

MESSAGE 4 – MORAL AND SPIRITUAL STATURE IN ETERNITY

Introduction

- In this message, I will elaborate on the importance of having strong conviction on the significance of making good progress in moral and spiritual stature and continually paying due attention to nurture it – because of its significance and value from the perspective of God's eternal kingdom
- This message complements the first message in which I considered with you the significance of moral and spiritual stature

Reasons for wanting to make good progress in moral and spiritual stature

- Sensible and faithful disciples of the Lord would want to make good progress in moral and spiritual stature for the following reasons:
 1. Moral and spiritual stature is one of the primary intentions of God for our lives – and we want to respond well to God's call and intentions
 2. Moral and spiritual stature is the basis for manifesting God's glory in our being and through our conduct and ways – and we want to glorify God in our lives
 3. Moral and spiritual stature is of primary importance and of eternal value
 4. Moral and spiritual stature is the basis for deep relationship and fellowship with God and with the brethren on earth and in eternity
 5. Moral and spiritual stature enables us to contribute effectively in the outworking of God's purposes and the advancement of His kingdom
 6. Moral and spiritual stature is directly related to the quality of our being and the quality and meaning of our life on earth and in eternity
- If we want to make good progress in moral and spiritual stature, we would need to know how to do so
- Making good progress does not take place automatically – we need to be strongly motivated and to pay due attention to this vital area of life
- It is important that we have strong conviction about the significance of moral and spiritual stature and a clear understanding of the 6 points mentioned above – so that we are properly motivated
- This must become an integral part of our belief system - the way we view and approach life - what we are concerned about and what we concentrate on
- These messages on moral and spiritual stature are meant to help God's children towards this end:
 - o That we may see clearly and be deeply convicted about the importance and significance of moral and spiritual stature
 - o That it may have its rightful place in our lives – we pay due attention to it and make good progress in it

Insufficient emphasis and attention on moral and spiritual stature

- In my observation, although many believers have a vague sense of the importance of moral and spiritual stature, they are not clear about its significance
- Among the broad spectrum of Christians, there is generally insufficient emphasis and attention paid to this vital issue – even though there is general acknowledgement of its importance
- Take, for example, the area of *service*. Though service is important, there is often much emphasis on service without adequate attention paid to moral and spiritual growth
 - o This results in poor quality service and lack of good fruit
 - o There is insufficient spiritual maturity, strength and stamina to sustain true service
 - o There is the tendency to rely on human capabilities (works of the flesh) rather than on the Lord's enabling
 - o There is over enthusiasm about external things and activities, statistics and outward appearance of success and accomplishment, rather than discerning concentration on the realities in God's kingdom, its true advancement, and what is truly important to God
 - o Such an approach renders believers unnecessarily vulnerable to spiritual pressures and attacks, spiritual exhaustion and disillusionment – with many becoming casualties
 - o This is not the will of God – and it need not be this way
- Healthy, wholesome approach to service bears a relationship with adequate attention paid to moral and spiritual growth
 - o True service that is sustainable arises from healthy spiritual life and growth – just like the branch drawing nourishment from the vine and producing good fruit (John 15)
 - o It is only in Christ that we can find inexhaustible spiritual resources for whatever the Lord wants us to do and go through
- When we live out our life as God intends, there will be a *symbiotic relationship* between growth and service: Growth giving rise to effective service, which promotes further growth, resulting in even more effective service
 - o Instead of service that is detrimental to spiritual life, the branch will continually bear good fruit

Two major reasons for weak believers and weak church

- In my understanding, there are two major reasons for the poor quality in Christian discipleship, the spiritual poverty amongst God's children, and the weakness of the universal church:
 - o Lack of understanding and insufficient effective attention paid to growth in moral and spiritual stature
 - o Insufficient effective attention paid to nurturing the quality of our relationship with God
- These two factors significantly contribute to the failures, complexities and many things taking place amongst professing Christians that grieve the heart of God
- Ironically, these two areas are the two key aspects of God's intentions for men:
 - o Moral and spiritual stature of man
 - o Deep and quality fellowship of man with God and with one another
- These are like the *twin pillars* supporting a structure – if the pillars are weak, the whole structure is unstable and may even collapse

