

The Great Need of Practice

Fellowship from Minoru Chen on June 20, 2021

Practice

Today, if there would be one word that I have in my heart, then that is simply this word *practice*. This word *practice* is clearly in the Bible, and I'm specifically referring to the New Testament. Even more specifically than that, I refer to the apostle Paul's writings where in various places he emphasizes and uses the word *practice*. In many other places this would be the case with the other writers as well. The word *practice* is not used, but it surely concerns the practice either of the Christian life or the practice of the church life. So, what comes to mind is this outstanding verse of Paul in the book of Philippians, chapter four, where he enumerated the virtues and the excellent characteristics in the Christian living. After that, he talked about these *things*. You know, Paul is quite a *things* man. He liked to use this word *things* [as in Eph 4:15] "...We may grow up into Him in all things..."

In Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, what things are true, what things are dignified, what things are righteous, what things are pure, what things are lovely, what things are well spoken of, if there is any virtue and if any praise, take account of these things."

Philippians is very much a *things* book. Paul said in Phil. 3:8 "...I count all things as refuse that I may gain Christ," and he charges the Philippians multiple times to "think the same thing." So here he said take account of these things. "Take account" means you ponder, you reflect, you consider, and you think about these things. Then in verse nine, he said this, "The things which you have also learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things..." (Phil. 4:9).

There are four things: 1) the things that you have learned, 2) the things that you have received (most likely Paul's teachings), 3) the things that you have heard (Paul spoke to them live), and 4) the things that you have seen, that means Paul's pattern or Paul's life as an example.

Practice These Things

Now this is the important point: *practice these things*. Not only consider or think about these things, but in fact, practice these things. Not only should those Philippian believers consider the things mentioned in the previous portion, especially in verse eight, but they should also practice the things they have learned, received, heard, and seen in the apostle. We can conclude quite safely that all these virtues that Paul described were surely his virtues that characterize Paul's living. He was bold to say that not only are these the things that I taught you and that I spoke to you, but these are things that you have learned or rather you have seen in me. I live this way, so practice these things. Take me as a pattern and take my teaching and follow my teaching. He said *practice these things*. Don't just "Amen" my teaching, don't just nod your head, don't just appreciate, or agree with these things, but *practice* them. There's another level.

After we receive a word or a message or something, we should surely think about them, pray over them, and take it to the Lord, but that is not adequate. According to Paul, that is just the first thing you should do. Back in the former days in Elden Hall in Los Angeles, Brother Lee spoke quite a bit when he was in town. You know, he gave messages sometimes in the springtime in what he called "the informal training" three times a week on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. On Tuesday, the church would suspend the prayer meeting of the church for a period of 9-10 weeks, however long, and dedicate that one extra evening for Brother Lee's training. I will tell you in those days, I made it a thing for me, that after every message, I would go home and do nothing but walk around the swimming pool in my apartment and just ponder, just pray, just reconsider and rehearse the things that I had just freshly heard maybe just an hour prior, and just be before the

Lord. I can personally testify to you, brothers and sisters, what a difference that makes. It's one thing to think about it the next day or the next week. But it is another thing that while it is so fresh and just out of the oven, at that moment, you take that to the Lord. There's something particular about doing that, and through all those years it became a habit of mine. You know, many times I heard a message given by Brother Lee or others, and I would go home in my car. It's a 30-minute drive. What do you do there? The best thing I would like to tell you is not just to talk, and then you forget the message and then you forget everything. The best thing is to right away use that time to pray and think about what you just heard. Go back to the word that you have just received. There's got to be something that has enlightened you and there's got to be something that has just inspired you. There's something that has lay hold of you, so you don't wait. You just take that time right away to bring those things back to the Lord. That kind of fresh receiving of the word is special. I hope that you would all practice that or do that.

But here Paul's word is not just to do that. Paul's word was to now go and *do* these things. These teachings he gave, he desired the saints to go and *practice* them. Now put these things into action. Now go and *do* this, rather than just hear the words, receive them, and even believe them. Now you need to go and do them. I tried to do that as well. I like to take what I receive as a help to immediately try my best to experience it and to practice those things. Now, of course, a lot that is spoken in a message is beyond me. It's very high, it's very deep, and it's beyond my stage in life to really experience those things, so I cannot experience everything to its depths according to the message. But it does not mean I cannot experience anything. At least I can begin my journey in the experience of something. At least I can start.

