

God's Many Splendored Image  
Adult Christian Education Class  
Virtues and Humility  
Study Guide- Chapter 4

Everyone asks at one time or another in their life, Can I really do good in this world for others? The Good News of Jesus Christ is that human beings can become good and can do good for others, because God will help them.

Story of Abba Moses the Black. "If he who was such a strong and powerful thief fears God, why should we put off our own salvation". Sin is changed to repentance, vengeance to forgiveness, hostility to hospitality and fierceness to kindness and gentleness.

#### Virtue as Image and Likeness of God

Does virtue matter in this world? Choosing which fork to use certainly doesn't but how people treat one another does matter. Seek examples of those who do good in the world and attempt to emulate them.

Virtue- Arete (i) is usually translated as virtue, means excellence of action, habits, and especially character. Philosophers like Plato include things like wisdom, moderation, courage and justice, Christians added qualities of such as humility, repentance, forgiveness, faith, hope and love.

St. John Chrysostom said, "virtues are true, lasting wealth that a person can carry into the next life, where all the riches of this world are gone".

Dorotheus of Gaza- 6th Century Abbot believes that virtues are natural to us as human persons. By God's gift the virtues belong to the nature we possess. For truly when God made man he sowed the virtues of man in him, as it says: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Gen 1:26

St. Basil of Caesarea also distinguishes between image and likeness. "By our creation we have the first, and by our free choice we build the second."

St. Gregory says that likewise, "every person is the painter of his own life, and choice is the craftsman of the work, and the virtues are the paints for producing the image."

#### Virtues and Passions

God has endowed us with virtues, and since they are natural to us as human persons, why do we find it so hard to live a life of virtue?

We all have within us the raw material for forgiveness, hospitality and gentleness even when we are misusing it.

The first and highest of the soul's three parts or capacities is reason, mind or intellect. In a mature, well balanced human life, our intellect is supposed to discern, receive and obey the will of the will of God and to guide and bring order to the other two parts of the soul which are understood to include the instinctive and emotional impulses and drives. The mind is like the driver of the cart, while the emotional impulses are like the two horses. With the horses, the driver gets where he is going much more quickly than if he walked without the horses.

Desire- When mis-directed, desire is obsessively focused on the wrong things, yet it also serves as the necessary driving force in love for God and love for neighbor.

Thymos- the other nonrational impulses. This impulse complements desire in that it pushes things away from the self and sets limits of the other impulses, one's own or those of other people. It is also the necessary driving force at work in virtues like perseverance, courage, self-restraint, rejection of evil and struggle for justice. Thymos is assertiveness which is different from aggression.

Passion- the opposite of virtue. They are instincts or emotions that are misdirected and therefore pull us away from God. The sin comes when we focus our attention on the tempting thoughts or the bad mood.

#### Passions and virtues in the Soul-Evagrius Ponticus

Parts of the Soul	Passions	Virtues
Intellect	Vainglory Pride	Prudence Understanding Wisdom
Assertiveness	Restless boredom Anger Sadness and depression	Perseverance Courage Self-restraint
Desire	Gluttony Fornication Love of Money	Continenence Moderation Love

The eight passions listed are those Evagrius names as important but there certainly are more. We all have the task of collaborating with God to work and struggle with our passions until they become virtues and manifest his likeness. Gregory of Nyssa explains that this happens when the soul's original balance is restored and our intellect, guided by God, guides the emotions toward harmony.

### Humility

How is a Christian to practice virtues and overcome passions? We must rely continually on God's help instead of our own strength and thus be protected from the devil's attack. Without humility the virtues cannot be rightly practiced nor human dignity truthfully affirmed nor virtuous deeds authentically accomplished.

True humility does the opposite: it always looks at how the self is acting and does not judge other but quietly leads by example. Real humility has nothing to do with creating in myself or making myself feel guilty. It means recognizing that all my talents and virtues are gifts from God, gifts for which I am profoundly thankful. Humility is not about pondering how awful I think I am. It is about how I relate to others. Humility means honoring the divine image in other people and admitting one's own needs. It often means being willing to accept service from others.

### Acquiring humility

How can people become humble? One traditional way will probably not work and that we tell ourselves over and over that we are not worthy and that we are the worst of sinners. This can lead some to complete despair. Our author suggests we follow the teachings of the fathers.

St. Basil suggests maintaining a balance in one's opinion of oneself. When exhilarated with limitless powers and possibilities, remember that one is made of dust; but when constrained and depressed that one is made in God's image. He also exhorts the affluent and proud to remember their lowliness primarily their mortality. It is a great equalizer when one realizes that when we die and are placed in our graves people will not be able to tell which one was wealthy or which one was poor. The real barometer of who we are is what we become in the light of Christ's teaching...that is the condition of our soul. He even speaks to the poor that no matter how difficult their situation is they still have the earth, sun, sky and the stars.

This is humility: "to feel in each action both our weakness and the help of God. Such a condition then becomes the foundation for all the virtues, for great spiritual growth, for abundant blessings to other nearby, and for the fullness of God's likeness.