

## VITAL FACTORS FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH LIFE, Week 6

### The Factor of Dealing with Our Natural Disposition for Our Growth in Life and Our Usefulness in Service

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:22-26; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 1:8-9; 2:15; 3:3-6; 4:5; 5:20; Eph. 6:20

- Matthew 16:22 And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!
- Matthew 16:23 But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.
- Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him **deny himself** and take **up his cross and follow Me**.
- Matthew 16:25 For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but **whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it**.
- Matthew 16:26 For what shall a man be profited if he gains the whole world, but **forfeits his soul-life**? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul-life?
- Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; and **it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live in faith**, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
- 2 Corinthians 1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were **excessively burdened, beyond our power**, so that we despaired even of living.
- 2 Corinthians 1:9 Indeed we ourselves had the response of death in ourselves, that **we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God**, who raises the dead;
- 2 Corinthians 2:15 For we are a **fragrance of Christ to God** in those who are being saved and in those who are perishing:
- 2 Corinthians 3:3 Since you are being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with the **Spirit of the living God**; not in tablets of stone but in tablets of hearts of flesh.
- 2 Corinthians 3:4 And such confidence we have through Christ toward God,
- 2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves; but **our sufficiency is from God**,
- 2 Corinthians 3:6 Who has also **made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant**, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the **Spirit gives life**.
- 2 Corinthians 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves **but Christ Jesus as Lord**, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.
- 2 Corinthians 5:20 **On behalf of Christ then we are ambassadors**, as God entreats you through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God.
- Ephesians 6:20 For which I am **an ambassador in a chain**, that in it I would **speak boldly**, as I ought to speak.

Our **disposition** is what we are by birth, our natural makeup. In our experience our disposition is found in the "I," the **old man**, the **self**, and the **soul-life**. Although there are no verses in the New Testament that clearly define the disposition, its significance is implied in certain portions of the Word. Galatians 2:20 says, "*I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.*" In this verse the disposition is implied by the old "I," which has been crucified with Christ. In Matthew 16:21-26 and Luke 9:22-25 the disposition is implied by the self and the soul-life. In Matthew 16:22 Peter rebuked the Lord Jesus according to his disposition. Peter's disposition was mainly expressed in his quickness and in his taking the lead to express himself. Peter, as the spokesman of the twelve disciples, took the lead to express himself on many occasions. None of the other disciples exceeded Peter in this matter. We each have our own disposition. According to our disposition, we also may be quick to express ourselves as Peter did. On the other hand, according to our disposition, we may be persons who rarely say something to express ourselves.

Our disposition is the most **difficult part of our being to deal with**, and often there is a particular part of our disposition that is the hardest to deal with. It seems that a mountain can be moved more easily than certain parts of our disposition. Our disposition is a part of our self. As Christians, we have to live Christ by rejecting our self. We must learn to act against our disposition. (*The Experience and Growth in Life, chapter 24*)