Truths Becoming Our Reality

In the Memorial Day conference, I gave the message on "The Recovery of the Subjective Truths of the Gospel of John." The emphasis of that message is that the truth is not just for our understanding or for our

knowledge, and it's not even just for revelation and vision. It must start there, but it cannot stay there. What truth we have in the recovery! It is the highest, the deepest, the brightest, everything, but if you and I don't bring these wonderful truths into our practice, there would be the time when they will just remain in us as mere revelation. True revelation, but just revelation or even worse, just doctrinal knowledge. The best doctrine, but just doctrine and knowledge, and that's it. You receive light and understanding, but that is still just the knowledge of that truth in an intellectual and outward way. The truth that God gives to us through His holy Word and by the guidance of the Spirit of reality is not just doctrinal knowledge given to us, but it is to be experienced. We need to walk in these truths as the apostle John said in his second and third epistles. Until we experience and walk in the truth that we have received, this truth is still not our reality. It's truth that we would stand for, that we would fight for, and that we will be absolute for. No problem. But it is still not possessed by you and me as reality. In other words, these things are still not fully ours. You can receive and understand wonderfully the three stages of sanctification in the New Testament. Wonderful! I don't think there's anyone that has seen these three stages except for Brother Lee, who gave these things to us. You got it and you understand it, but it is not yours. You were inspired and you even saw a kind of revelation, but the truth of the three stages of sanctification are not just so that we can talk about it or give a message to some other people about it, but that we would *experience* these three stages. Then this teaching or this truth, this word of the truth, now has become the reality of your being.

Paul's Prayers in Ephesians

Paul prayed two prayers accordingly in chapter one and chapter three of Ephesians. We all know the two famous Pauline prayers. The first one in Ephesians 1:17, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him."

The second prayer in Ephesians 3:16-17, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith...”

In chapter one the prayer was for the spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may know this all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ in God's economy from eternity to eternity. For that, Paul bowed his knees to the Father to pray that we would have that wisdom and spirit of revelation, that our eyes would be open, and that our understanding would be open to see that. But that is chapter one. The second prayer in chapter three he bowed his knees to the Father that we would be strengthened into our inner man through the Spirit, according to the riches of His glory, by His power so that Christ can make His home in our hearts. The very Christ that you might have seen in chapter one now must make home in your heart. Now that's entirely a matter of experience. What you see now must make home in you. That person, that wonderful Christ of God whom you have seen who is everything, needs to be *your* everything. He needs to be your and my experience, making home in our hearts. Otherwise, God still has no way to fulfill His purpose. So, I want to emphasize this afternoon the utter importance, the absolute importance of *practice*. To practice what we have heard and what we have received.

Christian Life is a Matter of Practice

Now a couple more things. Number one, we have to realize that a believer's life, or we can say the Christian life, is a matter of practice, because none of us is born a Christian. In fact, many of us didn't become Christians until later. And really, we don't know how to be a Christian; we don't know how a Christian should behave, how a Christian should live, or how a Christian should do things. We don't know. It's in the Bible, but we really don't know. And so for a worldly, fallen sinner to be saved and to receive Christ into him, to receive the divine life into him, that's wonderful. You don't need to practice that. I don't think too many people practice getting saved, they just get

saved. But after that, the Christian walk, the Christian journey is a practice. You may say, "No, Christ lives in me, and life is a matter of life, it's spontaneous, automatic, and instinctive." While I agree with you that the organic nature of life, of something living, is spontaneous and automatic. But you cannot just say that because life is spontaneous and automatic you don't need to practice anything, you don't need to do anything.

