

Visible Virtues

By far, the best teacher I ever had any year in school would have been Dr. Powell, who taught four different sections of American History at Amarillo College. Apart from having two doctorates, one in Foreign Relations and another in American Colonial History, he had also earned a Purple Heart in the Gulf War and the Medal of Bravery for heroics during the time he was a lieutenant in the Cincinnati Fire Department, all by his 40th birthday. Incredibly knowledgeable and very well-rounded, his office was a library, housing nearly 500 books which he called "only a little bit of his complete collection." Talking with him in his office one day, I complimented him on his extensive knowledge over many different subjects, aside from just history, to which he responded, "Brady, there are two different types of people who have Ph.D.'s in this world: those who think they know everything and stop reading, or those who are scared to death that everyone will find out how much they don't know, and never quit studying."

While this may seem to be advice addressing the actions of a man, they are largely representative of the inner workings of the individual. Remember what Solomon said concerning the conduct of a person as stemming from the heart (Proverbs 23:7), and we will understand that if they are forced, actions of humility can only last so long. The only way to really convince a person to act a certain way is to change what they believe concerning their present conduct. That is why, in Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul would discuss the changing of the inward man as being a "*renewing in the spirit of your mind.*" He would spend the preceding verses discussing the walk of those who don't follow trust in God as corrupt and good for nothing; Peter would say a similar thing to those who would not grow in 2 Peter 1:9, calling them "shortsighted." What is the solution then? To have the actions of Christ is not enough -- we must also have the mind.

Speaking to carnal people in 1 Corinthians 2:16, Paul would say that to have the spiritual mind is to have "*the mind of Christ.*" What then does the spiritual mind entail? For starters, it includes an attitude of humility. In Philippians 2:3-13, Paul discusses the actions of Christ as being extremely humble, but yet also calling Him glorified above all other names. In this we have a paradox. To seek humility in one aspect, yet gain glory seems to us to be contradictory. Yet we can see this same aspect throughout our own recent history, that those who have been praised with sincere gratitude have also been those who have uttered the least glory to their own name (i.e. Cpt. Chesley Sullenberger's speech in Danville, CA, following the Hudson River plane crash). To this, Jesus agrees, stating in Luke 14:11, "*For*

whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

But yet man still drives on in their pursuit of fame and fortune, believing notoriety and self-promotion to be the keys to eternal remembrance. The Temple of Diana in Ephesus was burned down by a man named Herostratos who wished for his name to be remembered throughout the ages. Despite what those whom he loved thought about him, he chose to focus his fame on the masses, picking quantity over quality. Similarly, those of us who draw our names in the sands of time may be remembered, but what are we remembered for? And who will remember us? This pursuit of glory will overshadow everything else we have done in our lifetimes. Though we give our very livelihoods to the poor of this world, if we ask for honor in return, that is what they will remember us for. Along the same lines: *"Though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing"* (1 Corinthians 13:3). To give and not to expect is the true measure of character.

Humility cannot be discovered in any man who proclaims his virtues from the rooftops, but by the individual who allows his virtues to speak for themselves. This applies to virtually every act of conversation between man, whether it be for persuasion, inspiration, or teaching. Peter wrote to the women in 1 Peter 3:1-6 that the thing that should convince their husbands of God's goodness should not be their clothes but their lifestyle. Along with this, the qualities of "The Virtuous Woman" in Proverbs 31 says little about her speech (although when it is, it is discussed as wisdom and kindness, vs. 26), but a great deal about her actions. Likewise it should be for our own lives, women and men, with our humility displayed prominently through our actions.

Getting back to what Dr. Powell told me in his office that day, I realize that his words didn't just speak to pursuits in academia, but a mentality that we go through in life. If we believe we don't need to improve, what use are we to others and to God? Our conversations with people will drip with arrogance, our teaching will spew condescension, and souls will be lost. To believe that there are many, many people out there who know volumes more than you do is not just a virtue, it's necessity. As Galatians 6:1 tells us, when we teach others, we are to take heed to ourselves, *"lest we also be tempted."*

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