- They may also be likened to the *two legs* of a man – the health and strength of the two legs are essential for a believer to fare well in his Christian walk and the Christian race
- If his legs are weak, he will be wobbly and unstable – he will easily stumble and fall – he may be limping or even unable to walk - how then can he run the race well?
- For spiritual warfare, his legs must be strong so that he can stand firm (Eph 6) and fight the good fight of faith and accomplish the Lord's will
- If our moral and spiritual state is unhealthy, we will not be able to fare well in any of the major aspects of the Christian faith
- How can believers effectively manifest God's glory in their being and glorify God in their conduct and ways if there are many things not right in their hearts and they are in an unhealthy spiritual state?
- How can such believers, in a sustained manner, bear good fruit, serve God effectively and contribute well to the advancement of God's kingdom?
- It is easy for the evil one to attack with devastating effect and manipulate the lives of such believers
- Point to reflect upon:

If God's people can be helped to see the biblical emphasis on moral and spiritual stature and pay due attention to it, the health of the universal church will be strengthened at its very foundation

Why insufficient emphasis and attention on moral and spiritual stature

- If this area is so important and emphasised in the Scriptures, why the widespread relative neglect and failure to pay due attention to it?
- I will give three reasons and then concentrate on the third reason in this message:
 1. The evil one does not want God's children to see its significance and pay attention to it as this would threaten his kingdom and nullify his opposition to God's purposes
 - The evil one will try all ways and means to distract us and hinder us from recognising its importance and significance and from paying due attention to it
 2. Growth in moral and spiritual stature is a difficult process and often not obvious
 - Rather than concentrating on nurturing qualities of the inner man, it is easier and more appealing to the flesh to concentrate on activities that produce visible and obvious results, that give a sense of success and accomplishment
 3. The failure to appreciate the significance of moral and spiritual stature for the meaning and quality of our life in eternity – in addition to our life on earth

Significance of moral and spiritual stature for life in eternity

- There is a vague notion in the minds of many believers that once they enter heaven all will be well
- It is not uncommon for professing believers to console themselves or comfort one another with these words (especially when going through difficult, painful times):
 - Heaven is a wonderful place – there will be no more pain and tears
 - Christ will come again, and we can all look forward to it
- But the truth is that some may shrink away in shame when Christ comes again – and some may be severely reprimanded by the Lord
- There is insufficient recognition that how we have grown and how we live now have a bearing on:
 - the meaning and quality of our existence in eternity
 - the meaning of our fellowship with God and the manner of our participation in the continuing outworking and fulfilment of God's purposes in eternity
- Some think that there is no distinction in heaven and we will all be the same – including in moral and spiritual stature – because all of us will be like the Lord Jesus
- Some may refer to the words of the apostle John: ‘when He appears, we will be like Him’

1 John 3:2-3

2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

- If ‘we will be like Him’ refers to moral and spiritual stature, then it would mean we will all have the moral and spiritual stature of the Lord Jesus – but this is not so
- In the preceding verses, the apostle John indicates that it will not be the same for all when we see the Lord Jesus
- There are those who can meet the Lord Jesus in joy but there are also those who may shrink away in shame at His coming

1 John 2:28

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

- This verse tells us: To have proper confidence for looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ, we must abide in Christ – which means growing well in Him and bearing good fruit - as the Lord Jesus explains to us in John 15
- Having a wrong understanding will remove a strong incentive for us to pay proper attention to growth in moral and spiritual stature, which is a difficult and often painful process
- When we recognise the eternal value, significance and implications of moral and spiritual stature, it can strongly motivate us to pay much attention to it
- In 2 Cor 4:16-18, Paul tells us that if we respond well (like Paul and his co-workers), then the trials we go through are ‘momentary, light afflictions’ when compared to the ‘eternal weight of glory’ they produce in us – because our inner man is being renewed
- The thrust of Paul's point is that when the inner man is being renewed through afflictions, there will be a positive difference of eternal significance

- In 1 Tim 6:7, Paul tells us ‘we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either’
 - o We know we cannot bring with us into eternity earthly wealth and possessions and temporal attainments and accomplishments
 - o But we can bring into God’s eternal kingdom something of immense value - the moral and spiritual stature we have attained

Store up for ourselves treasures in heaven

- Besides warning us against laying up for ourselves treasures on earth, the Lord Jesus also exhorts us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, which will endure