When a little child is born, he has a human life, he has everything he needs to be a man, to be a person. Are you going to let him just be a human being spontaneously? Will you just give him some food and let him spontaneously become a proper human being? That's a joke, isn't it? That will not happen. From the time this little child starts growing up he begins to practice how to live the life of a human being. Both patterns and instructions become important, and that's the job of a good set of parents. I recently read somewhere, and I don't know whether it's true or not, that how a child will be as an adult depends on the first six years of his life. The first six years. That jolted me a little bit and caused me to think. They're making the point that whether it's six years or eight years, that if this little child is not led and instructed and taught how to be, you better believe it, whether six years or sixteen years, nothing works. The child will grow up wild, living, spontaneous, instinctive, but I don't think you can be assured at all, that this one will be properly human, functionally human, or productive. It won't happen. We know it won't happen. Even for a child to grow up to be a bad person, the child needs practice. He or she practices and practices and eventually becomes a bad person, a criminal.

The Christian life, brothers and sisters, is a matter of practice. Life is spontaneous, you cannot force life to do something or mechanically make life do something that it doesn't do. Life is spontaneous, it will do what it will do. For example, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus in Romans eight, that law is the Triune God actually in action and functioning in each one of us as an automatic spontaneous law.

There's no doubt about that. Only when that law is active and functioning, can it overcome the other law, the law of sin and of death, no doubt about that. You cannot overcome, I cannot overcome, only the law of the Spirit of life can free us from this other law of sin and of death. But do you think that if I just sit there, never contact the Lord, never pray, never in the word, and never exercise my spirit, that the law will spontaneously free me? Do you really believe that will happen? I don't think so. I think that's naive thinking. According to the same chapter, I need to set my mind on the spirit. Right? I need to walk according to the Spirit, I need to be led by the Spirit. That's all in Romans eight. I need to put to death the practices of the body, so on and so forth. All these things are things I practice as a Christian, and when I practice these things, that law kicks in, that law works, that law frees me. Absolutely every time I practice these things, spontaneously, without doing anything, that law frees me. We do need to do one thing, which is to fulfill certain conditions so that the law of the Spirit of life can operate. That fulfilling of the conditions is the principle of practice. In other words, to experience the law of the Spirit of life you need to practice certain things like turning to the spirit, setting the mind on the spirit, walking according to Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and so on.

The Practice of the Church Life

Today there are Christians who don't see this, they think everything is spontaneous, that life will just do its job and we don't need to do anything. That is wrong, there is no such thing. Even when we say we want Christ to grow in us, we still need to practice. Yes, that life will grow spontaneously because it's life, God's life in us will grow, but we still need to practice. In Ephesians 4 speaks of "holding to truth in love, that we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." If you don't hold the Head, what growth will there be? There'll be no growth. Dear saints, practice is our cooperation with the life of God so that life can do its work in a spontaneous way. The church life is the same. You know, we have a book called *The Life and Way for the Practice of the Church Life*. In fact, we have a lot of books with the

term *the practice*. The church life that we are all in is a practice. The church life is not a doctrine or a theory. The church life is not just a vision or revelation. The church life is a corporate, collective practice of the Body, or the Body life in a locality. It's a practice of going to the meetings, praying, loving one another, even remembering the Lord on the Lord's Day. Fulfilling the greatest commandment, a new commandment of the Lord in the New Testament, is a practice. Our prophesying is also a practice. Our preaching the gospel, isn't that a practice? Our shepherding people, isn't that a practice? Our serving in the church, isn't that a practice? We have to do those things in order to have a church life. If there is no practice, I would say, there is no church, if a weak practice, a weak church, if a strong practice, a strong church. This is the same as the individual Christian life. Our shortage today, brothers and sisters, in our church life, is the vital practice of the church. Let me put it this way, we are not short of the truth. We are not short of revelation in the Lord's recovery. I will say there are only two things we are short of: number one, we are short in the experience of those truths, and number two, we are short in the practice of those truths. The experience is inward, whereas what I call the practice is outward. But do not underestimate the importance of the outward practice.

A couple of weeks ago I gave you those twelve points that I wrote down, right? I told you that they are not the Bible, don't take them as a legal document. These are just some very simple, straightforward, workable, doable things to practice, both individually, by yourself, and corporately with two or three. These things in themselves are not life, life is the Triune God within us, life is the Spirit within us. Without the Spirit, without that life, all these are meaningless practices. But, brothers and sisters, if we don't do certain things, if we don't cooperate with the Lord, if we don't exercise, God cannot do much of anything. Life even cannot do much. The individual saints who grow the quickest are those who cooperate with the Lord the most. It's that simple. They give the Lord the most ground, their consecration is the most absolute, they turn their being over to the Lord on the altar.

