

A PROPER SISTER IN THE CHURCH LIFE (1)

Witness Lee



LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

A PROPER SISTER IN THE CHURCH LIFE (1)

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CONTENTS

Section I: The Sisters' Position In God's Economy

1. The “Female” Life Being A Life Useful To God
2. Woman Being For The Bringing Forth Of Christ
3. Eve—Keeping Her Position And Taking Her Husband As The Head
4. Deborah—Keeping The Proper Order And Fighting For God To Gain Man
5. Eve—Not Submitting To Authority
6. Miriam—Slandering God's Deputy Authority

Section II: Examples & Signs For Sisters' Following The Lord

7. Rebekah—Pure, Absolute, And Submissive
8. Ruth—Choosing To Accomplish God's Economy As Her Goal
9. Mary—Loving The Lord And Consecrating To The Lord Absolutely
10. Lot's Wife—Forsaken Because Of Her Love For The World
11. Jezebel—Confusing God's Word

Section III: Sisters' Virtues

12. Sarah—A Broad Person
13. Zipporah—The Female Helper Of A Called One
14. Rahab—Longing To Be United With Christ
15. Killing The Self & Not Losing The Temper

Section IV: Sisters' Living

16. Pursuing Christ For Satisfaction
17. Fellowshiping In The Inner Chambers Of Christ

18. The Exercise Of Speaking
19. Idle Words Leaking Life
20. The Opinion Of Martha Hindering Man From Enjoying The Lord's Resurrection Life
21. Mary's Full Knowledge And Experience Of God Producing Excellent Praises And Prophecy
22. The Adorning Of Sister
23. The Matter Of Eating
24. The Principle Of Christians' Management Of Finances

Section V: Sisters' Marriage And Family

25. Concerning Marriage
26. Basic Principles Of Marriage
27. Obedience And Submission
28. Adjusting The Differences Between Husbands And Wives
29. Inheriting The Grace Of Life With Husbands
30. The Exercise In Family Life
31. How To Be Parents In The Lord

Section VI: Sisters' Serving

32. The Service Of Sisters The Five Daughters Of Zelophehad—Caring For God's Interest
33. Hannah—Staying In The Line Of Life And Cooperating With God's Move
34. Being One In Coordination—Thinking The Same Thing
35. The Serving Sisters In The Church Life
36. The Loving Mothers In The Church Life

SECTION I:
THE SISTERS' POSITION
IN GOD'S ECONOMY

CHAPTER ONE

THE “FEMALE” LIFE

BEING A LIFE USEFUL TO GOD

The book of Exodus reveals the kind of people God can use in His economy for the fulfillment of His purpose. God's intention is to have a people to build Him a dwelling place on earth. Thus, at the end of Exodus the tabernacle is erected to be God's dwelling place. Furthermore, for the fulfillment of God's purpose, there is also the need for an army to fight for God's interests on earth. The children of Israel came out of Egypt as a collective people, and right away they were formed into an army. From the time of their redemption until the conquest of the good land, they had to subdue the enemies, especially the enemies who had occupied and fully possessed the land promised to them. If the children of Israel were to enjoy the good land and to fulfill God's purpose of building a temple as God's testimony on earth, they had to fight to deliver the land from the usurping hand of the enemy. Therefore, to be useful to God is related to building up His dwelling place and to fighting for His interests on earth.

The life useful to God in these matters is the female life. According to the natural concept, however, it should be the male life that is useful to God. This is because the males are good fighters, whereas the females are regarded as weaker ones.

Not many readers of Exodus 1 and 2 have seen the underlying theme that links these chapters. Chapter one shows that the people of God were under slavery, and chapter two reveals how God prepared one to save His people out of bondage. The underlying theme is that God needs a certain kind of life both to preserve His people and to prepare a savior to deliver them from bondage. Both the preservation of the people and the preparation of the savior were accomplished only through the female life.

In the Bible the concept of a “male” is rich in meaning. It refers, of course, to a man, but it also indicates an independent life. Furthermore, it refers to Christ as the unique male in the universe. All married brothers need to realize that they are simply husbands in shadow and that the real husband is Christ. Because God is the unique husband, Isaiah 54:5 says, “Thy Maker is thine husband.” In the Old Testament God regarded His people as His

spouse (Hosea 2:19). No matter whether an Israelite was a male or a female, he or she was part of God's corporate wife.

In the Bible the term "husband" indicates headship, and it also indicates an independent life. When we speak of a male in the positive sense, we have in mind a husband who is the head and who has an independent life. Because God is the unique husband in the universe, only He is the head and only He has an independent life. It is blasphemous to say that God needs to depend on anyone or anything. It is also blasphemous to claim that we can be independent of Him.

As females, the married sisters should not usurp the headship, nor should they live in an independent way. Rather, they must live a life of dependence upon their husbands, who are but shadows of the Lord as the real husband. Although the married brothers are husbands in shadow with respect to their wives, in actuality they are females with respect to the Lord. Therefore, they should not usurp the headship of the Lord nor have an independent life. They also should be submissive and live a life of dependence.

I. GOD BEING THE HEAD OF CHRIST

God is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). It is not accurate to say that God is our head, for it is Christ who is the head of man.

II. CHRIST, UNDER THE HEADSHIP OF GOD, BEING THE HEAD OF EVERY MAN

First Corinthians 11:3 says, "The head of every man is Christ." In Himself Christ is not the head of every man; He is the head of all men under the headship of God.

III. MAN, UNDER THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST, BEING THE HEAD OF THE WOMAN

Just as the head of every man is Christ, so "the head of the woman is the man" (1 Cor. 11:3). Man, however, should not be the head of the woman in himself. He should be the head only as he himself is under the headship of Christ.

On the one hand, Christ is under the headship of God, and, on the other hand, He is the head over every man. In like manner, man, on the one hand,

should be under the headship of Christ, and, on the other hand, he should be the head of the woman. It is not an easy matter to be both under the headship and to be the head over others. But in the life of Christ we see an excellent example of how this is worked out. The four Gospels reveal that Christ was always under the headship of God. Nevertheless, simultaneously He was the head of all His disciples. Christ was never independent of the Father. In John 5:30 He said, "I can do nothing from Myself," and in John 5:19 He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, this also the Son does in like manner." The Son was always under the headship of God the Father. However, He also exercised the headship over others. For example, He dealt with Peter very strictly whenever Peter acted as if he were the head and lived an independent life. The Lord corrected Peter by causing him to realize the headship of Christ. Just as Christ was under the headship of God the Father, so Peter had to be under the headship of Christ. In this we see that God is the head of Christ and that Christ, under the headship of God, is the head of every man. Likewise, man, under the headship of Christ, is the head of the woman.

VI. MAN, TYPIFYING CHRIST, SIGNIFYING THE INDEPENDENT LIFE

As a picture of the relationship between God and man, man represents God, and woman represents man. In this sense man, typifying Christ, signifies the independent life. With respect to being under the headship of God, Christ has a dependent life. But with respect to being the head of every man, Christ has an independent life. This means that Christ is dependent on God, but independent of us. In relation to God, Christ's life is a dependent life, but in relation to us, His life is independent. Man typifies Christ as the One with an independent life. With respect to Christ, the married brothers have a dependent life, but with respect to their wives, they have an independent life.

V. WOMAN, TYPIFYING MAN, SIGNIFYING THE DEPENDENT LIFE

Just as man represents God, woman represents man in his relation to God. In this sense woman, typifying man, signifies the dependent life. With man there are two aspects, both dependence and independence. But with

woman there is only dependence. It is God, not man, who has not allowed the woman to have an independent life.

VI. MAN TO BE A REAL “FEMALE,” LIVING A LIFE DEPENDENT ON GOD

Man should not be a male, but a “female,” one who lives a life of dependence on God. Only such a “female” life is useful to God. In Exodus, a book of pictures, this female life is portrayed by the midwives in chapter one and by all the females in chapter two—Moses’ mother and sister, the female slave, Pharaoh’s daughter, and the daughters of the priest of Midian. All men should be such “females.”

VII. MAN’S INDEPENDENCE OF GOD BEING REBELLION

Man’s independence of God is rebellion. The moment we become independent, we become rebellious against God. Because the male life is independent and rebellious, God cannot use it for the accomplishment of His purpose.

VIII. WOMAN, LIVING AN INDEPENDENT LIFE, BECOMING A REAL “MALE”

If a woman lives an independent life, she becomes a real “male.” Today a great many women have become “males.” This is the main reason for the many separations and divorces.

IX. ONLY THE REAL “FEMALE” LIFE BEING USEFUL TO GOD

Whether we are sisters or brothers, we all need to be “females” and live by the only life that is useful to God. In order to be “females” we need to depend upon the Lord. The tree of life in Genesis 2 signifies dependence, and the tree of knowledge signifies independence. Life always makes us dependent, whereas knowledge always makes us independent. For example, before you teach a child something, he depends on you concerning that matter. But as soon as he learns that particular thing, he becomes proud and independent. Life, on the contrary, makes us dependent on God. God desires that we choose life instead of knowledge. This means that He wants us to choose dependence rather than independence.

To live an independent life means to live by the tree of knowledge, but to live a dependent life means to live by the tree of life. Living by the tree of life is actually living by the Lord Himself. The vine in John 15 is an excellent illustration of the dependent life. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." All the branches of the vine are dependent upon the vine. To abide in the vine is to be dependent upon the vine. Thus, as far as abiding is concerned, there can be no independence.

Not only do the worldly people live an independent life, but many Christians also live a life that is independent of God. For this reason, the vast majority of Christians have become useless to God. Therefore, we must learn that, whether we are males or females, we must live a life in constant dependence on God. No matter how long we have been with the Lord, we still must depend upon Him for life today. For example, we cannot graduate from eating, drinking, and breathing. How foolish for a person to say that because he has been breathing for seventy years he no longer needs to breathe! With life, there is no graduation. God's strategy is to put us in a position where we must depend upon Him. We need to pray, "Lord, apart from You, I can do nothing. I must abide in You and take You as my life. Daily I need to eat the tree of life. Lord, I want to live a 'female' life, a life that always depends on You." This is the kind of life God can use for the fulfillment of His purpose.

At the age of forty, Moses lived an independent "male" life. Acting independently of God, he exercised his natural strength to smite an Egyptian. Moses was truly an independent "male." However, during the forty years Moses was set aside, God taught him that He would not use his male life. It is not an easy matter to train a male to live a female life. Nevertheless, in the second forty years of his life, Moses learned to be a female. During his third forty years, from the age of eighty to the age of one hundred twenty, Moses lived the life of a female. Only in one instance, when he struck the rock the second time, was he independent of God (Num. 20:7-13). Because Moses acted as a male on that occasion, he offended the Lord and thus was denied the privilege of entering into the good land.

Readers of the Bible usually regard Moses as the leader of the children of Israel. Moses, however, did not have this concept about himself; he never assumed a position as the leader. When the children of Israel rebelled against him, he considered it rebellion against God, not against himself. Moses simply went to the Lord and presented the problems to Him. In

doing so, Moses honored the Lord as the head, as the unique male. This indicates that Moses was living a female life, a life of dependence on God.

The female life is seen not only in chapters one and two of Exodus, but also throughout the following chapters. We have pointed out that Moses was trained to live a female life. Moreover, all the warriors were living a female life of dependence on God. If you have not learned to be a female, you will not be able to fight for the kingdom of God. God uses only female warriors. This means that if you are living an independent male life, you are useless as far as spiritual warfare is concerned.

I wish to emphasize the point that to be a male is to be independent of God. For example, a husband may deal with his wife in a way that is independent of God, and a wife may deal with her husband in the same manner. This means that both the husband and wife may be “males” in the negative sense. But we should not be such “males,” those who are independent of God. We should be “females,” those who depend upon God and do nothing apart from Him. In all that we say or do we should depend on Him. If this is our situation, then we are true “females” living a dependent life.

The history of the church reveals that whenever there is such a “female” life, God is able to do something for His purpose. Take Martin Luther as an example. He was a man who learned to depend on God. No doubt, Luther was born with a strong will. Nevertheless, he learned to depend on the Lord. He did not live and act as a strong “male,” but as a dependent “female.”

The Apostle Paul also was such a “female.” His writings bear witness to this fact. As a “female,” Paul did not do anything in a way that was independent of the Lord. His work, his behavior, and his actions issued from a life of dependence on God.

(Life-study of Exodus, Msg. 4)

CHAPTER TWO

WOMAN BEING FOR THE BRINGING FORTH OF CHRIST

The record of the genealogy in Matthew 1 does not say “Joseph begot Jesus,” as mentioned of all the foregoing persons; it says, “Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus” (Matt. 1:16). Jesus was born of Mary, not of Joseph, since it was prophesied that Christ would be the seed of a woman and born of a virgin (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14). Christ could not have been born of Joseph, because Joseph was a man and a descendant of Jeconiah, of whose descendants none could inherit the throne of David (Jer. 22:28-30). If Christ had been born of Joseph, he would have been excluded from the throne of David. However, Mary was a virgin (Luke 1:27) and a descendant of David (Luke 1:31-32), the right person of whom Christ should be born. The marriage of Joseph with Mary brought him into relationship with Christ and united into one the two lines of Christ’s genealogy for the bringing forth of Christ.

I. BY GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

The birth of Christ was prepared and carried out by God’s sovereignty (1:18; Luke 1:26-27). By His sovereignty, God brought Joseph and Mary together in marriage to bring forth Christ to be the legal heir to the throne of David. Marriage is a mystery. It is not easy to bring two persons together, especially when it concerns the birth of Christ. It was not a simple matter to bring Joseph and Mary together. Look into the history here. According to the genealogy of Christ in Matthew, Joseph was a descendant of Zerubbabel, a returned captive. Zerubbabel, a leader of the tribe of Judah and a descendant of the royal family led the captives from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:2). Eventually, he also took the lead in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3:8; 5:2). Joseph was his descendant. If there had been no return of the captives, where would Joseph have been born? He would have been born in Babylon. The same would have been true for Mary, also a descendant of the returned captives. If the forefathers of Joseph and Mary had remained in Babylon and if both Mary and Joseph themselves had been born there, how

could Jesus have been born of Mary in Bethlehem? Now we can see God's sovereignty in bringing back the forefathers of Joseph and Mary.

