

THE SISTERS, THE BLESSING OF A LOCAL CHURCH LIFE

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MESSAGE THREE: THE DIVINE BLESSING THROUGH THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN WHO FOCUSES ON TRUTH AND THE ENRICHMENT OF THE LIVING TRUTH

THE EXPERIENCES

*She is like the merchants' ships; she brings her
food from afar.*

— *Proverbs 31:14*

*She girds her loins with strength, and
strengthens her arms. She perceives that her
merchandise is good; her candle goes not out by
night.*

— *Proverbs 31:17-18*

*She lays her hands to the spindle, and her hands
hold the distaff.*

— *Proverbs 31:19*

*She makes fine linen and sells it, and delivers
girdles unto the merchant.*

— *Proverbs 31:24*

The virtuous woman is focused not only on life, but also on truth. In focusing on truth, the virtuous woman has four experiences. First, she is like the merchants' ships for bringing food (truth) from afar. Second, she girds her loins with strength, and perceives that her merchandise is good. Third, she has the ability to make the truth applicable. She not only has a lot of material, but she lays her hands to the spindle and her hands to

the distaff. She turns the raw material into something applicable. And fourth, she is able to produce garments, and delivers girdles to the merchant. This shows that she is able to teach those who are able to teach others. These four points are very simple, and we will now look at their applications.

THE APPLICATIONS

The Virtuous Woman Focuses on Food Both for Herself and Her Household.

*She is like the merchants' ships; she brings her
food from afar.*

— *Proverbs 31:14*

When the Truth is Healthily Applied, it Must be Food for the Saints

*But He answered and said, It is written, 'Man
shall not live on bread alone, but on every word
that proceeds out through the mouth of God.'*

— *Matthew 4:4*

The virtuous woman focuses on food both for herself and her household. When the truth is healthily applied, it must be food for the saints. Remember how the Lord answered Satan during the temptation in the wilderness: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). In other words, the truth, which is the living word, must become food to us. If the truth is not food, then it is either theology or doctrine. What is truth? Truth is simply food. The Lord did not say, “You shall know the truth, and the truth will give you a lot of doctrines.” He did not say, “You shall know the truth so you can compete with others about who knows more.” Nor did He say, “You shall know the truth so the truth will become your entertainment.” No, the Lord said that the truth will set us free. The truth we know should not be doctrinal to us.

If we only talk about the truth but do not receive nourishment, then it is not really truth. The virtuous woman should be like the merchants' ship, bringing food from afar. That means she knows how to use the truth to feed herself and her household.

***To Have the Rich Supply of Truth the Virtuous Woman
Must be as Merchants' Ships, i.e. She Pays a Price
to Obtain Food From Nearby and Afar***

The virtuous woman travels afar to gain the food. This means that she pays a price for the truth. To have the rich supply of truth the virtuous woman must be as merchants' ships. She pays a price to obtain food from nearby and afar. Actually, it is even good to travel among the local churches. This will enhance your rich supply of truth. However, you shouldn't travel to the point where you don't care about your own local church. Sisters, you should not focus on the truth and then forget your household. It is good to have fellowship with many saints from many different localities. But it is for the sake of your own household, your local church. Usually we don't like to be as merchants' ships. We would rather just be in a library, enjoying lots of books. We like to read so that we can tell others what to do. But there is not much of a price involved. We should travel, spiritually speaking, which means we must pay the price to obtain food for the church life.

***She is Not Isolated, but Instead Her Fellowship is Extended
to Different Local Churches to Gain the Riches for the
Building Up of Her Own Local Church Life***

The virtuous woman is not isolated. Her fellowship is extended to different local churches to gain the riches for the building up of her own local church life. Sisters, it is good to read spiritual books, but that cannot replace living fellowship. How many local churches have you been to? It is very healthy to travel among different localities. This is not a matter of "touring;" it is for the sake of obtaining food. You should not be isolated. You are

living in the Body of Christ. Your fellowship should extend to all the local churches, so that you can gain the riches for the building up of your own local church life. Then the locality you are in will be so blessed.

She Girds Her Loins with Truth

She girds her loins with strength, and strengthens her arms.