## Day 1 &amp; Day 2

**Matthew 16:23-25** But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.

**Romans 6:6** Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves:

**Galatians 2:20** I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

### I. We must deal with our natural disposition for our growth in life and our usefulness in service:

- A. Our natural disposition denotes what we are in our makeup by birth, and our character is the outward expression of our natural disposition; **natural disposition** is what we are within, and **character** is what we express without.
- B. The inward natural disposition and the outward character are the extract, the essence, of our being; the **self within** is our natural disposition, and the **self expressed** is our character.
- C. The thing that most damages our usefulness in the Christian life and church life is our **living according to our natural disposition**; it is the **real enemy** of our growth in the divine life and the major factor that **spoils** our usefulness in the hand of the Lord.
- D. We must learn to take care of the “burl” in our makeup, our natural disposition; if we deal with this “burl,” we will **grow quickly** without any hindrances to our growth in life, and we will also become **more useful** to the Lord.
- E. Disposition is implied in the terms used in Matthew 16:23-26—mind, himself, and soul-life; disposition includes all these elements; actually, we may say that **our natural disposition is our self**.
- F. To deal with our natural disposition means to deal with our self, our soul-life (vv. 22-26), our old man (Rom. 6:6), and the “I” (Gal. 2:20); how useful you will be to the Lord or how much trouble you will make to the church **depends upon how much your natural disposition is killed**; the way to deal with our natural disposition is to **realize and remember that we are crucified persons** and remain under that realization and reality throughout the day (v. 20; 5:24-25; Rom. 6:6; 8:13b).
- G. Our natural disposition is our self; it is in us, and it is us; practically speaking, to deny the self is simply to **deny our natural disposition**; as Christians, we have to live Christ by **continually exercising our spirit** to reject our self and live by another life, the crucified and resurrected Christ, signified by the tree of life—Gen. 2:9; Phil. 1:21a; Rev. 2:7; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 Tim. 4:7-8.

In our Christian experience there is **something within** us called our **disposition**. This disposition is what we are in our makeup. Each of us has a particular and unique disposition. Inwardly, in our disposition we are quite different from one another. Your disposition denotes what you are in your makeup by birth. Whatever you are by birth is your disposition. If you are slow, you were made slow by birth; being slow is your disposition. Likewise, if you are quick, quickness is your disposition. One may be silent or talkative; both are matters of inward disposition. Although our disposition is something made by God, it **still needs to be dealt with by God**. This seems to be contradictory—something given by God must be dealt with by God. However, this is very much according to the divine revelation, and it is also confirmed by our experience.

**Character** refers to our **outward expression**. The Chinese equivalent to the English word character means an outward form that expresses the inner nature. Thus, character is the outward form that expresses our inner being. The disposition is always explicitly expressed in our character. Character is at least a part of the expression of disposition. If you were born slow, slowness is always a part of your outward expression, your character. If you were born humble or proud, humility or pride will be a part of the outward expression, the character, of your person. Character is composed of about thirty percent nature and of about seventy percent habits. For example, if a child is placed in a Chinese home, he will be cast into a Chinese mold. The same child placed in a family of another nationality will resemble a person of that nationality when he grows up. Our outward character is composed of our nature by birth and our habits by living. **To deal with our disposition is to deal with what we are inwardly, but to deal with our character is to deal with what we express outwardly, including what we are inwardly**. The intrinsic element of our outward character is our inner nature by birth. (*The Experience and Growth in Life, chapter 21*)

## Day 3

**2 Corinthians 3:5-6** Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God, Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

**2 Corinthians 1:9** Indeed we ourselves had the response of death in ourselves, that we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead;

**II. We should not be limited by our natural disposition in the Lord's work; instead, we should learn to live a life of opposing ourselves, our disposition; whatever we have and whatever comes out of us cannot be brought into the Lord's service—Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:3-6; 4:5:**

- A. The natural disposition of some brothers reflects a **strong self-confidence**; their self-confidence must be overthrown by continually **rejecting their self** and by **relying on the resurrecting Triune God**—1:8-9.
- B. The **less a man is enlightened by God**, the more he thinks that he will have no trouble obeying God; the quicker a man makes loud claims, the more it proves that he has never paid any price; those whose words **pretend intimacy** with God are probably farthest away from Him—Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14; Phil. 3:3.
- C. The natural disposition of some brothers is one of **refusing to work** as long as the circumstances are not perfect or the conditions are not adequate; we must reject the natural disposition that requires a particular environment before we can work—1 Pet. 4:1; 1 Cor. 9:23-27.
- D. We need to **work together with God by a life** that is able to fit all situations, that is able to endure any kind of treatment, that is able to **accept any kind of environment**, that is able to work in any kind of condition, and that is able to take any kind of opportunity, for the carrying out of the ministry; we must learn the secret of experiencing Christ in everything and in every place—2 Cor. 6:1-2; Phil. 4:5-9, 11-13.