By His sovereignty, God placed both Joseph and Mary in the same city, Nazareth (Luke 1:26; 2:4). If they had lived far away from each other, it would have been difficult for them to come together in marriage. Joseph and Mary not only were descendants of the returned captives, but also lived in the same little town. This allowed them to come together in marriage.

Furthermore, when we examine the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, we discover that Joseph was a descendant of the royal line, the line of Solomon (vv. 6-7), and Mary was a descendant of the common line, the line of Nathan (Luke 3:31). Although Joseph and Mary came together in marriage, Jesus was born of Mary, not of Joseph. Apparently, He was born of Joseph; actually, He was born of Mary (1:16). This was absolutely a matter of God's sovereignty.

The curse recorded in Jeremiah disqualified any descendant of Jeconiah from inheriting the throne of David (Jer. 22:28-30). If, in actuality, Jesus had been born of Joseph, He would have been disqualified from the throne of David. Because Joseph was still in the royal line, he was a royal descendant according to man's eyes. By the marriage of Mary, Jesus' mother, with Joseph, Jesus was apparently associated with this royal line. Again, we see God's sovereignty. God found a young woman, also the descendant of David, to bring forth Christ. Jesus was born of her and was actually the seed of David qualified to inherit the throne of David.

By this sovereign arrangement, Jesus was born an ordinary person and the heir of the royal throne. This is the reason He has two genealogies, one in Luke, telling us of His common status, and another in Matthew, telling us of His royal status. His common status came from Mary, and His royal status came from Joseph. Thus Jesus was born by God's sovereignty. None of us was born under this kind of God's sovereignty. None of us was born under this kind of sovereignty. Only Jesus was qualified to enjoy such a sovereign arrangement.

(Life-study of Matthew, Msg. 4)

II. THROUGH MARY'S SURRENDER

According to Luke 1:26-38, the birth of Christ was carried out through Mary's surrender. Here I would say a word to the young people. It was not easy for a young virgin like Mary to accept the commission to conceive a

child. If I had been she, I would have said, “Lord, if You would ask me to do anything other than this, I would do it. But You ask me to conceive a child! This is not humanly possible; it is neither moral nor ethical. I can’t do it!” For us to read this record is easy. However, suppose a young sister among us were to receive such a commission tonight. Could she accept it? This is not an insignificant matter. Mary might have said, “Gabriel, don’t you know that I am espoused to a man already? How can I conceive a child?” Who among us would accept such a commission? If an angel spoke such a word to you, could you accept it?

After listening to the word of the angel, Mary said, “Behold the slave of the Lord; may it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). This may appear simple, but the price was extremely high. To bring forth Christ Mary paid a very high price—the cost of her whole being. It is not easy to bring forth Christ; it is not cheap. If we would bring forth Christ, we must pay a price. Mary did.

Joseph reacted immediately, planning that he would put Mary away secretly (v. 19). Thus, Mary was in trouble. I assure you, whenever you accept the commission to bring forth Christ, you will find yourself in trouble. All the angels will understand you, but not one human being will understand. Do not expect anyone to be like the angel Gabriel. Everyone will misunderstand you. In fact, the person closest to you may misunderstand you the most. Nevertheless, in large measure, the birth of Christ was accomplished through Mary’s surrender.

The birth of Christ was a great fulfillment of prophecies in the Old Testament. The first prophecy in the Old Testament is Genesis 3:15. There are no prophecies in chapters one and two of Genesis, but in chapter three, after the fall of man, after the serpent had worked himself into man through the woman, God gave a promise. In giving this promise, God seemed to say, “Serpent, you came in through the woman. Now I shall deal with you by the seed of this woman.” Thus, the promise concerning the seed of the woman was the first prophecy in the Bible.

In 1:22 and 23 this promise is fulfilled by a virgin conceiving a child. This child came to be the seed of the woman. In Galatians 4:4 Paul says that Christ was born under the law and also was born of the woman. Christ came not only to fulfill the law, but also to fulfill the promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent.

From Genesis we proceed to Isaiah 7:14, where there is another prophecy concerning Christ. “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.” The

fulfillment of this promise brought God into man. Hallelujah, God became man!

(Life-study of Matthew, Msg. 5)

CHAPTER THREE

EVE—KEEPING HER POSITION

AND TAKING HER HUSBAND AS THE HEAD

Let's look into the inward cause of man's first fall. I am strong on this point. The inward cause of man's fall was the woman's assuming the headship (vv. 2-3, 6). Eve was ensnared by the serpent because she forgot her husband. The Devil was crafty, knowing that the woman was weaker than the man (1 Pet. 3:7), and he chose her as his target. Regardless of what the woman said to the serpent, as long as she stood there and spoke to him, she was wrong, for it indicated that she had assumed the headship. The safest way for her would have been not to talk to the evil one, but to turn to her husband and hide behind him. If Eve had done this, the subtle one would have been frustrated. Therefore, the basic cause of man's first fall was the assuming of the headship by the wife. Although she had a husband, she nonetheless stood on her own.

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WOMAN

The significance of the woman is that she represents man before God. In the life-study message on Romans 7 we pointed out that Isaiah 54:5 says, "For thy Maker is thine husband." God is the unique, universal man. Whether we are males or females we are all a part of His wife. Man's position is not the position of the husband; it is the position of a wife. God is our husband. The headship is with God, not with us, not even with the men. Before God, the position of the brothers is the same as that of the sisters. Both sisters and brothers are females in the eyes of God.

II. THE POSITION OF THE WOMAN

God is our Husband and our Head, and we must always keep ourselves under His covering. The woman must cover her head and never assume the headship (1 Cor. 11:3, 5, 14-15). Since God is our Head we should always turn to Him. By the Lord's mercy, I have learned of Him. If I had been Eve in the garden and the Devil had come to me, I would not even have looked at him. I would have turned to my husband and hidden myself behind him.

I would have let Adam be the head and let him exercise his headship. Then there would have been no problem.

III. THE FAILURE OF THE WOMAN

The failure of the woman consisted in being over the man and assuming the headship (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). This failure on Eve's part typifies man's assuming the headship and signifies his being over God and putting God aside. This same principle operates today. Whenever we act on our own, putting the Lord aside, we are defeated. If we try on our own to be victorious, that very effort is a defeat because it keeps us away from our husband, our Head. Never do anything by yourself. To try to do anything by yourself means that you are assuming the headship and forgetting your position as a wife. We should be wise and never take the position of the husband.

Eve in the garden was our representative. Nearly all of us on occasion have acted in the way she did. We have become Eve. Whatever situation occurred we faced it by ourselves. Although we might have prayed a great deal, when the problem presented itself we forgot our husband and acted as if we had none. Why do you not turn to your husband? Why do you always meet the temptations alone? As long as you confront situations by yourself you stay away from your husband. That was the basic cause of man's first fall. As a minister of the Word, I must learn the lesson of not speaking by myself. While I am speaking I must rely upon my husband. I must hide myself in Him and be one with Him. If I fail to do this, I will become another Eve and will be defeated.

Now we can see that we should not blame Satan too much. We all must blame ourselves because we have assumed the headship and have not respected our husband. We assumed the headship, forgetting that we are the wife. When mothers deal with their little children they may deal with them independently. They may say, "I know how to take care of children. I have been a mother for years. I know what to do and I know how to do it." If you adopt this attitude, you immediately become Eve. Although you may do a good job, in fact you are defeated. We must remember the principle of man's first fall: man renounced the wife's position and assumed the husband's position, making himself the head and the husband. Whether our efforts succeed or fail makes no difference. As long as we stay away from God and presume that we can act apart from Him, we have been defeated already. We must see this.

We may experience this even as we deal with our temper. To be defeated by our temper is a small thing. However, if we try by ourselves to overcome our temper, we commit a sin. The attempt itself is a great sin. Your trying to defeat your temper means that you are assuming the headship. You must learn to say, “Lord, I do not care whether or not I can defeat my temper. Lord, I rely upon You for this. It is not my responsibility to deal with my temper. Lord, I am not the husband. You are my husband. I simply rely upon You. I don’t assume that I have the headship. Lord, You are my Head. Lord, You take care of my temper.” If we all learn this lesson and maintain this stand before the Lord, our temper will disappear. The Devil will be defeated. We must learn this one, basic principle.

(Life-study of Genesis, Msg. 18)

CHAPTER FOUR

DEBORAH—KEEPING THE PROPER ORDER AND FIGHTING FOR GOD TO GAIN MAN

Prior to the history recorded in Judges 3:7—5:31, the people of Israel had never had a female leader. Then, suddenly, God raised up a female, Deborah, as a judge of Israel. Regarding this, we need to realize that in the Bible, whenever God does something which stands out as being extraordinary, it is very significant. It indicates, first, man's failure, and then, God's excellent act. At the time of Judges 4, all the men of Israel had failed, so God raised up a woman. That raising up of a female changed the entire condition of Israel.

In the Bible a proper female indicates one who is in submission to God, one who keeps God's ordination. This is the position that Israel should have taken before God, but the situation in Israel had become fully abnormal. The men had left their position before Jehovah. Hence, Israel violated God's ordination, leaving her position as God's wife and forsaking Him for hundreds of idols. This brought Israel into a miserable situation and condition.

According to God's creation, Deborah was a very capable person. By reading her song in chapter five, we can see that she was full of ability, capacity, insight, and foresight. But such an excellent person was very submissive. God made her the leader, yet she kept the proper order and took Barak as her covering (4:6-9). She realized that she needed a man to be her covering. Actually, Barak did nearly nothing, yet Deborah took him as her "head covering." When she took this kind of standing, the whole nation became different. In their miserable situation no one would take the lead to fight for Jehovah's interest, and no one would be willing to follow. But when this excellent, extraordinary woman took the lead to practice the female submission to the man, the entire country came into the proper order. Everyone returned to his or her proper position. Thus Deborah could say in her song, "Then a remnant of the nobles went down;/The people of Jehovah went down with me against the mighty" (5:13). All the leaders took the lead, and all the people followed; the army was formed. At first, only some of the people followed, but eventually they all followed. From this we

see that the entire country came into an excellent order, assuming the proper position before Jehovah.

Judges 5:15-16 speaks of “great resolutions in heart” and “great searchings of heart.” In Israel’s miserable situation, no one was searching his heart. But the people needed a great searching of their hearts, and they needed to make great resolutions in their hearts to rise up and follow the others to fight for God’s kingdom.

We may apply this to our practice of the vital groups today. For the vital groups we need much prayer with repentance. In our prayer spontaneously the searching of the heart comes to us. This issues in a resolve to live for the Lord and to fight for the Lord according to the present need in His recovery. In particular, we need to make a resolution before the Lord concerning gaining persons for His increase. This is “great resolutions in heart.”

Judges 3:12-13 says that Jehovah strengthened Israel’s enemies, but 4:6-16 reveals that Jehovah was fighting for Israel. This shows that God is a God of incarnation. God wants man to match Him so that He can move. If Israel had not fought, God would not have fought for them. However, because Israel did fight under Deborah in a proper order, God fought for them. The principle is the same with us today. If we do not go out to gain sinners, God will not go, but if we go, God also will go. However, this kind of going out needs a searching of our heart and a resolution in our heart. God will not work until we become active in this searching of our heart and making resolutions in our heart. This is the way to fight the battle; this is the way to preach the gospel; and this is the way to gain sinners to become members of Christ.

(Life-study of Judges, Msg. 4)

CHAPTER FIVE

EVE—NOT SUBMITTING TO AUTHORITY

Let us consider the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 and 3. After Adam was created, God gave him some instructions. He commanded Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We must realize that this was not merely a matter of eating or not eating the forbidden fruit. Rather, God put Adam under a kind of authority with a view that Adam would submit to it. God entrusted all creation to Adam's authority so that Adam would manage and be the authority over all the creation. At the same time, God put Adam under His own authority so that Adam would learn to submit to authority. Only those who submit to authority can themselves be authorities.

In the order of God's creation, He first created Adam and then Eve. God destined that Adam would be the authority and that Eve would be under Adam's authority. God set one to be the authority and the other to submit. In the old creation and in the new creation, the order of precedence is the basis of authority. Whoever is created first is the authority. Whoever is saved first is the authority. For this reason, wherever we go, our first thought should be to find those to whom the Lord wants us to submit. Wherever we are, we have to see authority, and we also have to submit to authority.

Man's fall came from not submitting to authority. Eve did not check with Adam; she made the decision. She saw that the fruit was good for food and pleasant to the eyes, so she took liberty and made the decision herself. Before she stretched forth her hand to pick the fruit, she first used her head to think and receive the temptation. Then she assumed the headship by stretching forth her hands. Hence, the taking of the fruit by Eve did not come from submission. Rather, it came from the decision of the self. Not only did she transgress God's commandment, she also disregarded Adam's authority. Rebellion against God's deputy authority is rebellion against God Himself. Adam listened to Eve's word and took of the fruit. This was worse; it was in disobedience to God's direct command. As a result, Adam also disregarded God's authority and was rebellious.

I. ALL WORK NEEDING TO BE DONE OUT OF SUBMISSION

While we live on this earth, our first question should not be whether or not we should do a certain thing. Rather, in doing a certain thing, we should ask to whom are we submitting. It is not a matter of doing or not doing. It is a matter of to whom we submit. Without submission there is no work and there is no service. When Adam took the fruit, the first question that should have been asked was whether or not this was in submission to God. All of the work of a Christian should come out of submission. Nothing is of our own initiative; everything is responsive. No act is active; everything is passive. In other words, everything should be initiated by God; nothing should be initiated by us.

Not only was Eve under the authority of God; she was also under the authority that God had set—Adam. Eve had to submit to a double command and a double authority. This is the same for us today. Eve only thought of the fruit being good for food. She did not know to whom she should submit in eating. From the very beginning, God wanted man to submit rather than to propose his own ideas. Eve's act, however, originated from her own idea, not from submission. She neither submitted to God's arrangement nor to God's authority. Instead, she proposed her own idea, transgressed against God, and became fallen. To fall is to act without submission. An act that has no submission behind it is rebellion.

The more submission a man has, the less acts there are with him. At the beginning of a man's pursuit after the Lord, there are many acts and little submission. As he progresses, the acts become fewer, until in the end only submission is left. When many encounter work, they like to take action. They do not like to be still. They do not care whether or not there is submission. For this reason, many works are done by the self, not through heeding and obedience.

