God. We will see God in all our circumstances. If we desire nothing but God Himself, it will become a blessing to us, and we ourselves will become a blessing in the church life.

However, it is hard for anyone to be in the church life and still be pure. Other motives are always rising up. We always have to check with ourselves. We are not that simple. For example, if we declare we desire to be "money-making full-timers," it may be because we like to make money and not because of the Lord's leading. It is too easy for us to lose our purity towards God.

B. The Pure in Heart Enjoy a Pure Bible

Furthermore, we need to come to the Word as our pure nourishment. According to First Peter 2:2, the Word itself is pure, guileless and straightforward, without anything hidden or crafty. There is nothing deceitful about the Bible. No other book on earth bears such a characteristic. Even the works of Charles Dickens are full of contrived characters and twists of plot. Even school textbooks are full of evil things. We have been raised up in a society that is cynical. The Bible is so pure, but according to

our nature and upbringing we are impure readers. This is why many people arrive at such strange interpretations of the Bible - because the purity of the Bible doesn't match their impurity as readers.

Anyone who loses their purity also loses their ability to read the Bible. Some spend so much time in the Word and get so little; others receive so much after a short time. This is because some are complicated and some are simple and pure. When a pure person reads the pure Word, the two correspond and light comes forth. To such a person the Word is nourishing and operational. When we come to the Word out of a pure desire to contact God in the Word, we receive God Himself in the Word. When we come to the Word to receive the nourishment there, with no other motive, then we receive the very nourishment that constitutes us good ministers of Jesus Christ.

When you are serving the Lord full-time, you often are expected to speak. Therefore you often prepare something. This is where you can lose your purity. We shouldn't go to the Word just to receive revelation for the sake of our message. We should go to the Word to receive nourishment and revelation for ourselves first. Then, out of such a pure and simple motive, we will be able to minister to others as well. Too often I have seen brothers prepare for a message for the sake of discharging their duty. Perhaps their hearers received something, but they themselves lost something of their purity.

C. The Pure in Heart Enjoy a Pure Church Life

What is the deciding factor of the church life? The deciding factor of the genuine church life is aggressive pursuing after Christ. I am concerned that among us many are more concerned about what they would like to do rather than what the Lord is doing. Sometimes when I look at the lack of pursuing among us, I wonder whether we should just give up and sell the meeting hall. There is no poorer situation for the church to be in than to be in a condition where there is no pursuing.

Eventually your purity is tested by this aspect of the genuine church life. Do you want to be with those who are pursuing the Lord out of a pure heart or not? If we are in the church life out of habit or simply because it satisfies some religious aspect of our nature, that is a shame. Furthermore, if we are focused only on what burdens us while we are in the church life, that is also a shame. We should be for what the church is burdened for. What the church is doing should hold the first priority. If you are not for what the church is for, the things you are interested in will come to be of no value anyway.

D. Trusting Comes Out of Purity

Your ability to trust comes out of our purity. If you are unable to trust the church, you are not pure. Even if the elders are mistaken in all their decisions, I would still trust the church, because I realize the Lord is here. Can the elders make a decision that the Lord cannot handle? Besides, how do you know something is truly a wrong decision? The Lord is able to handle every situation. If you feel you cannot trust the decisions of the elders or the direction in the church any longer, it doesn't mean you have developed or are experienced, it means you are defiled. If you have an opinion about everything in the church life, it means you have lost your purity.

You also have to trust the Lord according to His promise for your daily life. He promised food and covering. He didn't promise air conditioning or a certain kind of car. When we are lacking in purity, we become complicated. This is why many full-timers are tempted to get a job when their standard of living drops; they cannot trust the Lord according to His promise.

We need to fight to keep our purity and if we have lost it, we need to fight to regain it. In this we really need the Lord's mercy. The church life is constituted with these three elements: the pure God, the pure Word, and pursuing in the pure companionship. When you are pure, you are trusting. You trust God, the Word, and the church life. When we are impure, then we cannot trust

God, because we have our own choice and preference. We cannot trust the Word, because we have our own standard of living. And we cannot trust the church life, because we are just for ourselves.

Eventually what manifests your purity the most is your trust towards the church life. How you are towards the church life manifests your purity more than any other thing. Your trust to the Lord and the Word depends upon what you are asked to trust the Lord and the Word for. Your trust to the church life, however, cannot be selective. Either you are standing fully one with the church or you are not standing fully one with the church. All those who are church-goers bear the mark of not trusting the church. The person who has confidence in the church is a person who fully stands one with the church. Brothers, is there any way for those who do not trust the church to be fully built together with others in the church life? Such saints disassociate themselves and become factious. On the other hand, how blessed is the church life where so many brothers trust the church and pursue together according to its direction!