**Day 4**

**Matthew 19:25-26**

And when the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, Who then can be saved? And looking upon them, Jesus said to them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

- E. One type of natural disposition is that of the “hero”; this type must **do everything in an impressive, perfect, and complete way**; another type of natural disposition is that of the “non-hero”; the non-hero **does not do anything in a thorough or complete way**.
- F. Some responsible brothers have a strong element in their natural disposition that **hinders them from coordinating and cooperating** with others; these ones usually are very capable, and they can also easily stir up trouble in the church life; their disposition can even be one with a **dominating attitude**, a **suppressing spirit**, **critical speaking**, and a **legalistic and unforgiving spirit**.
- G. Other responsible brothers may have a natural disposition that wants everyone to like them and does not want to offend anyone; this **limits their effectiveness in the Lord's work**, because when the Lord wants to speak an honest or frank word of admonishment or warning to the saints through them, they will not do it—cf. Col. 1:27-29; 1 Thes. 5:12-13; 1 Cor. 10:5-13; Heb. 3:7-19; 12:25:
  - 1. Furthermore, those with such a disposition can express the “strange fire” of natural affection toward the saints, even to such a degree that causes them to be **lacking the proper discernment** and the proper oversight in their care for the church, the saints, and the work—Lev. 2:11; 10:1-2; Num. 6:6-7; Phil. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:2; Heb. 13:17.
  - 2. A major part of the Nazarite vow is to **separate ourselves from the deadness** that comes through natural affection (Num. 6:6-7); also, the meal offering being without honey means that in Christ there is no natural affection or natural goodness (Lev. 2:11; Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 10:18).
- H. The source of any rebellion among us was the natural disposition of the persons involved; **ambition for position** (which comes from Satan) is the primary element of every fallen person's natural disposition; the root of **dissent** is the self, the natural disposition—Isa. 14:12-13; Num. 12:1-2; 16:1-3; 1 Sam. 15:10-12; Matt. 18:1-4; 20:20-28; Luke 22:25-27; 2 Cor. 10:4-5.
- I. Second Kings 4:8-10 gives the account of the Shunammite woman's reception of Elisha by providing a meal for him whenever he passed by; he did not give one message or perform one miracle, but the woman identified him as “a holy man of God” by the way he took his meal; this was the impression that Elisha gave to others, so we have to ask ourselves, “What is the impression that we give to others?”—cf. 2 Cor. 2:15; 5:20; Eph. 6:20.
- J. If the Lord breaks our outer man with our natural disposition, we will no longer present others with our strong self when we touch them; instead, **our spirit will flow out whenever we touch men**; it is **impossible for us** to break through the problems of our natural disposition, but it is **possible for the Lord to do it**—John 7:37-38; Luke 18:24-27; 19:2.

In consecration we offer ourselves to God according to the light we have received. In disciplining us the Holy Spirit deals with us according to the light that He dispenses to us. We can only consecrate according to what we know. We can only consecrate according to what we can see with our spiritual eyes. In reality even we do not know how much is included in our consecration. The amount of light we have received is not infinite; our light is very limited. Even when we think that we have the greatest light, God's eyes still may find us in darkness. What we consecrate to God according to our perceived light will never satisfy His demand. In other words, God's demand is always higher than what we can offer. **Our consecration cannot satisfy God's heart because our knowledge is limited and our light is limited.** But the discipline of the Holy Spirit is altogether different; **it evaluates our need in God's own light.** It is not what we see, but what God sees. He knows that we have certain needs, and He operates through His Spirit in the environment for us to experience these things, the purpose of which is to break our outer man. Therefore, the disciplining work of the Holy Spirit goes far beyond our consecration. It is many times greater than our consecration. There is a big difference here. (*The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit, chapter 6*)

## Day 5

**2 Corinthians 4:7** But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.

**2 Corinthians 4:10** Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

### III. The Spirit deals with our outer man, our self, our natural disposition, by the **the killing element of the cross in the compound Spirit**, by the discipline of the Spirit, by the shining of Christ as the Spirit, and by the church life, fruit-bearing, and lamb-feeding:

- A. In order to deal with our natural disposition, we must **deny the self** and **apply the killing power of the cross**; we need to see and realize in our experience that the compound, all-inclusive Spirit in our spirit includes the precious death of Christ and the sweetness and effectiveness of Christ's death, which can kill our natural disposition—Exo. 30:23-25; Phil. 1:19; Rom. 8:13:
1. Christ as the **compound Spirit** is our medication to **heal** us, **enliven** us, and **kill all the negative things within us**; when we take Him as our medication, we enjoy "the putting to death of Jesus," or the killing of Jesus—2 Cor. 4:10-11.
  2. In the Spirit there is the killing element of the cross; when we **reject ourselves in the morning** to receive God into us, we have the sense during the day that a killing process is going on within us.
- B. The goal of the discipline of the Holy Spirit is for us to be a **broken man**; God has to put us in a place of total inability and total helplessness before He can have a way in us; the purpose of the trials through which we pass is so that we can **receive the benefit of knowing God for Him to be expressed**—1:8-9; 12:9-10; Isa. 40:28-31; Hosea 6:1-3:
1. The breaking of the outer man is the breaking of our natural disposition; our natural disposition **makes it hard for us to release our spirit**; a person who is not broken by God cannot be entrusted with the Lord's work; what we are originally, including our natural appearance and taste, **does not match God and is not compatible with God**—Jer. 48:11.
  2. Whatever we are by birth, whether good or bad, whether useful or not, is natural and **altogether a hindrance to the Holy Spirit** in constituting the divine life into our being; for this reason our natural strength, natural wisdom, natural cleverness, natural disposition, natural shortcomings, natural virtues, plus our character and habits, must all be **torndown** in order that the **Holy Spirit may form in us a new disposition, new character, new habits, new virtues, and new attributes**.
  3. In order to accomplish the work of reconstitution, the Holy Spirit of God **moves within us** to enlighten, inspire, lead, and saturate us with the divine life; He also **works in our environment** to arrange every detail, person, matter, and thing in our situation to tear down all aspects of our natural being in order that He might conform us to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God—Rom. 8:28-29.
  4. Everything in our environment has been **measured to us by our God**; He orders everything around us, the only purpose of which is to break our conspicuous, obtuse, and hard spots—Psa. 39:9; Matt. 10:29-30; Luke 12:6.
  5. **If the outer man is not broken, the inner man will not be released**; the earthen vessel has to be broken before the treasure can be released (2 Cor. 4:7); as long as the ointment is in the alabaster box, the fragrance will not be released (John 12:3).
  6. A person who is not broken **cannot submit to others**; only those who have experienced Christ as their life of submission know the rebelliousness of their natural disposition—Phil. 2:5-8.
  7. Anyone who is **boastful** has not been broken, anyone who blames others has not been broken, anyone who thinks he is something when he is nothing has not been broken, and anyone who competes with others has not been broken—3:3; 1 Cor. 6:7; Gal. 5:25-26; 6:3.
  8. Someone who has never been pressed, mistreated, depreciated, or wronged by others is **raw, wild, and useless** to God; we should not have the mistaken concept that all the saints will admire and respect us because we have been sent by God, called by God, and entrusted with His work; one who respects us today may deride and trample us under his feet tomorrow; this is the way of one who serves the Lord—John 2:23-25; Acts 14:11-13, 18-21; Mark 11:8-10; cf. 15:9-15.
- C. Deliverance from our natural disposition also comes from the **inner shining of Christ as a great light**; this shining is seeing what God sees—Prov. 4:18; 20:27; Psa. 18:28-29; Matt. 4:16; Luke 11:34-36; Acts 9:3-5; 22:6-10; 26:13-19; Eph. 5:13; Phil. 2:15-16:
1. The greatest thing in the Christian experience is the killing that comes from the shining of the divine light; the **shining is the saving**, and the **seeing is the deliverance**; everyone who truly sees a vision of the Lord in His glory is enlightened in his conscience regarding his uncleanness—Isa. 6:1-8.
  2. The Lord **grants us much light** to expose us and to humble us; only this kind of shining will remove our pride, and **only this light will stop our fleshly activities** and break our outer shell with our natural disposition; the more we see God, know God, and love God, the more we abhor ourselves and the more we deny ourselves—Job 42:5-6; Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23; 14:26.
  3. We should not try to be magnanimous or forbearing **by the effort of our self**, our natural disposition; rather, we should learn to **prostrate ourselves in God's light**, receive His breaking, and allow the environment to break us and tear us down.