II. RIGHT AND WRONG ARE IN GOD

Man should not do anything out of a knowledge of right and wrong. Rather, he should do all things out of obedience. The principle of the knowledge of good and evil is the principle of living by right and wrong. Before Adam and Eve took the fruit, their right and wrong were in God. If they did not live before God, they knew nothing; both their right and wrong were just God Himself. But after man received of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he found a source of discerning between right and wrong apart from God. As a consequence, after man's fall, there was no need for him to seek after God. He could get along by himself. He could isolate

himself from God and judge between right and wrong. This is the fall. The work of redemption enables us to turn back to God for our right and wrong.

III. CHRISTIANS NEEDING TO SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY

All authority is from God because everything is ordered by God. If we trace any authority upward, we eventually will come to God. God is above all authorities, and every authority is under Him. Once we touch God's authority, we touch God Himself. Basically, God's work is not carried out by power, but by authority. He upholds everything by the word, which is of His authority. Creation came about through the word of His authority. His word is His authority. We do not know how God's authority works. But we know that God accomplishes everything through His authority.

The centurion whose servant was sick knew that there was an authority above him to which he should submit, inasmuch as there were those under him who submitted to him. Therefore, he only needed the Lord to say one word, and he believed that the matter would then be taken care of. He knew that all authority was in the Lord's hand; he believed in the Lord's authority. This is why the Lord said that He had found no faith greater than this. Meeting God's authority is the same as meeting God. Today God appoints authorities everywhere in the universe. All the orbits in the universe are established by Him; all the ways in the world are set up by Him. Hence, they are all under His authority. Offending God's authority is the same as offending God Himself. A Christian should submit to authority.

IV. THE FIRST LESSON FOR A WORKER BEING TO SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY

Our position is to be under others' authority on the one hand, while having others under our authority on the other hand. Other than God Himself, everyone, including the Lord Jesus, has to submit to authority on earth. We should see authority everywhere. Both at home and in school there are authorities. When you see a policeman on the street, even though you may know that he is incapable and that his learning is not as high as yours, you have to consider him as God's appointed authority. When a few brothers are together, they should know how to line themselves up immediately. Everyone should know where he stands. A worker should know who is his authority. Some never realize who their authority is. They have never submitted to anyone. With us there should never be right or

wrong, good or evil. Wherever we go, we should first know who is the authority. If you know who you have to submit to, you will spontaneously know what position you should occupy in the Body, and you will stand in your proper position. But there are many Christians today in whom there is not even a thought about submission. For them everything is confused; with them there is no such thing as keeping one's position. Submission is the first lesson for those who work. It is actually the major part of their work.

V. THE NEED TO RECOVER SUBMISSION

When Adam fell, the order in the universe was destroyed. We should never try to differentiate between good and evil. Rather, we should submit to authority. Man is prone to judge good and evil by himself. He feels that this is good and that is not good. It seems as if man's judgment is clearer than God's. This, however, is a condition of foolishness and the fall. This must be removed from us, for this is nothing but rebellion.

The scant submission that we see now is not enough. Some think that it is enough to be baptized and forsake the denominations. But this is not enough. There are many young students who think that God is chastising them by requiring them to submit to their teachers. There are many wives who think that God is chastising them by requiring them to submit to a husband who is impossible to live under. There are many Christians who are still living in rebellion. They have not learned even the basic step in submission.

Submission in the Bible is submission to God's appointed authority. How shallow is the submission which has been preached hitherto! Submission is the basic principle. If the matter of authority is not solved, nothing can be done well. Faith is the principle by which we receive life, while submission is the principle by which we conduct our living. All of the divisions and denominations of the church today come from rebellion. In order to restore authority, submission must be restored first. Many are accustomed to acting as the head; they have never known submission. But we must learn submission. It must become our reaction.

God has not hidden one thing from us concerning authority. In the church, whether directly or indirectly, God has shown us how to submit to authority. Many only know about submission to God; they do not know about submission to authorities. Because all authorities are from God,

everyone has to submit to authority. All of man's problems are due to living outside the realm of God's authority.

VI. NO ONENESS OF THE BODY WITHOUT THE AUTHORITY OF THE HEAD

Today God is taking the way of the recovery of the oneness of the Body of Christ. In order to have the oneness of the Body, there must first be the life of the Head and then the authority of the Head. Without the life of the Head, there is no Body. Likewise, without the authority of the Head, there is no oneness of the Body. We must allow the life of the Head to rule so that the Body can become one. God requires that we submit not only to Him, but also to all His deputy authorities. All the members have to learn to submit to one another. The Body is one. The Head and the Body are also one. God's will can be accomplished only when the authority of the Head prevails. God wants the church be the kingdom of God.

VII. A FEW POINTS ON THE LESSON OF SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

A servant of God will eventually encounter authority in the universe, in his community, in his home, or in the church. If a man has never met God's authority, how can he submit to God? This is not a matter of doctrine or teaching. If it is, it will still be abstract to us. Some think that submission to authority is a very difficult thing. But it is not difficult when one meets God. Unless God's mercy is upon us, no one can submit to God's authority. For this reason, there should be a few points for us to learn:

A. There must be a spirit of submission.

B. There must be the training in submission

Some people are like savages; they cannot come under any submission. We have appointed a housekeeper for every household with the hope that we would all learn submission. [Translator's Note: This refers to the dormitories of the training in which these messages were delivered.] Everyone should receive training by standing in the proper position. One who has learned the lesson or who has been trained will not feel restricted no matter where he is placed. He will spontaneously live out submission without any difficulty.

C. One must learn to be a deputy authority

A worker of God must not only learn submission to authority; he must also learn to be God's deputy authority in the church and in the home. If God entrusts him with many things, and if he has learned to submit under God's authority, he will not feel boastful about anything. However, some who have learned to submit to others find that they do not know how to be the authority when they are brought by God to a place to work. Therefore, not only do we have to learn to submit to authority, but we also have to learn to be the authority and to stand in the proper position. On the one hand, the church suffers because many do not submit. On the other hand, the church suffers because many do not know how to be the authority by standing in the proper position.

(Authority and Submission, chapter 2)

CHAPTER SIX

MIRIAM—SLANDERING GOD’S DEPUTY AUTHORITY

I. MIRIAM SLANDERING MOSES

Aaron and Miriam were the older brother and sister of Moses. In the family Moses was under the authority of Aaron and Miriam. But in God’s calling and work, Aaron and Miriam were under Moses’ authority. They were not happy about Moses marrying an Ethiopian woman, and they spoke against and reviled Moses, saying, “Has Jehovah indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” (Num. 12:2). Ethiopians are Africans. They are the descendants of Ham. It was not right for Moses to marry an Ethiopian. Miriam was older than Moses. It was all right for her to rebuke her brother on the ground of family relationship. But in opening her mouth, she touched the work of God and overstepped Moses’ position. In His work, God had placed deputy authority in the hand of Moses. It was a big mistake for Miriam and Aaron to speak against Moses because of family problems.

God appointed Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. But Miriam despised Moses. For this reason, God was not happy with her. It is all right for you to deal with your brother. But it is not all right for you to speak against God’s authority. Neither Aaron nor Miriam knew God’s authority. They fostered a rebellious heart by standing on natural ground. Moses did not answer. He knew that if he was God’s appointed authority, there was no need for anyone to protect him. Whoever spoke against him would touch death. He did not need to open his mouth. As long as God had given him authority, he did not have to speak. A lion does not need protection because it is the authority. Moses first submitted to God’s authority. Then he was able to represent God as authority. He was very meek, more than all men who were on the face of the earth (v. 3). The authority which Moses represented was the authority of God. All authorities are delegated by God, and no one can take them away.

Their words of rebellion ascended upward and were heard by God (v. 2b). When Aaron and Miriam offended Moses, they offended God in Moses. Therefore, God became angry. Once a man touches deputy authority, he

touches God in that person. Once he offends the delegated authority, he offends God.

II. AUTHORITY BEING GOD'S SELECTION RATHER THAN MAN'S ATTAINMENT

God called all three to come out to the entrance of the tent of meeting (v. 4). Aaron and Miriam came out boldly, presuming that they would be vindicated. They thought that God had finally called them. They thought, "You, Moses, have married an Ethiopian woman and have caused unhappiness in the family. We have many things to say to God." But God said, "Moses is My servant. He is faithful in all My house. Why are you so bold as to speak against My servant?" Spiritual authority does not come through man's attainment. Rather, it comes through God's selection. Spiritual matters are entirely different from worldly principles.

Authority is God Himself. It cannot be offended. Whoever speaks against Moses speaks against God's selection. We cannot despise God's selection.

III. THE MANIFESTATION OF REBELLION BEING LEPROSY

When the anger of God was kindled, the cloud removed from over the tent, and the presence of God was gone. Immediately, Miriam became leprous (v. 10). This was not from infection. It was inflicted by God. Being leprous is not any better than marrying an Ethiopian woman. As soon as inward rebellion is manifested, it becomes leprosy. Lepers have to be shut out. Man cannot approach them. They lose all fellowship.

When Aaron saw that Miriam became leprous, he besought Moses to be a mediator so that God would heal her. God instructed Miriam to be shut out from the camp seven days before she could be received again. She bore shame for seven days as if her father had spit in her face. Only after seven days did the tent of meeting journey on. Whenever there is rebellion and reviling among us, God's presence is gone, and the tent will not move. The pillar of cloud will not come until reviling words have been judged. If the matter of authority is not settled, all other matters will remain unsettled.

IV. SUBMITTING TO GOD'S DIRECT AUTHORITY AND ALSO SUBMITTING TO HIS DEPUTY AUTHORITY

Many think that they have submitted themselves to God already. They do not know that they still need to submit to God's deputy authority. Those who are truly submissive see God's authority in all environments—in their homes and in all institutions. God said, "Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?" (v. 8). Every time reviling words come, we have to pay much attention to them. We cannot be careless, thinking that we can say things rashly. When there is reviling, it proves that there is the spirit of rebellion within. The reviling is the sprouting of this rebellion. We have to fear God and must not speak in a rash way. Many today speak against those ahead of them. They speak against the responsible brothers in the church, but they do not realize the seriousness of this matter. If one day the church receives grace from God, she will separate herself from those who revile the servant of God. She will not talk to them because they are leprous. May God be merciful to us that we would see that this is not a matter with our brother, but a matter of God's appointed authority. If we have met authority, we will realize that there are too many incidents where we sin against God. Thereafter, our concept concerning sin will be changed. We will see sin from God's point of view. The sin that God condemns is man's rebellion.

(Taken from Authority and Submission, chapter 3)

SECTION II:
EXAMPLES & SIGNS
FOR SISTERS' FOLLOWING THE LORD

CHAPTER SEVEN

REBEKAH—PURE, ABSOLUTE, AND SUBMISSIVE

In Genesis 24, Abraham moved in accordance with God's economy (Gen. 24:3-8). What he did in obtaining a wife for Isaac was for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. We long to see that all the marriages in the churches will be for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This kind of marriage requires a daily living in oneness with God. Young brothers and sisters, if everything you do is in accordance with God's economy, even your marriage will be the carrying out of His economy. You need to say, "Lord, what I am doing here today must be in accordance with Your economy. I am single now, but one day I will be married. May my marriage be for Your economy." This is the main revelation in Genesis 24. The primary thing in this chapter is not that Isaac is a type of Christ as the Bridegroom and that Rebekah is a type of the church as the bride. I say again that the primary thing revealed here is the practical living in accordance with God's economy for the carrying out of His eternal purpose.

Now, let's take a look at several characteristics on Rebekah.

I. CHASTE, KIND, AND DILIGENT

In verse 16 we are told that Rebekah was "very fair to look upon, a virgin." Rebekah was chaste and pure. She was also kind and diligent (vv. 18-20). When Abraham's servant asked for a drink, she immediately gave it to him. She also drew water for his camels. It was hard work for a young woman to draw water out of the well and pour it into the trough for ten camels to drink, but she did it. If the young sisters want to be under God's sovereignty, especially with respect to their marriage, they need to be kind and diligent. Any young woman who is unkind and sloppy should remain single. When people ask you to do one thing, you must do two things for them. And the second thing should far surpass the first thing. You should not only give a man water to drink, but should also draw water for his ten camels. If you do this, you will be qualified to obtain your husband, your Isaac. This is some advice to all the young single sisters.

II. ABSOLUTE

Rebekah was absolute (vv. 57-58, 61). Although Rebekah had never seen Isaac, she was willing to go to him without hesitation. She did not say to her mother, “Mother, I have never seen Isaac. Perhaps I should correspond with him first and afterward have him pay us a visit. Then I could decide whether or not to marry him.” Rebekah did not talk in this way. Although her brother and mother were hesitating, wanting her to stay for at least ten days, she said, “I will go.” She was absolute.

During the past forty years, I have seen a number of young sisters who developed mental problems as a result of considering marriage. Some spent days, weeks, months, and even years considering whether a particular brother was the one whom God had prepared for them. When such sisters came to me, I said, with a rebuking tone, “If you feel he is the brother, marry him blindly. But if he is not the one, forget about him and don’t talk about it. The more you consider, the more you bother God, yourself, and me. How can I tell you yes or no? If I say yes, you will say that I do not know him well. If I say no, you will feel unhappy because you have already fallen in love with him. Don’t think about it anymore. Either marry him or forget about him.” I was serious in telling them this. Young sisters, if you want to be married, you must learn to be kind, diligent, and absolute.

III. SUBMISSIVE

Rebekah was also submissive (vv. 64-65). When she saw Isaac and realized who he was, “she took a veil, and covered herself.” Sisters, do not put a piece of cloth on your head as a decoration or ornament. It must be a sign of your submission. Once you are married, you are no longer your own head. Your husband is your head, and your head must be covered. This is the true meaning of marriage.

(Life-study of Genesis, Msg. 60)

CHAPTER EIGHT

RUTH—CHOOSING TO ACCOMPLISH GOD’S ECONOMY AS HER GOAL

In verses 8 through 18 we have an account of Ruth’s choosing for her goal.