— *Proverbs 31:17*

Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

— *Ephesians 6:14*

The virtuous woman is not only like merchants' ships, she girds her loins with truth. The verse says, "She girds her loins with strength, and strengthens her arms" (Prov. 31:17). And then in the New Testament Paul says, "Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14). Therefore to gird the loins is related to truth. The virtuous woman lets the truth regulate her living. There are three applications in this regard.

The Truth Becomes her Strength, Her Subjective Experience

How can the truth become your strength? By becoming your subjective experience. Probably the first piece of truth you obtained was that Jesus is your Savior. This truth is not doctrinal to you. You are saved, and you know that He is your Savior. Before you were saved people told you about Jesus as the Savior. You may have even talked about it yourself. But there was no subjectivity. It was only an objective and theoretical doctrine. But one day, praise the Lord, you repented and believed in Christ. The Lord came into your spirit, and you were saved! Then all of a sudden, the very salvation you experienced became

your strength. The truth that Jesus is the Savior made you strong. You could even go out and tell people, “You need to believe in Jesus! He’s the Savior!” This shows that when the truth is yours subjectively, it makes you strong.

The Truth Generates the Discerning Ability

She perceives that her merchandise is good; her candle does not go out by night.
— *Proverbs 31:18*

a. She knows the needs of the saints.

b. She knows what kind of food is best for the saints.

c. She becomes a faithful and prudent maid-servant who gives food at the proper time.

Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time?
—*Matthew 24:45*

In the virtuous woman, the truth generates a discerning ability. “She perceives that her merchandise is good; her candle goes not out by night” (v. 18). After she gains the food, she has the spiritual ability to perceive that it is good. Practically speaking, when the virtuous woman tries to care for the sisters, she considers what their needs are. Not every spiritual book is the same, and not every truth is always appropriate. We often give people something to read without considering their real need. We give out a book to a new one, and when they are done we give them another. After they have read several books, they still don’t really know anything. Their needs are not being met. But a virtuous woman is diligent. Like the merchants’ ships, she travels to gain the food from afar. Then she considers the church life. She considers everyone as an individual. She discerns and

perceives what the needs are. She spends the time to think about how she can give the best food to meet those particular needs. We should remember what the Lord said. “Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time?” (Matt. 24:45) The virtuous woman becomes a faithful and prudent maid-servant who gives food at the proper time. There is nothing wrong with any spiritual food, but at different times we need different food. We know this practically. We would never feed a baby food for an adult. But for some reason we don’t see this spiritually. We don’t realize that people’s needs are very different. Who is the woman of worth? She is a sister who has the ability to perceive what food is the best to meet a given need. She has the ability to ask, “What kind of spiritual food should be given to this person?” Sisters, many people need your spiritual food. When you learn to serve, you must learn to give the best food at the proper time. If in the church life all the sisters exercise this way, they would be very busy. There are so many needs to consider. There are so many people who need to be fed. If you can discern what kind of food is the best for the saints, then you will become a faithful, prudent maid-servant

**The Very Truth Becomes the Light for the Testimony.
By Her Holding Forth the Word of Life, the Church Life
Becomes a Luminary in the Midst of Darkness**

*That you may be blameless and guileless,
children of God without blemish in the midst of
a crooked and perverted generation, among
whom you shine as luminaries in the world,
holding forth the word of life...*

— *Philippians 2:15-16a*

The virtuous woman girds her loins with truth. Then the very truth becomes the light for the testimony. By her holding forth the word of life, the church life becomes a luminary in the midst of darkness. Do you know why many churches are not luminaries? Do you know why some churches become filled

with all kinds of unpleasant things, and have very little of the Lord's testimony? It is because they are short of truth. It is not enough to say, "We have truth. We even have the highest truth!" If the church really has the truth, it will be a luminary shining on this earth. The church life will be prevailing and shining. People who walk into the church life will be convicted by all. And people will receive the Lord because they know the Lord is really among the saints. But we are often lacking this kind of testimony. Why? Because we are short of truth. For the truth to become the light for the testimony, we need to pay a price. We need to be like the merchants' ships, paying the price to get the riches of truth. Then these riches must become food to us - not doctrines, not teachings, not theology, but the real food of life. Then we must learn how to feed the saints with all our riches. In this way the church will become a living testimony.