Then the Lord has a free way to work in them, and so they grow quickly. Those who do not grow quickly are those who have reservations, who take back their consecration, who waver, who would not give the Lord the room, who are slow to say amen to the Lord. These ones also grow, but their growth is slow, or even stunted. There's no magic here, it is a principle, a life principle.

The apostle John also used this word *practice* as well, especially in his epistles he talks about practicing sin, or practicing righteousness. There the word practice means not just doing something once in a while, or doing something intermittently, or doing something periodically, that is not practice. There the meaning of practice is something that you have done so much that it has become a habit, it has become habitual to you. You don't think, you just do it. That's the meaning of practice. In this sense practice has two meanings and they are interrelated.

Practicing Repeatedly

Number one, practice as Paul said, "practice these things," he meant to apply what you have heard, to carry out, to put into action what you have learned. Do these things regularly, repeatedly, until you're good at it, until you're proficient at it, if you will. An athlete, a gymnast, needs to practice and practice doing the same moves until he or she becomes proficient, until he or she can do it without thinking, until he or she can do it in their dreams. Because of repeated practice the muscles are ingrained with the memory of movement, it becomes second nature to them because of so much-repeated practice. When you see a good gymnast perform a routine, you may say, "Whoa, I can't do that." Well, of course, you cannot do that because you've never done it. And you have not done it a million times like this gymnast. You only see her performing for two minutes on a beam, you don't know how many hours or years she spent perfecting that one- or two-minute routine. Practice also means "do it." And you don't do it once in a while, you don't do it when you're inspired, you don't do it when you like to do it. You do it until it becomes second

nature, until it becomes part of you. This is the first meaning of practice.

Becoming Your Living

The other meaning of practice is that once you are there, once you have practiced and practiced, this practice will no longer be something foreign to you, in fact it will become customary, habitual. As I said, you won't need to even think about it. By the time you get there you can use another word as a substitute for practice, *living*. It is no longer a kind of, "let me think about it. How do I practice this?" It has become a living. Sometimes I look at these fantastic world-renowned pianists, these classical pianists. I'm just mesmerized when I see them. They can play a Bach or Schumann concert for thirty minutes with a whole symphony in front of hundreds or thousands of people. They are just one with that piano and that music. By then, that concert, that piano, that music is no longer a practice to this pianist. It is his or her living. He or she is living, breathing that piano, that music score, or that concert. He or she doesn't think in terms of notes and bars, or tempo, it is just in his or her muscles, head, bloodstream. By then it's his or her living. Dear ones, this is the other meaning of practice, practice in the meaning of living.

The Need to be Vitaly Living

Brothers and sisters, we know that the most important need and burden today with GTCA, with migration, and even in our present-day church life is that all the saints, as many saints as possible, would become vitally living. To be vitally living means not only that you are alive, but that you also must be active. A sign of life is activity. If you are just laying down in bed, you may still be living, because you still have a pulse, but in no way are you vital by just being living. A vital person is a person who is living and full of activity. A Christian, who is truly vital and filled with the life of God and with the Spirit, is someone who is alive and also filled with activities. This livingness and vitality are needed so that we can serve the Lord, not only in a general way, but that we can also gain an increase for the Lord. Our burden is to

bear fruit as branches in the vine for the glory and multiplication of that vine. Our burden is to bear spiritual children for God's household and family in order to build up the Body of Christ. To build up the Body of Christ, we must gain new materials from the world, from humanity, from among sinners and seekers. These new ones would allow the church to be built up, to grow, and to increase. This, in a simple word, is our present burden and we have spoken a lot about this matter. Brothers and sisters, to do this is not a complex or complicated matter. It is a matter of life and I would also like to say it is mostly a matter of practice. This is a matter of doing *something* to gain this increase.