You may say the church makes mistakes. This, however, does not justify anyone to stop trusting the church. Parents make many mistakes in raising their children, but the children still trust their parents, because they are pure. I have seen many mistakes made in the leadership. But it is not decisions I trust; it is the church. Even though a decision may seem to be wrong, by the operation of the Body even wrong decisions produce a way for the church to be built up. As long as I am trusting the church, I am profited by whatever happens.

2. Longing and Pursuing

Whoever has tasted the Lord longs after the Lord and the things of the Lord (1 Pet. 2:2-3). This longing is within even the most backslidden Christian. Outwardly someone may seem to forget about Christ, but inwardly this longing still is deep within them. Any time a backslider is brought back to the very life that he

received at the moment he first touched the Lord, that life will operate to bring him back to a healthy desire for Christ. In your caring for others, this is a great secret.

***A. The Secret:
Deeply Touching Our Spirit and the Spirits of Others***

This is also the secret for our own going on. What really works is to touch our spirit. Are we able to touch our spirit? Are we able to touch another's spirit? If we are, this solves the main problem. Outwardly we may perceive a number of reasons why a person is cold. God only sees one problem, which is a lack of the Spirit. Actually, all the problems boil down to this one problem: a shortage of God's divine life.

Many brothers consider being full-time. They consider the obstacles involved. The only obstacle, however, is a lack of aggressive touching of the spirit. If the operation of life within you is not aggressive enough, then every price you have to pay and every spiritual thing you have to do will seem a trial and a hardship. What you need is to do is to get crazy in your spirit. Touch the Lord to the degree that your life becomes filled with Him. When you are crazy in your spirit, then everything will become simple, because longing and pursuing are right there in the divine life you already possess.

We are very active in group meetings, going out to visit others, and so on. We talk much and study and consult and help one another. Yet how much do we really touch one another deeply in the spirit? To touch one another in this way is the only way to bring out the longing and pursuing. I can be caught by your neighborhood meeting and really become redeemed and even realize I no longer belong to myself but to God. But my life has only cracked open a little, because in the operation of life I have only been helped to a small degree. Therefore my desire only reaches to a certain point. I tell you brothers, for life to work, you need to touch another's spirit deeply. The more we are filled with the living presence of Christ, the more we will become a person longing after Him and pursuing Him as His lover.

***B. Satan's Strategy:
To Fill Us with Other Things***

Satan seeks to damage our longing by stuffing us with other things. Once we are stuffed with the world or with spiritual things, we lose our longing after Christ. We may appear the same outwardly, but, like a Chinese dumpling, the inward filling may be of a different variety. We may be filled by something of the world, such as our job; or we may be filled with something spiritual, like developing a spiritual work. The church in Laodicea was stuffed with spiritual things, but was neither hot nor cold for the Lord. The Lord said, "I wish you were hot or cold" (Rev. 3:15). The Laodiceans might have been able to say they were rich in spiritual knowledge, but the Lord perhaps would have replied, "I wish you did not have such knowledge." Once you are filled with these things, it becomes difficult for you to recapture your longing for Christ.

We may unwittingly become Satan's accomplices when we rejoice at a brother's business success. Satan is working to stuff this brother in order to kill his longing after Christ, and we are shouting hallelujah. If Satan is frustrated in his attempt to fill a brother with something of the world, he will seek to satiate him with spiritual things. And we may still encourage this, not realizing how this will damage this brother's virtue of longing. We encourage many brothers to give messages and rejoice when they do a good job. But how many of these brothers can give a normal testimony of the experience of Christ?

Some may say, "If this is the case, there is no way to go on. It is impossible." It is not impossible; it is just a matter of guarding what you already have. Within us there is such a life. We need to spend time to touch this life. Then our heart will spontaneously be possessed of a longing after Christ and an exercise to pursue after Him.

3. Poor in Spirit and Open

The Lord's speaking in Matthew 5 begins with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5:3)." Why is this? Because this was a time of transition, from the old to the new covenant. This tells us that in order to be able to go forward with the Lord as He is moving, we need to be poor in our spirit. Being poor in spirit always opens the way for us to enter into new experiences and new revelation.