I. NAOMI’S PROPOSAL TO HER TWO DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW FOR THEIR FUTURE

Naomi made a proposal to her two daughters-in-law for their future. She said to them, “Go and return, each of you, to your mother’s house. May Jehovah deal kindly with you, just as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May Jehovah grant you to find rest, each of you in the house of your husband” (vv. 8-9a). Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept, saying to her, “No, we will return with you to your people” (vv. 9b-10). Naomi told them to return and then asked them, “Why should you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Return, my daughters, go; for I am too old to have a husband. If I said, I have hope; even if I had a husband tonight and even bore sons; would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from having a husband? No, my daughters; it has been far more bitter for me than it should be for you, for the hand of Jehovah has gone forth against me” (vv. 11-13). When the daughters-in-law heard this, they lifted up their voice and wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. Naomi said to Ruth, “Your sister-in-law has now returned to her people and to her gods; return with your sister-in-law” (vv. 14-15).

II. RUTH’S CHOOSING TO GO WITH NAOMI

Ruth said to Naomi, “Do not entreat me to leave you and turn away from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you dwell, I will dwell; and your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die; and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me, and more as well, if anything but death parts me from you” (vv. 16-17). When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she ceased speaking to her about it (v. 18).

Ruth chose the goal of participating with God's elect in the enjoyment of Christ, and she even became a top ancestor of Christ who helped bring forth Christ into mankind. This was more than just a resolution on the part of the Moabite widow; it was a goal, a choosing. Ruth chose God and His kingdom for the carrying out of God's economy concerning Christ. Hallelujah for such a goal and for such a person choosing this goal!

(Life-study of Ruth, Msg. 2)

III. RUTH'S SEEKING FOR HER REST

Ruth 1 shows Ruth's choosing, chapter two shows Ruth's exercising of her right, and chapter three shows Ruth's seeking for her rest. We need to enjoy Christ to such an extent that we have rest. In order to have rest, we surely need a home. No place can give us as much rest as our home. In chapter three Naomi proposed and even pushed to gain a home for Ruth.

The steps taken by Ruth correspond to our spiritual experience. Before we were saved, we all had our own taste and choice. Under the Lord's sovereign arrangement, we heard the gospel and made a resolution to become a believer of Christ. Our choice was to believe in Christ. By believing in the Lord Jesus, we were organically joined to Him. Now He is in us and we are in Him. With this intimate, organic union, we must begin to pursue Christ in order to gain, possess, experience, and enjoy Him. This is typified by Ruth's exercising of her right to gain and possess the produce of the good land. Just as Ruth had the right to enjoy the produce of the good land after coming into the land, so we have the right to enjoy Christ as our good land after believing in Him.

According to Revelation 2, whoever overcomes may eat of Christ as the tree of life and as the hidden manna (vv. 7, 17). The Bible reveals that Christ is not only our food but also our drink, clothing, and breath. He is our daily necessities. Every day we need to enjoy Him. We must be like Ruth and exercise our right to enjoy Christ. Every morning we should "glean" from the "field" of the Bible.

However, after our gleaning we still need a home so that we can have a settled rest. This kind of rest can come only through marriage. In Ruth 3:1 Naomi said to Ruth, "My daughter, I must seek some resting place for you." Naomi wanted to find a way to establish a home for Ruth. If Ruth was to have a home for her rest, she needed a husband. Naomi realized that the proper person to be Ruth's husband was Boaz, who typifies Christ.

I realize that many of us love the Lord Jesus, but have we taken Him as our Husband? Have you ever had a time with the Lord when you said, “Lord, You are my Husband”? Even though you are saved and you love the Lord, you will not have a home for your rest until you marry the Lord Jesus, taking Him as your Husband.

In these messages on Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, the Lord has given us a clear view of how we should take Christ as our unique Husband. After the people of Israel entered the good land under Joshua, there was a history of miserable chaos because Israel was not faithful. She left God as her Husband to go to many husbands, to many idols. In this modern age there are many idols, such as entertainment, sports, and shopping, which cause Christians to be unfaithful. It seems as if they have never been married to Christ, that they have never actually taken Him as their Husband. As a consequence, they are roaming, wandering from place to place with no rest.

The place to find our Husband is in our home, the church. Christ is the Husband in the church. To have a husband is not sufficient. We must also have a home. Without a home we have no rest. If we have Christ, enjoy Christ, and experience Christ, yet we do not have the church, we are still homeless. Therefore, we must stress not only Christ as our Husband but also the church as our home. Christ as our Husband and the church as our home are a complete unit for us to have a proper and adequate rest.

(Life-study of Ruth, Msg. 4)

IV. THE EXAMPLE OF NAOMI

Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, was punished by God because he did not live according to God’s eternal economy. He did not commit fornication; on the contrary, it seems that he just made a little mistake in leaving the Holy Land. But when he left the good land due to the famine, God came in and dealt with him, leaving his wife and his two daughters-in-law with nothing, as widows without children. I believe that before going to Moab, Elimelech mortgaged all his property, including the inheritance of his two sons. Eventually, Naomi, a widow with two widowed daughters-in-law, returned from the land of Moab, owning nothing. Nevertheless, Naomi did not rebel against God’s dealing. Instead, admitting that God had dealt not only with her husband but also with her, she said, “The All-sufficient One has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but Jehovah has brought me back empty” (Ruth 1:20b-21a). From her speaking we can see that she was a godly woman. She believed in God, regarded Him, and feared Him.

When Naomi came back to the Holy Land, she came back to the rest in God's economy to participate again in the enjoyment of the God-promised land, where there would be the possibility of being related to Christ's genealogy. Her returning was a great thing, yet it was not accomplished by power. Rather, she came back as a poor beggar who sent her daughter-in-law Ruth to glean in the field.

V. THE EXAMPLE OF RUTH

Ruth was outstanding in life. The purpose of the book of Ruth is not to tell us anything concerning power but to reveal the things of life to the uttermost. Naomi made it clear to Ruth that she had no capacity to produce a husband for her who could redeem her and bring forth a descendant for her father-in-law, Elimelech. Feeling that the situation was hopeless, Naomi encouraged Ruth to return to her mother's house in order to have a future. Ruth's reply was full of life. She would go with Naomi forever, being with her in poverty. Ruth said to Naomi, "Do not entreat me to leave you and turn away from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you dwell, I will dwell; and your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die; and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me, and more as well, if anything but death parts me from you" (Ruth 1:16-17). This is the real spirit of the New Testament believers—to follow Jesus by forsaking everything: parents, children, relatives, houses, and so forth (Matt. 10:37; 19:29; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 14:26). This is the way of life revealed in the New Testament.

(Life-study of Ruth, Msg. 8)

CHAPTER NINE

MARY—LOVING THE LORD

AND CONSECRATING TO THE LORD ABSOLUTELY

I. LOVED BY THE DISCIPLES

In Matthew 26:6-13, although the religionists hated the Lord Jesus, His disciples loved Him (vv. 6-13). Two of those who loved Him were Simon the leper and Mary, the woman who poured the oil upon His head. A leper signifies a sinner (8:2). Simon, as a leper, must have been healed by the Lord. Being grateful to the Lord and loving Him, he spread a feast (26:7) in his house for the Lord and His disciples in order to enjoy His presence. A saved sinner would always do this. Simon must have known that the Lord was about to be killed. He probably realized that this was the last opportunity for him to express his love to the Lord. Therefore, he grasped the opportunity for a further intimate, loving contact with the Lord. He opened his home, spread a feast, and invited the Lord and all those who loved Him.

Verses 7 and 8 say, “A woman came to Him, having an alabaster jar of ointment of great value, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at table. But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, Why this waste?” The disciples considered Mary’s love offering to the Lord a waste. Throughout the past twenty centuries, thousands of precious lives, heart treasures, high positions, and golden futures have been wasted upon the Lord Jesus. To such lovers He is altogether lovely and worthy of their offering. What they have poured upon Him is not a waste, but a fragrant testimony of His sweetness.

In verse 11 the Lord said to the indignant disciples, “For the poor you have with you always, but you do not always have Me.” This indicates that we must love the Lord and grasp the opportunity to express our love to Him.

Verse 12 says, “For in pouring out this ointment on My body, she has done it for My burial.” Along with Simon, Mary also probably thought that this was her last chance to do something over the Lord’s body to anoint Him for burial. In a very real sense, Mary buried the Lord Jesus before He

was crucified. What a contrast there is between the religionists who hated the Lord and wanted to kill Him and His lovers who took the opportunity to express their love for Him! I believe that the others like Peter, James, and John did not receive the Lord's prophecy concerning His crucifixion properly. According to the Lord's testimony, Mary certainly received His word regarding this, for the Lord testified that in pouring out the ointment, she had done it for His burial. This was a sign that Mary understood what the Lord had prophesied concerning His crucifixion.

Verse 13 says, "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." In the foregoing verse, the Lord spoke of His burial, implying His death and resurrection for our redemption. Hence, in this verse He called the gospel "this gospel," referring to the gospel of His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The story of the gospel is that the Lord loved us, and the story of Mary is that she loved the Lord. We must preach both, the Lord loving us and us loving the Lord. One is for our salvation, and the other is for our consecration. The gospel tells us how the Lord loved us, but the loving story of Mary stirs us up to love the Lord. Thus, there needs to be a mutual love. This must accompany the preaching of the gospel.

(Life-study of Matthew, Msg. 68)

II. SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOVE THE LORD

Let's take a look at Mark 14:3-11. The house of Simon in Bethany is a miniature of the church life. According to this miniature, the church life is composed of cleansed lepers who love the Lord Jesus. Those who love Him, as did Simon and as did the woman who anointed Him, take Him as their full replacement. In their heart there is no room for the temple. They would not even be distracted by caring for the poor (Mark 14:5).

Some who were present "were indignant among themselves, saying, Why has this waste of the ointment been made? For this ointment could have been sold for over three hundred denarii and given to the poor; and they were scolding her" (vv. 4-5). Those who were indignant regarded the woman's love offering to the Lord a waste.

According to verses 6 and 7, the Lord Jesus said to those who were scolding the woman, "Let her alone; why are you causing her trouble? She has wrought a good work upon Me. For you always have the poor with you,

and whenever you want you can do them good; but you do not always have Me.” The Lord’s word, “You do not always have Me,” indicates that we must love the Lord and seize the opportunity to love Him.

Today many Christians care more for works of charity than for Christ. A charitable concern for the poor often replaces Christ. But in Mark 14 the Lord Jesus would not allow the concern for the poor to be a replacement of Himself. Here it seems that He does not care for the poor, but cares only for Himself. He seems to be saying, “Do not trouble this one who loves Me. She has done a good work on Me. If you want to take care of the poor, wait for another time and go to another place. The poor are always with you. But this is the unique time for you to take Me as your replacement and to pour out everything upon Me.”

III. ANOINTING THE LORD FOR BURIAL

In verse 8 the Lord went on to say, “She has done what she could; she anointed My body beforehand for the burial.” She anticipated the need, or took occasion, to anoint the Lord’s body for burial. This indicates that she received the revelation of the Lord’s death by the Lord’s words. Hence, she seized the opportunity to pour the best she had upon the Lord. To love the Lord with our best requires a revelation concerning Him.

In chapter 13, we have seen that when the Lord Jesus was on the Mount of Olives with four of His disciples, He spoke to them concerning the beginning of birth pangs (Mark 13:8). These birth pangs are for the delivery of the new man, a delivery that involves a long process. How can this man be delivered, be brought forth? We have seen that the new man can be brought forth only through the death and resurrection of Christ. Through His death and resurrection He becomes everything in the new man.

After the Lord spoke to His disciples concerning things to come, especially concerning the birth pangs, he entered into Simon’s home in Bethany, where a feast had been prepared for Him. While He was feasting, a woman who loved Him poured out the best thing she had upon Him. This indicates that He was everything to her. The Lord said that this woman had done what she could, anointing His body beforehand for burial.

What the Lord says in verse 8 is crucial, for it indicates that this woman had certainly received the Lord’s word concerning His death and resurrection. I do not believe that Peter received this word, but she received it. She knew that the One she loved would soon be killed and that she would

not have another opportunity to anoint Him. Therefore, while He was still present, she seized the opportunity to pour out her ointment upon Him. In doing this, she anointed Him for His burial.

IV. BROUGHT INTO THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

No doubt, this woman had been brought into the death of Christ. Burial, of course, is between death and resurrection. She poured out her best upon the Lord as her all-inclusive replacement, and she did this for His burial. This means that she took His death in order to have the full enjoyment of Him.

If we had only the Gospel of Mark, we would not be able to have an adequate understanding of what it means to be brought into the death and resurrection of Christ. In Acts and in Paul's Epistles we see the development of this matter. When we are in Christ's death and resurrection, we can enjoy Him to the uttermost. We can be like the woman in Mark 14, who entered into the Lord's death and resurrection and thereby enjoyed Him as her full replacement. Within her there was no ground for anything or anyone other than the Lord. Within her there was no room for Moses or Elijah or the temple, and there was no ground for herself. She had been replaced by this lovable One.

This woman had been fully prepared to take the Lord as her replacement. She had passed through all the steps of the process with the Lord. Whereas we may say that Peter was somewhat coarse, she was thorough and fine. For this reason, she was certainly brought into the Lord's death. She realized that the Lord would be put to death. But this thought concerning the Lord's death did not get into Peter. Because she took in the Lord's word regarding His death, she also seized the opportunity to anoint Him for burial. By this one step she took the Lord's death and was working for His burial. This was the good work she did upon Him. Then a few days later she was among those who entered into the Lord's resurrection. Hence, she was a forerunner, one of the first to enjoy the resurrected Christ. By means of the Lord's preparation, she entered into His death and resurrection.

(Life-study of Mark, Msg. 42)

CHAPTER TEN

LOT'S WIFE—FORSAKEN

BECAUSE OF HER LOVE FOR THE WORLD

I. A SIGN OF SHAME

There is no doubt that Lot's wife was saved from destruction. This is so definitely and clearly revealed that no one can argue with it. But, as we have seen, she looked back from behind her husband and became a pillar of salt. That she walked behind her husband indicates that she was even less willing than her husband to leave Sodom and that she was not happy to follow him out of the city. If she had been happy to flee Sodom, she would have walked side by side with her husband. Even before she looked back and became a pillar of salt, she was already behind her husband. At this point, let me say a word to the wives. In committing sin, it is good for a wife to be reluctant to follow her husband, but concerning the things of God, it is not good for her to be slow in following him. Concerning the things of God, the best thing for a wife to do is to go along with and walk together with her husband. Wives, in the things with God, do not go behind your husbands. If you do, you, like Lot's wife, may suffer and become a pillar of salt. This is a warning to us all.