Confession

I previously talked about the personal revival, where each one of us starts with confession. Confession is a “doing,” it is a practice. Confession before the Lord allows us to be cleansed in our conscience and removes any barriers or insulation between us and the Lord. Confession gives us a clear sky and a free fellowship with the Lord. Isn't this wonderful thing? If we confess spontaneously, He will forgive, but we need to practice confession. We need to practice confession every day, in everything, whenever our conscience may protest, whenever we are judged by the Lord in our hearts, whenever we are exposed of certain things, we must confess. Brothers, this is a daily practice. Confession must become a living to us.

Consecration

Next, we have consecration. The matter of consecration is also a practice, a very deliberate practice. Remember, Paul said, I judge because the Lord died and was resurrected on our behalf, I make this judgment, that henceforth, we will no longer live to ourselves but live to Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Paul made a very conscious decision to live to the Lord, to consecrate his whole being and whole life to the Lord. In the Old Testament picture, this type of consecration is seen in the priests through the burnt offerings to God. The burnt offerings were required daily, not once every ten years. Consecration is not

something we only give while at some retreat or something, but we must have a daily consecration. We must live a life of consecration daily. Brother Lee said it's good to practice consecrating to the Lord every hour, at the top of the hour, to re-consecrate yourself again. This may seem very tiresome, to set your clock to ring once an hour to remind you to consecrate again and again, but if you live and practice this, over time, this becomes your life. You can live a life where you are always consecrating yourself.

Prayer

And then I have another word of practice, that is prayer. We need to pray to the Lord to be revived. There's no bigger practice than prayer in the Christian life. Prayer does not happen spontaneously. You will not suddenly become this prayer warrior just from sitting there. It does not happen that way. Prayer comes through practice, through daily prayer, even several times a day. Daniel prayed three times a day, facing Jerusalem. Prayer for him was not a practice, it was just his living. We just need to practice to pray. To pray, I don't mean you need to kneel down before the Lord. I'm talking about when you're walking or in the car. You pray just by conversing with the Lord, having this conversation with the Lord, and you just pray to the Lord. These days, the Lord seems to want to bring me into more of this moment-by-moment prayer. I realize there are many moments that I have wasted, when I'm basically not doing anything, and my mind is blank. I could be praying so much more if I would redeem these moments to pray. But nevertheless, by the Lord's mercy, He is reminding me and so I find the more I do this, the more I need to do this. I almost feel like every moment if I'm not praying to be one with the Lord, I cannot go on and I need the Lord in every matter, in every decision. The whole principle of life is dependence on the Lord. So brothers and sisters, to pray is like this. If we practice three times a day to pray, in time, this will become our living. That's the Christian life.

Resolution

The next word to focus on is resolution or in other words, a decision.

You need to make a decision and tell the Lord, "Lord, I'm here for Your increase. I am here on the earth to bear fruit. I'm here to beget spiritual children. Lord, I expect that you will give me a child, I expect that I will gain some remaining fruit. Even Lord, I expect that you will give this to me this year, or in two years." You may say that this prayer to the Lord is so manufactured, that it is not spontaneous. You may say, "I don't care about this. I just care for life. When life gives me fruit, I'll have fruit or when life doesn't give me a fruit, I have no fruit." But, I'd like to say a strong word about this. That is the wrong concept to have. We want fruit for the Lord's sake and we must ask for fruit. According to His word, what we ask for in His name, the Father will give to us. That's what I read in John 15. So, we need to ask, we need to make a decision, we need to make a resolution.

Our Schedule

Not only do we need confession, consecration, prayer, and resolution, but as we've discussed these last couple of weeks, we also need to consider the way we spend our time. As an extension of making a resolution or decision to bear fruit, we need to be practical and put our resolution into action which we can do with the way we schedule our time. You might ask, what does life have to do with scheduling our time, and I would tell you, life matters a lot. The Spirit of Life, the law of the Spirit of Life, will work by itself. But if you and I are not practical in scheduling our daily life for the Lord's interest, our life will become unregulated, and we cannot grow. We need to schedule our daily life to take care of the Lord's need. We need to set aside time to pray for people, to contact people, to visit people, to help people to be saved, to lead people to Christ, to shepherd people, to have appointments and to invite people to our homes for dinner. Having a schedule to do this will help us labor in a persistent, steadfast way rather than just for a couple of days or a couple of months. We could maintain our labor for a whole year, even if it seemingly does not have results, but we keep practicing and cooperating with the Lord according to a schedule. A schedule means you budget your energy and time, you sanctify and set apart a certain time in the week just for this. We set

aside time to eat and to do whatever things we need to do, humanly, then we do them to live and exist. But somehow in the spiritual realm, we don't quite think that way. We don't think we need to schedule time for spiritual matters, so our Christian life becomes unstructured and unscheduled. In the name of spontaneity and freedom, it becomes something entirely unregulated. But life, human and divine, grows by regulation. We need regulation to grow.