- D. If we are not useful in the Lord's hand for taking care of people, it is due to our **natural disposition**; **the church life**, **fruit-bearing**, and **lamb-feeding** are three matters that kill our natural disposition; to deal with our natural disposition, we must love God by contacting God to be infused with Him as grace, and we must love people by contacting them to infuse them with God as grace—John 21:15-17; Eph. 3:2; 4:29; 1 Pet. 4:10.

### Day 6

**Genesis 25:26** And the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

**Genesis 47:7** And Joseph brought in Jacob his father and set him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

#### IV. God's dealing with Jacob is a full picture of the **Holy Spirit's discipline** and His transforming work in the New Testament believers to deal with their natural disposition so that Christ may be formed in them, fully grown in them, unto maturity; **this is God's blessing us and making us a blessing to others that they may be supplied with the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity**—Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 6:1a; Gen. 12:1-3; Ezek. 34:26; Num. 6:22-27:

- A. Jacob's life shows that a natural person must pass through breaking in order to become Israel, a prince of God; what God tears down through our environment is our worthless self, our natural disposition; however, **what God builds into us is Himself**, the peerless, supereminent, and infinite One—1 Cor. 3:12.
- B. God destined Jacob to live a struggling life all his days; He sovereignly arranged every circumstance, situation, and person in Jacob's life and caused them all to work together for Jacob's good so that He could transform Jacob, **a supplanter and a heel holder, into Israel, a prince of God**—Gen. 25:26; 32:24-32.
- C. The strongest manifestation of Jacob's maturity in life (the last stage of transformation) is the fact that Jacob blessed everyone; his supplanting hands became blessing hands; **blessing is the overflow of God as life to others through the maturity in life**—47:7, 10; 48:14-16; 49:1-28.

When we accept the **discipline of the Holy Spirit**, **we should not deem it to be a pleasant thing**. Some brothers and sisters seem to glory in testifying of their experience while being disciplined by the Holy Spirit. This should not be. No child is proud after being punished by his father. In the same manner, **we should feel ashamed when we receive the discipline of the Holy Spirit**. We should be aware of our own obstinacy, stubbornness, lawlessness, and disobedience, which cause punishment from God our Father. No doubt, He chastises me because He loves me, but when I speak of His chastisement, it is not my glory. It is because I am so rebellious and stubborn, even as a mule without understanding, that God is compelled to discipline me. This is my shame. Therefore, we should not boast in regard to the discipline we receive. All those who boast concerning the discipline of the Holy Spirit are those who do not know the nature of the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

Because the discipline of the Holy Spirit is such an unpleasant thing, God in His original thought put greater emphasis on the inner anointing, which is of a positive nature, than on the outward discipline, which is of a negative nature. But judging from our condition, the **discipline of the Holy Spirit is most needful**, because we are by nature **rebellious, lawless, and disobedient**. We often disregard and disobey the moving and enlightening of the Holy Spirit. It seems that His anointing alone, which is His sweet act, is not enough to accomplish His purpose, but that we need in addition the outward discipline as the coordinating factor to chastise us and deal with us in order that we may be subdued. Therefore, the discipline of the Holy Spirit must not be neglected in our experience. (*The Experience of Life, chapter 12*)