That Lot's wife became a pillar of salt signifies that she had lost her function and had become a sign of shame. When salt is in the form of powder, it is very useful. The more that salt is ground into fine powder, the better it functions. But no one uses salt in the form of a pillar. The Lord Jesus said that we, the saved and regenerated ones, are the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13). Our function is to kill the germs of this corrupted world. However, if we become tasteless (Luke 14:34), it means that we, like Lot's wife, have lost our function. As one of the people of God, Lot's wife should have been filled with the salty taste and been able to kill the germs of corruption around her, but she lost her taste and became functionless. She was a sign of shame.

In writing the book of Genesis, the Spirit of God was unwilling to give the name of Lot's wife. Although the name of Abraham's wife, Sarah, is mentioned many times, there is no mention of the name of Lot's wife. It is

unworthy of mention. That poor saint walked behind her husband and looked back toward the city of Sodom. She might have looked back for her children, her house, and her other belongings. All her goods were left there in Sodom. Her interests, heart, desire, and soul were still there, though her body had been pulled out of that city. Hence, at her looking back to that place, the Lord caused her to become a pillar of salt as a warning example to us all.

In Luke 17, the Lord used Lot's wife as a warning example for His disciples. However, not many Christians today live under this warning. Nevertheless, we must heed the warning that a truly saved person faces the possibility of being put to shame at the Lord's appearing. I certainly do not want to become a pillar of salt. Do you? To become a pillar of salt is not a glory; it is a shame. What a shame for a believer to become a lifeless pillar of salt standing in the open air for nothing but suffering!

II. PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ABSOLUTE IN FOLLOWING THE LORD

Luke 14:25-33 speaks of absoluteness in following the Lord. We must follow the Lord in an absolute way. Although the Bible teaches us to love others, here Luke 14:26, a holy word out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus, says, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and moreover, his own soul life also, he cannot be My disciple." It is impossible for anyone to follow the Lord in a proper way without being absolute. Our parents, wives, children, brothers, sisters, and our own soul life should all be secondary. Only the Lord Himself must be the first, and we must follow Him in an absolute way. When the Lord speaks of hating our relatives for His sake, He does not mean a real hatred but a loving hatred.

In this portion of the word out of the mouth of the Lord, we see that we must follow Him in the way of absoluteness. It is not a matter of worshipping God on Sundays nor of having a home Bible study according to our pleasure. Such a home Bible study may be another type of hobby or entertainment. In the eyes of God, your home Bible study may be no different from a basketball game. You play your Bible ball in your Bible study, using your living room as your playground. You are not absolute in following the Lord. I am not joking; I am speaking the truth. I am not only saying this to others but also to myself. The Lord can testify for me that as I

was preparing for this message, the Lord asked me, “How about you? I have charged you to give this message, but are you absolute in following Me?” May the Lord have mercy on me that I would not preach to others and myself become a castaway. May He also have mercy on all His dear saints. How we need a sobering word that we would no longer be befuddled!

Those who are not absolute in following the Lord become useless. Tell me, how many Christians today are truly useful in the Lord’s hand for God’s economy? Most Christians have become useless as far as God’s economy is concerned. They are like salt that is tasteless (Luke 14:34).

Such Christians are not only tasteless, but according to Luke 14:35, they are “fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile,” but to be cast out. The land here is the field which grows things for God that He might accomplish His purpose. The dunghill in the universe is the lake of fire, where every dirty thing will be piled up. Luke 14:35 mainly refers to the coming age of the kingdom. In the kingdom age there will be the earth, the land for the fulfillment of God’s purpose, and there will also be the lake of fire, the dunghill. Christianity always tells people that there are only two places—heaven or hell. But in this verse the Lord Jesus speaks of the third place, saying that tasteless salt, being fit for neither the land nor for the dunghill, is cast out. Where was the pillar of salt which Lot’s wife became? Was it in heaven or in Sodom? It was in neither place, but in the third place. Although you have read through the Gospel of Luke, have you ever seen that in this chapter there are three places? Where will you be—in the land, in the dunghill, or cast out to the third place?

In Matthew 25:30 the Lord said that the unprofitable servant would be cast into outer darkness. The outer darkness must also be the third place. What this will be and where it will be, the Bible does not say. Nevertheless, the Bible does say that if you are a slothful servant, at the Lord’s coming back you will be fit neither for the land because you were unprofitable, nor for the dunghill because you have been saved. Where then will you be? In the third place, a place outside both the glorious kingdom and the lake of fire. Few Christians have ever seen that in the Bible there is a third place prepared for the defeated saved ones. This is a sobering word.

We need to be deeply impressed that in the full revelation regarding man in the divine Word there are three places—a place for salvation, a place for perdition, and a place for shame. Where was Lot’s wife? Although she was saved, she was in the third place, the place of shame. This is the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Do not try to argue with it.

III. BELIEVERS WHO LIVE IN THE WORLD AS THE WORLDLY PEOPLE AND SEEK TO SAVE THEIR SOUL

Believers who live in the world as the worldly people and seek to save their soul, their soul-life, will suffer shame as did Lot's wife, and will lose their soul at the Lord's coming back (Luke 17:28-33). Most Christians are like this. Although they are believers, yet they live like worldly people, shopping and dressing in the same way as the worldly people do. Since they live and walk the same as the worldlings, there is no difference between them and the worldly people.

To save the soul means to refuse to suffer for the Lord's sake. Christians who save their soul like to have their pleasure. They say, "What's wrong with going to sporting events? It's not sinful." Although it may not be sinful, it is worldly. I am not saying that Christians should have no physical exercise for their health. We certainly need that. But once any form of exercise becomes a sport or entertainment, it is worldly. If you enjoy it and find it pleasurable, it means that you are saving your soul. To have any psychological and worldly enjoyment is to save the soul.

Today is not the time for us Christians to have psychological and worldly pleasure or enjoyment; it is the time for us to suffer in our soul, in our psychology. As long as we can maintain our existence, it is sufficient. We should not seek psychological and worldly pleasure. Since World War II, who has given such a sobering word? During the past thirty-one years, I have been watching and observing, but I have not heard a sober word or warning telling Christians that we are not on this earth for our psychological and worldly enjoyment, and that we must suffer the loss of every kind of amusement and entertainment. Your enjoyment of certain music at home may be a saving of your soul. Many Christians cannot overcome their television sets. Their watching television may be a saving of their soul. I am neither religious nor legal, but I do say that today is not the time for us to have psychological and worldly amusement; it is the time for us to suffer in our soul. This suffering in the soul is for the saving of the soul. If you are not willing to suffer in order to save your soul, you will suffer shame as Lot's wife did and lose your soul at the Lord's coming back.

It is wrong to teach that all Christians will be raptured at one time at the Lord's coming back. That teaching befuddles the spiritual sense of the

Lord's people. In Luke 17:34 and 35 the Lord said, "I tell you, in that night there will be two on one couch; the one will be taken, and the other will be left. There will be two grinding at the same place; the one will be taken, but the other will be left." You may argue, saying, "The one taken is a believer, and the one left is an unbeliever." But that is your interpretation. While both are the same, doing the same thing in the same place, only the Lord knows who is genuinely for Him. If you read the context of Luke 17:22-37, you will see that this word is not given to unbelievers but to the Lord's disciples. It was a word given to them concerning the time of His coming. The "two" in verses 34 and 35 refer to two of the Lord's disciples, one of whom will be taken and the other of whom will be left. The one who will be taken will surely not be like Lot's wife. The disciple who will be left will be like Lot's wife. This is a sober word.

IV. CHILDREN OF GOD WHO DO NOT ABIDE IN THE LORD AS THE ANOINTING TEACHES

The children of God who do not abide in the Lord as the anointing teaches will be put to shame at the Lord's coming back (1 John 2:27-28). We who are in the Lord's recovery know what is the inner teaching of the inward anointing. But do we abide in the Lord according to the teaching of the living anointing within us? First John 2:27 and 28 charges us to abide in the Lord according to the anointing. For example, if you are about to go shopping and the anointing says no, will you say, "Amen, Lord"? If you do, that is good. However, if you say, "Lord, I won't buy anything bad," the Lord may say, "I don't care whether you buy something good or bad. Don't go." We should simply say, "Amen, Lord, I'm just abiding in You according to Your teaching of the inward anointing." We all need to abide in the Lord in this way.

(Life-study of Genesis, Msg. 53)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JEZEBEL—CONFUSING GOD’S WORD

Revelation 2:20 says, “But I have something against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices” (v. 20). Who is Jezebel? Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, who married her from the land of the Zidonians, the Gentiles. Jezebel seduced the people to worship Baal (1 Kings 16:30-32). Baal was the god of the Gentiles, not the God of the people of Israel. Jezebel told the people to worship the image of Baal. The problem was not just idols, but that God had been replaced. Baal was brought in and worshipped as their own god. In the history of the Jewish nation (Israel) up to 1 Kings 16, no one had ever led the people of Israel to sin in such a way as Ahab. Ahab was the first to lead the people to worship a Gentile god on a large scale. Not even Jeroboam could match him in the sins he committed.

Here we want to note who Jezebel is. Jezebel is a woman. The woman in Revelation 17 refers to the Roman Catholic Church. In Matthew 13:33 the woman who took the leaven and hid it in three measures of meal is also the Roman Catholic Church. Naturally, therefore, the woman in Revelation 2:20 also represents the Roman Catholic Church.

God never acknowledges the marriage between His people and the Gentiles as proper; God says that this is fornication. So Jezebel was not the queen; the coming together of Ahab and Jezebel was fornication. Fornication is confusion. What God sees is a woman who is confusing the words of God and the people of God. This woman brought in the god of the Gentiles. I have already said that the result of fornication is idolatry. The New Testament speaks of the conference at Jerusalem, the result of which was to exhort the Gentile brothers to abstain from meat offered to idols and from fornication (Acts 15:29). Here we see that the fornication of Jezebel brought idols into the kingdom of Israel.

Through Jezebel, Ahab was joined to the world. No matter where you are, it is apparent that the Roman Catholic Church unites herself with political powers. She sends out ambassadors and ministers to various nations, and in important world crises she stands up to speak. The uniting of the church with the world is the Roman Catholic Church. They claim that their first

pope was Peter. But I think Peter would say that he was a disciple of the poor Jesus of Nazareth; the glory and honor of the world had nothing to do with him. Yet the Roman Catholic Church maintains her position in the world and commands respect from the people. The practice of the Roman Catholic Church within these more than one thousand years is, according to the James 4:4, the same as the greatest adultery. Here we see that the church has lost her virginity. Today there is a group of people who think that they can bargain with others since they have such a large membership. According to men it is a type of advancement for the church to be able to bargain, but according to God, it is sin for the church to gain what the world has gained.

What is the result? Idolatry. The facts are placed before us; there is not one church that is like the Roman Catholic Church with so many idols. We can say that the best class of idols is made by the Roman Catholic Church. I stayed in the city of Rome for one month. During that time I continually felt one thing: If theirs is the church, then ours is not; if ours is, then theirs surely is not. There is no middle ground for the two to come together. The remarkable thing is that they have fulfilled what has been prophesied in the Bible. There is an image of the Father and an image of the Son; there are images of the apostles and images of the ancient saints. They worship Mary; they worship Peter. Jezebel teaches the Lord's servants to commit fornication and eat the meat offered to idols. Jezebel is spoken of because the church has brought in Gentile gods. We can see this in the book entitled *Mystery* by G. H. Pember. Catholicism takes in Gentile gods and hangs the signs of Christianity upon them. The most evident is the image of Mary. Some think that at least Mary is of Christianity. But the fact is that Greece has a goddess, India has a goddess, Egypt has a goddess, and China has a goddess; every religion in the world has a goddess, except Christianity. Since there must be a goddess, they bring forth Mary. Actually there is no goddess in Christianity—the origin of the concept of a goddess is the Gentiles. So this is idolatry on top of fornication. This is Jezebel bringing in the things of the Gentiles to the kingdom of Israel.

She calls herself a prophetess because she wants to preach and to teach. The position of the church before God is that of a woman. Whenever the church has authority to preach, that is Jezebel. The church has nothing to say; in other words, the church has no word. The Son of God is the Word; therefore, only He has the word. Christ is the Head of the church; therefore, only He can speak. Whenever the church speaks, that is the preaching of

the woman. The Roman Catholic Church is the woman preaching. In the Roman Catholic Church, what matters is what the church says, not what the Bible says or what the Lord says. It is quite remarkable that God says that Jezebel is the prophetess and the woman who speaks. "My slaves" refers to individual slaves. Jezebel has the authority to direct every believer. The people in the Roman Catholic Church do not read the Bible, because they are afraid of misunderstanding what God means. Only the fathers can understand and only the fathers can speak; therefore, only they can decide all matters. Basically the Roman Catholic Church is the preaching of the woman who decides what the children of God should do. Many doctrines have been changed because she speaks for the church and people must listen to the church. She pays attention to the thought that people must listen to the church and pope, not that people must listen to the Lord.

In church history there were persecutions by the Roman Empire, and there were also persecutions by the Roman Catholic Church. When the Roman Catholic Church in Spain persecuted the children of God, we do not know how many she killed. The punishment applied during the Inquisition was cruel to the extreme. After people were brought to the point of death, they were turned over to the government gasping for breath, in order to show that none were killed by them. She will always make you accept her doctrine. The Jewish nation (Israel) had only one woman who killed the prophets, Jezebel. In the previous centuries we do not know how many witnesses died at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. They claim that what they decide is always right. The people's ideas are entirely in their hands. The Lord said that the failure of Thyatira is due to the fact that she allows the teaching of Jezebel in her midst.