She Has the Ability to Make the Truth Applicable

*She lays her hands to the spindle, and her hands
hold the distaff.*

—*Proverbs 31:19*

The virtuous woman has the ability to make the truth applicable. "She lays her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff" (Prov. 31: 19). No matter how much material you have, you need to work on it to make it applicable. It is not enough to have a warehouse filled with cotton. Someone needs to labor on the cotton to turn it into clothing. Then the cotton becomes something applicable. In the church life we have a lot of sisters who keep on holding onto bundles of cotton, showing people, "Look how rich we are. The Lord has really blessed us." But where are the clothes? In other words, why hasn't the truth become something applicable. The riches need our diligence. We need to give ourselves to labor in the truth, so that the riches become something applicable. We should tell the Lord, "Lord, I worship You. You have given us all these riches. These riches are like the best cotton. I want to labor on the truth and make it

applicable. I want to work on the ‘material’ so that the church life can be blessed.”

***The Truth She Receives Becomes
the Raw Materials for Her Labor***

***Out of Her Labor Materials are
Produced for the Saints’ Needs***

Sisters, even these very messages should be considered as raw materials for your labor. Develop these materials and make them useful. It would be very good to decide, “I’m going to meet with five sisters. These messages will be my land, my field on which I can work. I will produce materials for the sake of these dear sisters.” You should be burdened to find some sisters and be together with them. Work on these materials until they become part of you. Be diligent to labor together until materials are produced for the saints’ needs. Come to the material, enjoy it, pray-read it, and digest it. Let it become yours. Then you can also share in the church meetings what you have enjoyed, and how you sisters are laboring. Perhaps you can read this book in a home meeting. Lay your hands on the spindle with a group of sisters. Consider this book, or other books like it, as the raw materials, and develop the truth to make it applicable. Then when you speak about these things, whether among yourselves or in the church meetings, they will not be doctrinal to you. The truth will become your experience, and you will be able to meet the needs of many saints. Then you will become such a blessing to the church life.

**She is Able to Produce Garments—the Truth She Provides
Becomes the Living of the Saints.**

*She makes fine linen and sells it, and delivers
girdles unto the merchant.
— Proverbs 31:24*

The virtuous woman is able to produce garments - the truth she provides becomes the living of the saints. “She makes fine linen and sells it, and delivers girdles unto the merchant. (v. 24) We said earlier that fine linen should not just be something outward. It is possible to be covered with fine linen, but it is not yet your constitution. To the virtuous woman the fine linen is like alabaster. But when she sells the truth to others, it is still fine linen. In other words, she can provide the truth to others, but it will still take time for the truth to become their constitution. Again, the truth should not merely be something we talk about. It must become our constitution, which requires the paying of a price.

**She Delivers Girdles to the Merchant—She is Able to
Commit the Truth to Those Who are Able to Teach Others**

*And the things which you have heard from me
through many witnesses, these commit to faithful
men, who will be competent to teach others also.
— 2 Timothy 2:2*

The virtuous woman delivers girdles to the merchant—she is able to commit the truth to those who are able to teach others. Often when you care for other saints, you eventually discover a problem. The problem is that everyone you feed only ends up eating for themselves. They don’t learn how to feed other saints. This can be very frustrating. The saints that you serve should also be able to feed others. It is not normal for someone to remain as an infant, only caring for their own appetite. The virtuous woman helps the saints do what she does. She is able to commit the truth to saints who are able to teach and feed others.

The top reward when you faithfully serve comes when those who receive your teaching become teachers too. They don't just feed off your teaching and say, "Thank you." They learn to feed the saints as you have fed them.

Too often we merely listen to the truth. We receive and enjoy it, and appreciate all the riches. But actually we are cheating ourselves. We haven't paid the price to make it ours, and we haven't labored on the truth so that we can feed others. But the virtuous woman is different. The virtuous woman pays the price to gain the truth. She considers the needs of the saints before she gives it to them. She labors on the raw materials until something applicable is produced. Eventually through her labor many sisters get raised up who are able to teach others also.

We should all tell the Lord, "Lord, we want to be such sisters. We want to grow in life, and we want to be equipped with truth. We want to pay the price to bring the food from afar. We want the truth to become our subjective experience. We want to feed the saints with the truth we enjoy. And we want to raise up more sisters who, because of our help, can learn to teach others also. Lord, may You make us such a blessing to the church life."

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