Dear brother and sisters, in your churches, we need saints who would mean business with the Lord. Those who would live and would practice these things in this way, month in, month out, year after year, faithfully, steadfastly, and perseveringly. If we have those saints, I do not believe that nothing will happen. On the contrary, I believe much will happen, maybe a revival would take place. We're not here stirring up a campaign. We're not here to start some kind of movement. Those things don't last. We have no trust in those things. We have trust rather, in the consecrated, sanctified, and regulated practice of all the dear saints. If we would give the Lord two or three hours every month for contacting people to gain the increase, that's just 45 minutes per week. So set aside 45 minutes at a minimum, at a certain, set time, just to contact people. Whether the contact is by calling on the phone or writing emails, going out to distribute BFA tracts, visiting your neighbor, inviting friends to your home, talking to your relatives who are not saved, contacting the students on the college campuses or new ones. There are so many options for contacting people and you just need to set aside a time every week to do this. You can tell the Lord and make a covenant with the Lord that this time is for Him. For example, John Wesley made a private, holy covenant with God. He made a vow, a covenant between God and him and he kept that covenant. You shouldn't think that someone so used by the Lord does everything in a spontaneous way. These ones budget their time and have principles they live to. Then they live this kind of life of service successfully. So dear ones, I hope you will do that.

Prayer Companions

Then, I would say you need to find a companion. We each need to make our own resolution and decision to bear fruit in a certain time, but we also according to Matthew 18, should carry this out in the way of the Body's principle and that's by the twos and threes. "Two are better than one . . . and a three-fold cord is not easily broken." With your companion, you have the support and presence of the Lord. The strength and the authority that comes with being in twos or threes is just indisputable. So find yourself a likeminded companion, to be your coworker, to be your vital companion, then you can pray together two or three times a week, fellowship together, and bear one another's burdens, including the burden for these young ones, new ones, these gospel candidates. There are many stories of how, eventually, this kind of prayer worked to turn someone that seemed hopeless outwardly, and these ones were turned because of a long period of prayer. We need to do it. We need to practice these things. My burden this afternoon is to say to you all that you should practice to have two or three under your care at all times. You don't need to care for them daily, but concerning these two or three, you can have a good conscience to say that they are under your care.

Semi-Annual

At semi-annual this year, the focus will be on Joshua, Judges and Ruth. I hope you will all sign up and not miss this wonderful speaking about possessing the good land, which is possessing Christ for Christ. And also this will be about gaining the right people for the bringing forth of Christ, people like Rahab and Ruth, who were Gentiles, Canaanite people, even considered to be "bad ones." But the Lord gained these ones and they become grandmothers of the Lord Jesus. Isn't that something? There was also another woman that was one of the Israelites, Deborah, a female judge. The people went to her to seek her judgment. Brother Lee made a very good point, that even as a judge, Deborah fully knew how to submit herself and to stay under Barak. The Lord used her in that time, she knew how to submit herself under the male authority to function in a proper way and was blessed

by the Lord. That famous song, in Judges 5, talks about how Israel had great searchings of heart and great resolutions of heart. All these topics will be covered at the semi-annual. I'm happy that the word resolution is there. These are days when we all need to make a new resolution and a great one at that. No matter where we came from or how many years we have been in the church life, let us all now make a new and a great resolution of heart. We are today's Israel. We're here to do things for Jehovah, to defeat his enemy, to possess the land, and to gain the people. I hope this speaking does not come across as any kind of chiding or anything like that. I have absolutely no such feeling. I just am so burdened and I'm quite clear that today, this is our need. All the truths are with us. Today, we simply need to apply and practice so that these things can become our experience and our activity, our living, and our actions, so that the Lord can really move. Amen.