(Taken from The Orthodoxy of the Church, chapter 5)

SECTION III:

SISTERS' VIRTUES

CHAPTER TWELVE

SARAH—A BROAD PERSON

In 17:15 we see that Sarah's name was changed. "And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be." Sarai means my princess and Sarah means princess. The word "my" before princess indicates narrowness, but princess by itself indicates broadness. Sarai's name was changed to Sarah because in a broad way, not in a narrow way, she was to be a mother of many nations. In 17:16 God said, "And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." When God is added into us, we become wider and broader. Without God's being added into us, we are not only imperfect but also narrow. Although you may be a brother or sister, if you do not have God added into you, you are a narrow brother or sister. If you are a husband who does not have God added into you, you are a narrow husband. If you are a wife who does not have God added into you, you are a narrow wife. What can widen us? Only God Himself. If you are going to be a broadened person with a broadened view and with a broadened mind, heart, and spirit, you need God to enlarge you.

Regardless of who we are, as long as we do not have God added into us, we always say things such as, "my interest," "my profit," "my future," "my growth in life," "my seeking of the Lord," "my function in the church meetings." Unless God enlarges us, we shall not care for others. Our name, which is "my princess," must be changed to "princess." We say, "This is my day, my house, my time, my this, and my that," because we are short of God, but once we have God added to us, we immediately become broadened. When we have God added into us, we shall not only become a father of a great multitude but also a princess of many nations for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose. We all need such a change, a change which comes from God being added into us to broaden our narrow person.

We all need to be changed from "my princess" to "princess," transformed from our narrow concept of spirituality to a broadened and general spirituality that we may be no longer "my" princess but a "mother of nations," caring for others and having the seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This also requires the termination of our old and natural man so

that we may be transformed into a new person, producing the seed, caring for many others, and enabling God's purpose to be fulfilled with a great multitude. For God's eternal purpose we need to be the "father of a great multitude" and the "mother of nations." We need to be transformed into a multiplied and multiplying person and into a broadened and general person.

(Life-study of Genesis, Msg. 47)

While every brother likes to be an exalted father, every sister wants to be a "my princess." When our name is Sarai we say, "My husband, my home, my day, my children, my position, my function in the meetings, my everything." Although the sisters may say "my princess," God wants them simply to become "princess" without any "my," to be general, not particular. We should not be exalted but multiplied, not particular but general. Particularity always goes with exaltation; they make a good couple. In the church life, none of us should be for exaltation or in particularity. We all have to be multiplied and general, to be a "father of nations" or a "mother of nations" (17:5, 16).

The church life depends a great deal upon the changing of names. If the brothers still insist on being exalted and if the sisters still prefer to be particular, how could we have the church life? We could only have a religion with a Sunday morning service and come together once a week, greet one another, and then go our separate ways until the next Sunday. In order to have the church life, there must be a great multitude of people that has been built up and compacted together, a people who truly know and practice the communal life. When the brothers no longer want to be exalted but multiplied and the sisters no longer want to be particular but general, then we shall be able to live together and have the proper church life and the multitude for the fulfilling of God's purpose. Then we shall live together day by day and be a churching people all the time. Nearly every time will be a meeting time. We shall be meeting together constantly because no one will want to be exalted but multiplied and because no one will want to be particular but general. This is not merely a doctrine. The changing of names is not only a change of term but a change of our being, of our person. Thus, we may change the title of this message to "the unveiling of the divine Being and the changing of the human person for the fulfilling of God's purpose." Although God's divine being has been unveiled, if we remain the same, His being unveiled will not profit us. His unveiling depends upon our changing.

We need to be changed not only in name but also in person. Then we can enjoy the unveiled God and drink at His rich udder.

The changing of names in the sense of changing the person is also seen in the case of Jacob and Peter. For the fulfilling of God's purpose, Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:27-28); a heel-holder, a supplanter (Jacob), was changed into a prince of God (Israel). If Jacob had remained a supplanter, he could never have been used by God in the fulfillment of the divine purpose. Jacob had to be changed into a prince of God. For the building of the church, Peter's name, Simon, was changed to Cephas, which means a stone (John 1:42). Peter's natural being was muddy, and he had to be transformed into a stone, even a precious stone, for God's building (1 Pet. 2:5) to fulfill the divine purpose.

(Life-study of Genesis, Msg. 48)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ZIPPORAH—

THE FEMALE HELPER OF A CALLED ONE

In Exodus 4 is some record regarding Moses and his wife, Zipporah (4:24-26). Verse 24 says, “And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him.” By the time of verse 23, it seemed that the calling of Moses was complete. Therefore, Moses took his wife and his two sons and began to make his way from the land of Midian to Egypt. But as they were staying in an inn, the Lord met Moses and sought to kill him. Moses must have been shocked, and Zipporah must have been terrified. Zipporah may have asked Moses why God, who had called and sent him, was now seeking to kill him. She may have questioned what was wrong. I believe that Moses immediately realized the problem: his younger son had not been circumcised. As a Gentile wife, Zipporah may have been unhappy when Moses circumcised the first son, and this may have caused her to oppose the circumcision of the second son. Due to Moses’ weakness and negligence plus Zipporah’s opposition, the Lord’s requirement had not been fulfilled; therefore, the Lord sought to kill Moses. It was not easy for Zipporah, a Gentile woman, to enforce this requirement. Zipporah was compelled to comply, although she was not happy about it.

Verse 25 says, “Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.” In cutting the foreskin of her son, Zipporah did not use a knife; she used a sharp stone, a flint, an unusual cutting instrument. Perhaps she used such an instrument because the circumcision was performed during a state of emergency. The use of a sharp stone also seems to indicate that the circumcision was carried out in an atmosphere of unpleasantness. This is also indicated by the fact that Zipporah cast the foreskin at Moses’ feet and said, “Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.” Although the atmosphere was not pleasant, God let Moses go after the circumcision had been completed. Had there been a pleasant atmosphere, no doubt Zipporah would have expressed her repentance and fellowshiped with Moses. She would have asked Moses to do the circumcising, with a proper knife to do the proper cutting. Then the cutting would not have been so painful. Nevertheless, in our experience it is only the Lord Himself who

uses a proper knife to do the cutting work. The cutting is here represented by the female life, because the cutting is subjective. But all of us, old and young, brothers and sisters, are those doing the cutting. In the church life we either cut or are being cut. In almost every case this cutting is done with crude, uncultured instruments.

For many years I was troubled by this portion of the Word. I began to understand it only after I had a certain amount of experience. Through experience I realized that the called ones need not only the male help, the help from Aaron, but also the female help, the help from Zipporah. The male help is matching, but the female help is cutting. Everyone called of God needs both the male help and the female help, both the matching and the cutting.

As every married brother realizes, wives are very adept at cutting. There are times when even Christian wives are “Gentiles” to their husbands. If the husband does not love the Lord or desire to go on with the Lord, the wife may not be a “Gentile.” But as soon as he begins to love the Lord, to go the Lord’s way, and to live for the Lord, the wife is exposed as being a “Gentile,” a “heathen.” This means that a wife who has been a Christian for years may suddenly behave like one who is not separated unto God and who does not live for God. Many of today’s Christians are still heathen in their daily living: they do not love the Lord, they are not separated unto the Lord, and they do not take the Lord’s way. They are Christians in that they have been regenerated and have received the divine life, but they are not Christians in their daily walk.

When a certain brother is in the world, with no concern for the Lord’s interests, his wife may not give him any trouble as far as the Lord is concerned. But as soon as he begins to live for the Lord, his wife behaves like a heathen Zipporah, a woman not wholly separated unto the Lord. To some extent, his wife will go along with him, just as Zipporah went along with Moses. But in his situation there is something that is not circumcised, something that is common, unholy, and not separated, sanctified, to the Lord. If the Lord does not come into this brother’s situation, the wife’s Gentile nature may not be exposed. But as soon as the Lord intervenes, perhaps as the brother is about to fulfill God’s commission, the wife’s attitude toward the circumcision of the flesh is exposed. Forced to agree to the cutting of the foreskin, the wife may actually carry it out, but she does not do so with a positive and pleasant attitude. Because she must accept her

husband's separation unto the Lord, she looks upon him as a "bloody husband."

To be a "bloody husband" is to be one under death. In the eyes of Zipporah, circumcision meant that her husband Moses was under the sentence of death. If we brothers are absolute with the Lord, we also shall become a "bloody husband" in the eyes of our wives.

Examine carefully the picture of Moses and Zipporah in Exodus 4. As they were on the way to fulfill God's commission, Zipporah was somewhat agreeable with what Moses was doing. Moses, however, was more for the Lord than Zipporah was. He was willing for his son to be circumcised, but Zipporah was not willing. Although there is no indication that Moses and Zipporah were fighting with each other over the question of circumcision, there was nevertheless something between them that was not smooth. There had to be a circumcision, but Zipporah opposed it. She disagreed with the cutting of the flesh as a sign of separation unto God. But it is against the divine principle for God to use one who is still living in the flesh or in the natural life. The flesh and the natural life must be cut off. God can only use one who has been separated unto Him.

The matter of circumcision involves a crucial principle in God's economy. Without circumcision, it is impossible to participate in the covenant God made with Abraham regarding the inheritance of the good land. Furthermore, an uncircumcised person can have no part in God's ministry. The meaning of God coming in to kill Moses was that an uncircumcised situation would cause him to be finished in the ministry of God. But the meaning of circumcision is to be ushered into His ministry.

Therefore, as Moses was on the way to carry out God's commission, God could not tolerate Moses' negligence in the matter of circumcision. Thus, He came in to deal with Moses. No doubt Moses had been weak in yielding, at least somewhat, to his wife's opposition to circumcision. Because this weakness was an offense to the Lord, He sought to kill Moses. When the Lord met Moses, the whole situation was brought to the light. Moses knew that he was wrong, and Zipporah realized what her responsibility was. Because the responsibility rested mainly upon her due to her opposition to the circumcision, she was forced to take action. She cut the foreskin with an unusual instrument, a sharp stone. But we need to point out that Zipporah nevertheless did the cutting in love. She loved Moses and wanted to save his life.

As we make the spiritual application of this incident, we see that often wives cut their husbands in an unusual way. If the sisters bring this matter to the Lord in prayer, He will show them the unusual ways in which they cut their husbands. It is not always the wives, however, who do the cutting. The Apostle Paul was never married, but he was surely cut by others.

Aaron's help, the matching, was objective, whereas Zipporah's help, the cutting, was subjective. Sometimes the Lord places us in an environment where we are cut by others, perhaps by our dear brothers in the Lord. At such a time, these brothers do not match us; they cut us. They may not fight against us, but even as they apparently agree with us, they function as cutters. We all need to be ready to receive this cutting.

God has prepared not only an Aaron for us, but, in His sovereignty, He also has prepared a Zipporah. There is no need for us to make any choices. God has the Aarons and the Zipporahs ready and waiting. Especially in the church life today there are both matching ones and cutting ones. To handle the matching ones is difficult, but to manage the cutting ones is more difficult because it makes us a "bloody husband."

After the matching with Aaron and the cutting by Zipporah, the calling of Moses was complete. He was ready to go to Egypt to carry out God's commission. Thank the Lord for the full picture of God's calling of His called ones! If we bring this word to the Lord, He will enlighten us. Then we shall say, "Lord, how I thank You that with me there are some Aarons and some Zipporahs. I praise You, Lord, for the matching and for the cutting."

(Life-study of Exodus, Msg. 9)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RAHAB—

LONGING TO BE UNITED WITH CHRIST

I. JEHOVAH'S PROVIDING OF RAHAB THE HARLOT

Joshua 2:1b-22 are concerned with Jehovah's providing of Rahab the harlot. God provided Joshua for the gaining of the land. However, there was the need of a Gentile female for the spreading of Christ, and for this God provided Rahab the harlot.

A. She Having Believed in the God of Israel

Rahab believed in the God of Israel (vv. 8-11; Heb. 11:31a). She told the spies that she knew that Jehovah had given the land to the people of Israel and that all the inhabitants of the land melted before them. She went on to say that they had heard how Jehovah had dried up the water of the Red Sea before Israel when they came out of Egypt and what they did to the two kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, whom they utterly destroyed. Then Rahab declared, "Jehovah your God, He is God in heaven above and upon earth beneath" (Josh. 2:11b). Because of her faith in God, she "did not perish with those who were disobedient" (Heb. 11:31a).

B. She Turning to Israel and Their God and Trusting in Him and His People

Rahab turned to Israel and their God, and she trusted in Him and His people (Josh. 2:12-13). She asked the spies to deal kindly with her father's house and to give her some token of trust that they would preserve her father, mother, brothers, and sisters and deliver their lives from death. She committed herself to them and was pleading with them for mercy. This indicates that she turned her whole being not only to God but also to God's people.

C. She Being Willing to Receive the Spies, Hide Them, and Deliver Them by Her Acts out of Her Faith

Rahab was willing to receive the spies, hide them, and deliver them by her acts out of her faith (vv. 1b-7, 15-16, 22; James 2:25). Her receiving, hiding, and delivering the spies were acts of faith. This indicates that her faith was active. After receiving the spies, she had good fellowship with them concerning what God intended to do.

D. The Sign for Rahab and Her Household to Be Saved

Joshua 2:17-21 speaks of the sign for Rahab and her household to be saved. The spies told Rahab to hang a line of scarlet thread in the window of her house (v. 18). According to their word, “she tied the scarlet line in the window” (v. 21). The scarlet thread tied in the window of Rahab’s house was hung out in the open; it was there for everyone to see. Thus, the scarlet thread tied to the window typifies an open confession of the redeeming blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Rahab made such an open confession and believed that by this sign she and her household would be delivered.

This sign for Rahab and her household to be saved indicates God’s household salvation to the Gentile sinners (Acts 16:31). We praise the Lord for His marvelous household salvation. Acts 16:30 and 31 reveal that whereas the Lord’s salvation is for the individual believer, the unit of His salvation is the household. This is also illustrated by the cases of the whole house of Noah (Gen. 7:1, 13) and of the houses of Israel (Exo. 12:3-4). The case of the whole house of Rahab confirms that the family, the household, is the unit of God’s salvation. In the New Testament the principle of household salvation is illustrated by the cases of the house of Zaccheus (Luke 19:5-6, 9), the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:13-14; 10:24, 44, 48), the house of Lydia (16:14-15), and the house of the Philippian jailer (16:32-33).

E. A Condemned Canaanite Qualified to Be Destroyed

Becoming One of the Main Ancestors of Christ

Rahab was a condemned Canaanite qualified to be destroyed, but she became one of the main ancestors of Christ, associated with Christ in His incarnation for the fulfillment of God’s eternal economy, by turning to God and His people and by being married to Salmon (Matt. 1:5a), the son of a leader of Judah, a leading tribe of Israel (1 Chron. 2:10-11), and probably one of the two spies.