Matthew 6:19-20

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

- o These words of the Lord come after the Beatitudes, where He emphasises the significance of inner qualities
 - o He follows up the Beatitudes with various exhortations to nurture good attitude and character expressed in practical daily living
 - o The laying up of treasures in heaven may be understood as referring to the nurturing of positive inner qualities and living lives pleasing to the Lord
- Paul wrote to Timothy that believers can store up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that we may take hold of that which is life indeed

1 Timothy 6:17–19

17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

- o We store up for ourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future by the way we live our lives on earth - so that we may have a life of quality and meaning in eternity
- o A major aspect is the moral and spiritual stature we attain to on earth – which goes together with a life rich in good works
- o Together with it are the rewards from God and the roles and responsibilities God sees fit to entrust to us in eternity

2 Timothy 4:6-8

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

- o If we have lived well, according to God's will and intentions for us, we can look forward to the crown of righteousness which the Lord will award to those who have fought the good fight and finished the course

Differences and distinctions in eternity

- The Scriptures does indicate that there will be differences and distinctions in eternity
- Consider the parable of the minas in Luke 19:12-27:

Luke 19:12–27

12 So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.

13 "And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.'

14 "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'

15 "When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done.

16 "The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.'

17 "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.'

18 "The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.'

19 "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

20 "Another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief;

21 for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.'

22 "He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow?

23 'Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?'

24 "Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.'

25 "And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.'

26 "I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

27 "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."

- o Ten slaves were entrusted with a mina each
- o The one who made ten minas more was commended by the master for having done well and for his faithfulness – and he was placed in authority over ten cities (vs 16-17)
- o The one who made five minas more was placed in authority over five cities (vs 18-19)
- o The one who was unfaithful and kept the mina entrusted to him and failed to produce anything with it was severely reprimanded as a worthless slave – and had his mina taken away from him (vs 20-26)
- o The Lord Jesus makes it clear how we have lived our lives on earth, and whether we have been faithful stewards of what He has entrusted to us, would have a bearing on the meaning of our time in eternity and what God would entrust to us then
- o Growing well in moral and spiritual stature enables us to fare well as good stewards of what God entrusts to us

- o This is the way we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven – and the treasure of a good foundation for the future – and we can look forward to meaningful participation in the outworking of God's purposes in eternity

How then should we understand the words of the apostle John: 'when He appears, we will be like Him' (1 John 3:2)?

- If they do not mean that we would all instantaneously attain the moral and spiritual stature of the Lord Jesus at His Second Coming, what do they mean?
- These words of the apostle John can be understood in a way that is consistent with the general presentation and flow of the meaning of various passages in the Scriptures on this issue
- From what I can appreciate, the apostle John is here referring to the change from our perishable, natural body to the imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual body described by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 15:42-44
- This is consistent with what Paul expresses in Phil 3:20-21 and 1 Cor 15:50-53

Philippians 3:20-21

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

- o When the Lord Jesus comes again, He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory – we will be like Him.

- Paul tells us the same thing in 1 Cor 15:

1 Corinthians 15:50-53

50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Concluding remarks

- It is important that we see clearly the value and significance of growing well in moral and spiritual stature and the far-reaching implications it has for our time on earth and in eternity
- We must develop strong convictions on the importance of moral and spiritual stature and continually nurture it well
- We do not all become the same in moral and spiritual stature the moment we enter heaven
- We do not, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, suddenly attain the moral and spiritual stature of the Lord Jesus
- The apostle Paul warns us not to be deceived:

Galatians 6:7-8

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

- o We will reap what we sow: If we walk according to the flesh, our inner man will become corrupt and degenerate; but if we walk according to the Spirit, our inner man will grow in richness of life and meaning
- o Growth in moral and spiritual stature requires moral input on our part – by responding well to God's provisions and to the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, and by living a life pleasing to God
- o There are eternal implications for the way we respond to the Lord and His working in our lives
- Appreciation of the significance of moral and spiritual stature for the meaning and quality of our life on earth and in eternity will help us understand the key issues in the book of Job and why God allowed Satan to afflict Job so severely
- The 'momentary, light afflictions' Job went through renewed his inner being and produced in him 'an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison'
- The deep lessons Job learned through the trials he went through would have a direct bearing on the quality and meaning of his life on earth and in eternity and how well he participates in the outworking of God's purposes