The footnote for this verse says that "to be poor in spirit is not only to be humble but also to be emptied in our spirit, in the depth of our being." If your spirit is emptied, you are not boasting, proud, critical, or selective. When you are empty, you have the ability to receive. In the church life, criticism and selectivity are indication of sickness. Many come to the meetings and judge others. Sometimes there may be criticism, such as, "Why don't we preach the gospel more?" or "Why don't we read the Bible more often?" Eventually the church life encounters difficulty because of all the "why don't we's." The saints love the Lord, but many lack the reality of being poor in spirit. We need the Lord's mercy.

Don't hold onto old things. Allow yourself to be unloaded to receive the new things, the things of the kingdom of the heavens. To be poor in spirit is to be able to receive what the Lord would like to give to you - the kingdom of the heavens. This is marvelous. The heavenly life rules in those who are poor in spirit. Through such people the divine life operates, generates, moves, and does things upon the earth. When we have this, we have the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

Whenever you feel full, that you know something, or that you have something, then the Lord cannot rule over you with his heavenly, divine operation. We brothers who minister sometimes have this experience. We like to think about the good messages we have given. We remember how much the saints were helped by us. As we do this, our experience of the kingdom disappears.

Everything else is still there. The message is still there, the teaching is still there, the reaction you remember is still there, and seemingly the help you rendered to the saints is still there. The only thing that has disappeared from the kingdom of the heavens is you, because you removed yourself from the life operation. This happened because you allowed this thought to fill you and you became no longer poor in spirit.

To be poor in spirit is not something you have to obtain; it is an ability you already possess. You know how to empty yourself just like our God emptied Himself. The Lord Jesus was able to empty Himself to the extent that He descended into humanity and even into death (Phil. 2:5-8). You know, brothers, this is a virtue we need to exercise. Anytime you begin to feel that you have some attainment, learn to warn yourself and seek the Lord's mercy. Pray, "Lord, have mercy. I don't want to be full. I desire to be poor in spirit. I have no time to count the blessings I have rendered unto others. I only care to be empty in my spirit so that all the time You might have a way to dispense more heavenly blessings into me for Your church."

***A Person Poor in Spirit is
Open to the Lord and to the Body***

If you are a person who is poor in spirit, spontaneously you will exercise an openness towards others. This is a high virtue in the church life. If we are not open, no one can help us. Our being open is necessary for our being built up together.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul gave a word that highlights openness. "We all with unveiled face." To have an unveiled face means to come to the Lord's presence empty, not with a view to do certain things. If a person comes to the Lord in such an empty way, he is able to behold and reflect the Lord. This eventually brings in transformation. Too many times we come to the Lord already knowing what it is we want, knowing what to pray, or what it is we wish the Lord to do for us. How often do we come just to

behold and reflect Him? This is how to experience transformation through the virtue of openness.

Such a person also experiences 2 Corinthians 6:11: “Our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians; our heart is enlarged.” Only the enlarged heart can have an open mouth. An opened mouth speaks in a straightforward manner. Such a person only speaks what is profitable to the other. We need to be open for others to speak to us with a true word and an enlarged heart. This is a secret to practicing the church life. Who can do this? Only those who are empty and poor in spirit. We need to pray, “Lord, in the church life, I want to be poor in spirit. I also would like to be so open before You, so that I can reflect You. And I want to open to the brothers to receive their help, so I might be able to help others also.” This kind of openness becomes the source of so much blessing in the church life.

Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 6:11, “You are not constricted in us, but you are constricted in your inward parts.” In the church life, you will always see some who are narrow. But don’t be bothered. We all have to learn to be open and enlarged. If all present here now would practice to be poor in spirit and to have an open mouth and an enlarged heart, what a church life we would have!

Eventually Paul told the Corinthians he considered them fleshly, not spiritual. To be fleshly is the opposite of being open. To be fleshly is to be subjective, insistent, and selective. Therefore the Corinthians experienced a church life full of controversy. They lacked the reality of an emptied spirit. When we are not open, we are opaque. Something fleshly is filling us and is frustrating the openness. Too often even in our meetings there is the lack of the heavenly element because we are fleshly and opaque, rather than poor in spirit and open to one another.

In all these things we surely need the Lord’s mercy. We realize how crucial it is to be a brother in the church life. We need to daily and even moment by moment contact the divine life within

us and allow the divine attributes in this divine life to operate. Then as we function in the church life with all these virtues, our exercise will be healthy and proper. May we all learn to treasure these virtues and guard them against the enemy's operation.

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