II. TURNING TO GOD AND GOD’S PEOPLE

THROUGH FAITH

How could Rahab, a Gentile harlot who had sold herself to sin to the uttermost, become a member of the chosen people of God? How could she receive Christ and then bring forth Christ to others for His increase? There was no other way but through faith. Faith comes from the hearing of the gospel. Today people need to hear the good news concerning what God has done through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. People need to hear that everything has been finished and completed and that the all-inclusive Christ is in the heavens for them to receive. However, Satan and his powers in the air try to frustrate them from receiving Christ. The only way this situation can be overcome is by faith. This was Rahab's experience. She heard what God had done for Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness, and she heard how God had defeated Sihon and Og, two strong kings who were the gate guards of Canaan. She heard the good news, and then she believed in the very God of Israel, wanting to be one among His people.

When the two spies came to Jericho, Rahab contacted them and hid them from those who were seeking them. There must have been a good communication between the spies and Rahab, and through this communication she became harmonious with them for God's economy. When she asked them to deal kindly with her father's house and deliver their lives from death, the spies told her to tie a line of scarlet thread in the window. According to the spies' word, she hung the scarlet thread from her window as a sign for the salvation of herself and her entire household, typifying the household salvation of Christ through His redemption by His blood. This is a strong indication that the history in the book of Joshua is related to God's eternal economy concerning Christ in His salvation through redemption.

Eventually Rahab the harlot became one of the excellent, prominent ancestors of Christ. This Canaanite woman married Salmon, a leader of the tribe of Judah, and through her union with this Jewish leader she became a part of Israel and brought forth Boaz, the great-grandfather of David. What an honor it is that Rahab's name is included in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1! This is a strong sign that the history recorded in Joshua is in line with God's eternal economy concerning Christ.

(Life-study of Joshua, Msg. 3)

III. THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING OUR ASSOCIATION WITH CHRIST

Matthew 1:5 says, “And Salmon begot Boaz of Rahab,...” Rahab was a harlot in Jericho (Josh. 2:1), a place cursed by God for eternity (6:6). Although she was a harlot in such a place, she became a grandmother of Christ. How could a harlot become a grandmother of Christ? In order to answer this question, we need to find the principles. The entire population of Jericho was destroyed except Rahab, her family, and her possessions. She was saved because she turned to God and God’s people (Josh 6:22-23, 25; Heb. 11:31). After she turned to God and His people, she married Salmon, a leader in the army of the leading tribe of Judah and one of the men sent by Joshua to spy out Jericho. At that time, Salmon became acquainted with Rahab and, in a sense, saved her. Eventually, Rahab married him and they brought forth a godly man named Boaz.

Now we must pay our full attention to the principles governing our association with Christ. The first principle is that, no matter what our background is, we must turn to God and to God’s people. Second, we must marry the proper person, not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense. After we have turned to God and to God’s people, we must be joined, build up, and involved with the proper person. Third, we must bring forth the proper fruit. Then we will be fully in the portion of the birthright of Christ.

It seems that many Christians today have lost their birthright. They do not have Salmon and Boaz. If you would have a Salmon and Boaz, you must become involved with the proper believers, with the proper leading ones in the leading tribes. Then you need to bring forth the proper fruit, Boaz, who will be a forefather of David. We must turn to the Lord, and we must turn to the Lord’s people; we must also take care of how we become involved with others. If we become involved with the proper persons, surely we shall bring forth the proper fruit. This will keep us in the full enjoyment of the birthright of Christ.

(Life-study of Matthew, Msg. 3)

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

KILLING THE SELF, & NOT LOSING THE TEMPER

After a man has received the Lord's grace, there should be some definite changes in his conduct and nature. One of the changes should be in his temper. Some people have believed in the Lord for many years, yet their temper is still the same as it was before they were saved. This is very unfortunate, and it surely does not glorify the Lord. As soon as a man believes in the Lord, he should take care of the problem of his temper. It is wrong for a person to have a terrible temper for years without seeing any change at all.

I. EXPRESSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

There are some clear expressions of the Christian life that should be exhibited as soon as a person is saved.

In John 15:12 the Lord charged the disciples to love one another. One expression of the Christian life is love. We have to love. We should love our brothers, and we should love all men.

The Lord also said, "Blessed are the meek" (Matt. 5:5). A Christian should have a meek attitude; he should not be stubborn. We should learn to have a meek attitude. "Behold, your King is coming to you, meek and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, a foal of a beast of burden" (21:5). The Lord was meek in His attitude; He came meek and mounted on a donkey.

Luke 9:23 says, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself...and follow Me." The Christian life is a life of denying the self. The Christian life should not be one that speaks for itself, fights for itself, or builds itself up; rather, it should be one that denies itself.

First Corinthians 13:7 says that love "endures all things." The Christian life should not be one of impatience, but one of endurance.

First Thessalonians 5:16 says, "Always rejoice." The Christian life should be one that always rejoices. Nothing should disturb our joy or quench our rejoicing.

Philippians 4:7 says, "And the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." A

Christian should not allow anything to disturb or usurp his peace. God's children should maintain their peace at all times.

Matthew 11:29 is also a very important verse. It is the Lord's own word: "I am meek and lowly in heart." A Christian should be lowly in heart. He should not be arrogant; rather, he should humble himself all the time.

II. TEMPER BEING INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Love, meekness, self-denial, joy, peace, and humility are all proper expressions of the Christian life. Temper and anger are not compatible with these expressions.

Where there is love, there is no anger. Where love flourishes, anger does not exist. Where love is, temper does not exist. One cannot be loving and angry at the same time. The Lord's command is that a Christian should love others, whether they are unbelievers or believers. If love fills your heart, anger will depart. It is impossible to love a person and be angry with him at the same time. You must realize how important love is for a child of God. Love should not be in just your conduct; it must become your attitude as well. You should not love occasionally; rather, love has to be your attitude. If you have such an attitude, it will be impossible for you to lose your temper.

The Lord commands us to be meek, and He was very meek when He was on earth. He came on a donkey, which means that He does not reign with severity but in meekness. When the Lord was on earth, it was easy for men to talk to Him, invite Him, and approach Him. It is hard to talk with some people, but a Christian should be anything but unapproachable. It should not be a hard thing to approach him. A Christian should be meek. If we are meek in our attitude and nature, spontaneously we will not lose our temper easily. Temper makes a person hard; those who have a temper are crude in their emotion. Love and compassion are the finest of all human affections, while anger is the crudest. If a man is meek in the eyes of the Lord, he will not give any ground to anger. It is an expression of crudeness for one to constantly argue and lose his temper. This is not compatible with meekness.

The Lord charges us to deny ourselves and to learn to be self-denying. If a man denies himself and drops his rights, he will not get angry easily. Men become angry when they want to fight for themselves. If a man does not

fight for himself, he will not need to lose his temper. Brothers and sisters, as children of God we should deny ourselves and not protect ourselves.

Sometimes others are unreasonable with us. Many things tend to provoke us, but the Bible says that love is not provoked (1 Cor. 13:5). The Lord shows us that we should be patient. Whatever the Lord allows to happen to us, we should be patient. The Lord's command is that a Christian's life be a life of patience. If we live a patient life, there will be no possibility of losing our temper.

A Christian should always rejoice. Joy is life. A man cannot be angry and rejoicing at the same time; this is impossible. Either you are rejoicing or you are angry. When you are angry, you cannot possibly be rejoicing. A man cannot be happy and angry at the same time. If the Lord's joy fills your heart, there will be no place in your life left for anger. The Lord has not given you ground for your anger. Brothers and sisters, if your life is filled with joy, your bad temper will be gone spontaneously.

The Lord intends that we be filled with peace. Nothing should disturb our peace. We should be at peace in the midst of everything, no matter what the circumstance. The Lord's peace guards our minds and hearts from all attacks. If our hearts are filled with this peace, it will be impossible for us to become angry.

A child of God should be one who humbles himself. God does not want us to be high-minded; He does not want us to sit in a high place. God's Son humbled Himself when He was on earth. He desires that we would also be lowly and that we would go along with the lowly (Rom. 12:16). Temper is incompatible with humility. We have to follow and learn of our lowly Lord who took a lowly way.

In Matthew 5:22 the Lord said, "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment." The Lord is not pleased to see any of His own becoming angry or losing their temper easily. It is especially bad to get angry or lose our temper with our brothers. Every child of God should learn to control his temper and not become angry easily.

III. THE ROOT OF OUR ANGER—SELF

Anger is a common thing, and there are many people who lose their temper easily. But temper is the most superficial of all problems. Strictly speaking, it should be dealt with the moment we believe in the Lord. It is

wrong to see a person with an uncontrollable or unmanageable temper eight or ten years after he is saved. So many people lose their temper easily. Why? So many Christians have not dealt with this problem yet. Why? If we cannot answer these questions, we cannot be proper Christians. We must understand the reason that a man becomes angry easily before we can find the solution to this problem.

Temper is a big thing. Yet in reading the New Testament, we cannot find the word temper. The Bible does not pay much attention to what we consider as the most common sickness, because temper is not a sickness but the symptom of a sickness. A sickness is one thing, and the symptom of a sickness is another thing. A man may have appendicitis—this is a sickness. He may have a fever as well—this is a symptom of the sickness. Symptoms are present because a sickness is present. It is useless to try to deal with the symptoms without dealing with the sickness. The fever may subside temporarily, but the sickness remains, and after a while the fever will come back. Temper is not a sickness but the symptom of a sickness. Hence, we have to know the root of the sickness. Once we know the root, we can get rid of the temper. Once the sickness is gone, the symptoms will surely go away. We have to realize that temper is a symptom and not a root of sickness. It is wrong for us to consider temper a sickness. It is no wonder that we cannot deal with it, because we consider it as a sickness.

Many brothers have said that they have a problem with Romans 6:11 because they still cannot overcome their temper. Romans 6:11 says that we should reckon ourselves to be dead, but many people have a problem applying this verse. When they are about to lose their temper, they hurriedly try to recite Romans 6:11, saying, “I have died, and since I have died, I can no longer lose my temper.” Yet this is not effective. Romans 6:11 is not about delivering us from the symptoms of sickness but about saving us from the sickness. It is useless if we try to apply it to our symptoms. If we try to reckon ourselves to be dead when we are about to lose our temper, we will still lose it. We may not lose it outwardly, but we will lose it inwardly.

What is the root of our temper? The simple answer lies with the self. If a man has not dealt with his self, he is heading in the wrong direction if he tries to deal with his temper. A man loses his temper because of the self. His self is his sickness; his temper is not his sickness. Because a man has the self, he has temper. If the self is dealt with before God, temper will be gone spontaneously. This is why the Bible pays attention to the self instead of our temper. Once the problem with the self is solved, the problem with

temper is solved as well. As long as the problem with the self remains, the problem with temper remains.

Concerning the self, there are several things that we should realize.

First, some people are very subjective. Those who are subjective are surely full of the self. They have opinions and concepts for everything, and they think that their concepts and opinions are never wrong. They also constantly insist on their opinions and proposals. They cannot stand any obstacles, frustrations, or breaking down. Their opinions must prevail and persist to the end. If anyone does not agree with their proposals or go along with their opinions, their subjective nature has no tolerance. Consequently, they lose their temper and become very angry. Brothers and sisters, if your eyes are only on your temper, you will never be healed of the sickness. Your sickness is your subjectivity and strong will; it is not your temper. Once your subjectivity is broken and your will and opinions are bruised, you will say to the Lord, "Lord, this is Your work, and I submit to You." If you do this, how can you lose your temper again? If you kneel down and say, "Lord, this is Your business; it is Your work" when your proposals are cut off, how can you lose your temper? It will be impossible for you to lose your temper. You only have a temper because you insist on your proposals and opinions. When you insist on your way of doing things, the self comes out and temper follows. No one can lose his temper if his self is removed. The root of your temper lies in the self. It is foolish to spend so much effort to deal with your temper while forgetting to deal with your self. Once a man believes in the Lord, the self must be broken. The self cannot remain whole before the Lord, and it is not worth keeping. If a man is free from the self, he will not lose his temper even when he is interrupted, frustrated, or tried.

Second, some people have a temper because they think they are better than others. They think highly of themselves and think that they are superb. In other words, they are proud. Everyone who is proud not only considers himself higher than others, but also demands that others admire and regard him highly. No proud person is satisfied with just having a high regard for himself. He is not content with just himself saying that he is good; he wants others to say that he is good. A proud person is not content with self-admiration; he wants everyone to admire him and the brothers and sisters to exalt him. If another brother does not appreciate his "worthiness," his "importance," or his high "spiritual attainment" or does not speak marvelously of him, he feels hurt and becomes angry! Where is the source of this anger? It comes from pride. A man becomes angry because he is

proud. Brothers and sisters, if you remove your pride, you will remove your temper. It is impossible to remove one's temper without first removing his pride. The root of temper is pride. You will not lose your temper if you are a humble person in the eyes of God, if you consider others' jesting, despising, and slandering as the discipline of the Holy Spirit, and if you accept this disciplining work, saying, "Lord, this is all for my own good; these things have happened to me because You want to deal with my pride. Lord, I thank You for Your perfecting work in these things." Then when a brother does not obey and instead damages your standing, you will feel that pride is wrong and that it is all right to be hurt. If you do this, you will not lose your temper; rather, you will say to the Lord, "It is right for You to deal with my pride." If you know God's hand, you will not lose your temper. Brothers and sisters, temper is not a sickness. If you deal with temper as if you were dealing with a sickness, you will never succeed. You have to learn to prostrate yourself before the Lord and say, "You can do whatever You want." If you put your self aside and are willing to deny and deal with your self, you will see that your strength to lose your temper will be gone, your motivation to lose your temper will be gone, and your temper will lose its grip.

Third, as a consequence of self-exaltation, you think that others should not be as highly regarded as you. You only want to see yourself being uplifted; you do not want to see others being uplifted. You only want to gain something for yourself; you do not want others to gain anything. You rejoice at others' failure and are sad at others' success. This is jealousy, and jealousy occurs not only in the secular realm but also in the spiritual realm. Those who are proud rejoice at their brothers' failures and are unhappy when they see their brothers standing. This is a despicable attitude. No attitude is more despicable. If a man rejoices when others fall, he is the same as Satan, who loves to see others fall. What a shame for God's children to have Satan's sentiment! The meanest and most despicable sentiment is one which rejoices rather than grieves over a brother's fall. The basis for this kind of feeling is the desire for the self to be exalted. One hopes to see everyone around him fall in order that he can be exalted. Brothers and sisters, a person who knows God wants to see both himself and others rise. Those who do not know God want to see themselves rise, yet do not want to see others rise. They even hope to see others fall so that they can be exalted by the contrast. This is a despicable sentiment. Temper often comes because there is jealousy in the heart. If you are a self-exalting

person, you will be angry if you see someone better and higher than you. Jealousy leads to anger. If you ignore jealousy and try to deal with just your temper, you will never succeed. You must uproot jealousy from your heart before you can remove your temper. If jealousy remains, your temper will flare up again and again.

Fourth, with some people the self is expressed in the form of self-love. They love themselves more than anyone else. Their attention is on themselves, and the only persons they treasure dearly are themselves. When it comes to eating, the most important ones to be taken care of are themselves. When it comes to lodging, the first ones to be taken care of are themselves. When it comes to bedding, the first ones to be taken care of are themselves. In everything related to the human life, the first ones in their mind are themselves. They want more benefit for themselves. They want more comfort for themselves. All of their thoughts are centered around themselves. They care for themselves and treasure themselves. When any discomfort comes their way, they become angry. Many people become angry because their self-love is hurt. They love themselves so much that they are not willing to suffer any hurt, pain, or embarrassment. Once their self-love is hurt and they fall into some discomfort, suffering, or embarrassment, they become very angry and lose their temper. Those who have learned this lesson before the Lord know that they live on this earth for the Lord and according to God's grace; they do not live according to their self-love. They live by His grace and not by their self-love. They realize that they live and stand because of His mercy and protection. When they live this way, they do not lose their temper even if they are very justified in doing so. Their self-love has been dealt with. Brothers and sisters, I hope that we realize that all of our temper stems from the self. If the self is not dealt with, temper will remain. We cannot expect anyone to stop their temper if the self is not dealt with. Those who do not deal with themselves will find that their temper is still with them.

Fifth, some brothers and sisters love themselves so much that they care only for their own things. They are only interested in their own affairs and have no interest in the affairs of others. They have no interest in helping others. Their conduct and thoughts are centered around themselves. They are the most important persons, and their affairs are the most important affairs. Their thoughts are on themselves, and whatever they do is for themselves. They are busy for themselves, and they care for themselves. Therefore, they have no time left for others. If others bother them, they

become irritated, and their temper flares up. Their activities are centered around themselves, and they have no sympathy for others. They love themselves so much that they have no time to sympathize with others. They are so busy with themselves that they have no strength to bear others' sorrow. Many people lose their temper when others infringe upon their self-centered love; they feel disgusted and bothered, and they are impatient and angry. The root of all anger is in man's self. If we are not self-centered and are able to sympathize with others and if we learn to love others, we will not feel bothered and angry when others trouble us. We will feel that it is a joy to help others and that by helping others we are serving God. Therefore, we must not deal just with our temper, because it is not the root. We must deal with the root of the sickness. If our self is dealt with, our temper will be gone. The more thoroughly we deal with the self, the more our temper will go away.

Sixth, some people love not only themselves, but they have other kinds of love—they love things; they love money. Some people are not yet delivered from material possessions. Money and material possessions are precious to them. All kinds of things are precious to them. They have a self that craves things, objects. The expression of the self in these people is in their love for objects. If someone comes to their house and breaks an object or loses something that belongs to them, they become very angry because they are hurt; the self which is attached to the objects is hurt, and the result is anger. The cause of their anger lies within themselves, not in others. If you hit a piece of wood with your hand, what kind of sound will you hear? You will hear the sound of wood. If you knock on the wall, what kind of sound will you hear? You will hear the sound of the wall. If you knock on a piece of glass, what kind of sound will you hear? You will hear the sound of glass. The hand is the same, and the knocking is the same, but the sounds that are produced are different. One is wood, and the sound is the sound of wood. One is a wall, and the sound is the sound of a wall. One is glass, and the sound is the sound of glass. Different objects have different sounds because the nature of these things is different. An outward phenomenon is an expression of the inward nature of something. Our temper is within; it is not outside of us. If the self is gone, the environment cannot stir up our temper. A man loses his temper because there is the element of self within him. As long as the self is within, he will lose his temper given the right environment. The environment does not produce the temper; it merely brings out the temper that is within.

In conclusion, anger comes from man's self. As long as a person is angry, it means that a certain aspect of the self has not been dealt with. Perhaps many aspects of the self have not been dealt with, or perhaps one particular aspect of the self remains. Therefore, the extent to which one's temper is dealt with depends on the extent to which the self has been dealt with before the Lord. The more thoroughly a man's self is dealt with, the more he is delivered from his temper. If the self is not clearly dealt with, his temper will remain.

We should not be so foolish as to just deal with our temper. We should remember that the problem of self is much deeper than the problem of temper. If we do not deal with the self, our temper will always be present. As we learn to prostrate ourselves before the Lord, we will be enlightened concerning the condition of the self, and God's mercy will bring about many things in our circumstances. If we have learned some lessons before the Lord, we will bow our head when these things come upon us and say, "Lord, Your arrangements are the best. It is good that You deal with my self this way. I submit and I accept these dealings." If you do this, your anger will not be vented. If you do not know the Lord's hand, like a mule that is without understanding, you will think that men or the environment are inflicting these dealings on you. When your eyes are set on men and the environment, you will be rebellious and angry. It is useless for a person to deal with his temper without first dealing with the self. We have to see that the root of temper is in us. Temper in a Christian is a sign of his refusal to accept the arrangement of the Holy Spirit in his environment. We have to learn to accept the discipline of the Holy Spirit and set ourselves aside. We have to realize the futility of the self. If we do these things, the problem of temper will be solved spontaneously.

Immediately after believing in the Lord, we should deal with the problem of temper. We should not allow this problem to continue; nor should we deal with it only after we have been Christians for many years. A Christian should be one who denies himself. He should not be subjective, proud, jealous, self-loving, or self-caring, and he should not love money. We need to deny the self and realize that everything that comes upon us is under the Spirit's arrangement for our own good. We should learn to accept everything. We should not deal with our temper as a symptom, but we should deal with the root of the sickness. We cannot deal with our temper without dealing with the self. Where there is temper, there is the self. We have a quick temper because we have a quick disposition. However, do not

think that those who are slow will not lose their temper. They lose their temper as well, except in a different way. As long as there is the self, there is temper. Brothers and sisters, in order for us not to lose our temper, we have to deal with the self. Once we are enlightened concerning the self, we will be delivered from our temper.

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, set 2, volume 38, chapter 62)

SECTION IV:

SISTERS' LIVING

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PURSUING CHRIST FOR SATISFACTION

God created us for the accomplishment of His eternal economy in His own image with the intention that we could become Him in life and nature but not in the Godhead. For this purpose He created us with a spirit to receive Him. Many people do not realize that God also created us with a seeking heart for Himself so that He could be our satisfaction.

Man fell away from God, and sin through Satan came in to frustrate man from receiving God for his satisfaction. Yet the desire for God, the seeking for God, still remains in man's heart. History tells us that over the past six thousand years many wise, great, philosophical, and thoughtful men have given the same testimony that nothing can fully satisfy man. Regardless of what they could get from the world, what they could attain, or what they could obtain, nothing can satisfy them because within them there is a seeking heart for God (Eccl. 3:11). This is why the wise King Solomon, after his many human experiences, concluded, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (1:2). Everything under the sun is vanity of vanities if one does not have God. God created purposely within man a desire for Himself. The monks in Buddhism and the nuns in Catholicism have this desire, but they do not have the proper understanding of how to seek God. God has given man a heart that is seeking after Him for satisfaction.

I. PURSUING CHRIST

Song of Songs is a book in the Bible that tells us how we can be satisfied properly with God. There is no other way except by pursuing after Christ, because Christ is the very embodiment of the Triune God. He is the reality of God. He is God in reality, God's embodiment, coming to earth to give people the opportunity to receive Him for satisfaction.

Peter may be counted as the first one among the apostles and Paul was a later one. They were seekers of God, but initially they took the wrong way. Eventually, both Peter, a fisherman, and Paul, a learned scholar, found the way to seek Christ for satisfaction. Paul told us in Philippians 3 that we have to pursue Christ to gain Him (vv. 12-14) because He is the most excellent way. All things other than Christ are dung (v. 8). Only Christ is excellent. Whatever we obtain or have obtained other than Christ is vanity.

Paul says that it is dung. Do you like dung? But today many worldly people are gaining dung day after day. Dung is their food. Solomon says that they are pursuing vanity. Vanity of vanities is what they are eating. That is their food. Paul's desire was to gain Christ, and he instructed us how to gain Christ as he did.

In this message our point is that we have to pursue Christ for satisfaction. Song of Songs opens in this way: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" (1:2a). The seeker longs for kisses, not just one kiss. The most impressive thing about weddings in the Western world is the time of kissing. The bridegroom opens the bride's veil to kiss her with his own mouth. He does not kiss the ears or the nose of the bride but her mouth. This is the most personal and affectionate thing. Here is a book in the Bible that opens in such a way: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." This is what it means to pursue Christ.

According to the New Testament, God's ordained way for man to receive Him in this kind of personal and affectionate way is first to believe in Him. To believe in Him is to receive Him as the divine life into us that we may have an organic union with God in the divine life. Regretfully, very few Christians know what believing in Christ means. They know that they need to take Him as Savior and Redeemer, but they do not know that to believe in Christ is to receive Him as the divine life into us so that we can have an organic union with God in His divine life. This is the first step.

Now that we have received Christ into us, what does God want us to do? Many Christian teachers teach people in the wrong way. They say that after one has believed in Christ, he should do many things. This is wrong. According to the New Testament, after we believe in Christ, after we receive Him as the divine life into us, we have to love Him (see 1 Cor. 2:9 and note 3—Recovery Version). Paul told us that the Lord's grace superabounded to him with faith and love in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 1:14). Faith is to receive Christ, and love is to pursue Christ.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." This word indicates that to some extent the seeker has obtained a part of Christ's love, but now she wants something more intimate. She wants to be kissed not just with one kiss but with the kisses of His mouth. Someone who is affectionate with another may kiss him on the cheek, but this expression of affection is not the first category of love. On the wedding day who would want to see the bridegroom kiss his bride on the cheek? He is expected to kiss his bride on the mouth as the expression of his utmost affection.

In her desire to be kissed with the kisses of His mouth, the seeker goes on to say, “For your love is better than wine” (1:2b). She does not say that His love is as good as wine but that it is better than wine. Wine cheers but Christ’s love cheers us in an unrivaled way. No wine can compare with His unrivaled love. Nothing is so cheering as Christ’s love.

Verse 3 says, “Your anointing oils have a pleasant fragrance;/ Your name is like ointment poured forth;/Therefore the virgins love you.” Christ’s name signifies Christ’s person, His being, and Christ is the compound Spirit signified by the anointing ointment in Exodus 30. “The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45b). This indicates that Christ’s name as His person is the anointing ointment. An ointment is always a compound. Christ is compounded with God, with man, with His death, with the effectiveness of His death, with His resurrection, and with the power of His resurrection. At least these six things are compounded together to be the anointing ointment, signifying Christ in His resurrection as the compound Spirit. If someone says your name, you respond because you are the person of that name. Christ’s charming name, His person, is the all-inclusive, compound Spirit.

His love is attracting, His name is charming, and His person is captivating. He has drawn and captivated millions of His lovers to pursue after Him and is still doing the same today. Therefore, all His lovers would run after Him for their satisfaction. This is why the seeker prays, “Draw me; we will run after you” (S.S. 1:4a).

II. THE NEED FOR A PERSONAL AND AFFECTIONATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Dear saints, in this message I want to impress you with something particular. After you have received Christ as your life, you must have a very personal seeking after Christ. No one can represent you or do anything for you in this matter. It must be personal. Every believer’s relationship with Christ must be personal and affectionate.

God works in a personal and affectionate way, not in the way of a movement. Mao Tse-tung gained the people of China by a movement, not by personal contact and affection. Even many in Christianity like to use the term movement. Some say that at John Wesley’s time in Oxford there was a movement. They also say that there was a great movement, a great revival, in Wales at the beginning of this century. This concept of having a

movement is wrong. We do not want to have a movement in the Lord's recovery. A person can be moved to join a movement and not have any personal contact with the Lord. Recently, we have stressed that God became a man that man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Although many responded to this truth, I was not very happy, because this response was a movement. In order to practice such a high truth, we need the personal and affectionate experience of Christ.

Since we have been born of God, we have become His children (John 1:12-13). John 3:6 says, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Since God is Spirit and we were born of Him, what are we? That which is born of a cow, is a cow. That which is born of Chinese, is Chinese. Also, that which is born of God as the Spirit is spirit. This is logical. A paraphrased version of John 3:6 could read this way: "He that is born of God the Spirit is the spirit-God." We were regenerated of God as the Spirit to be a spirit. As those who have been born of God, we are the children of God, the same as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Therefore, our relationship with God has to be personal and affectionate.

In these days I feel very much that there is a warm, intimate, close affection between me and my God. The seeker said, "Draw me." She did not say, "Draw us." Draw me is personal. We want a drawing from the Lord that is His personal and affectionate doing. We want Him to be with us in a personal and affectionate way. All the religions, including Christianity, present a portrait of God which is inaccurate. They portray God merely as great, almighty, sovereign, majestic, and even unapproachable; no one can or even dares to touch God. To say that God is majestic is not wrong, but that is only one attribute of the divine Being. Regardless of how great, sovereign, almighty, and majestic God is, when He wanted to build up His relationship with man He took the personal, affectionate way. He took the way of becoming a man. If the Lord Jesus had come to Peter in a majestic way, Peter would have felt threatened. But He did not come to Peter as the majestic, untouchable God. Instead, He came to Peter as his countryman. Peter was a Galilean, and Jesus was also a Galilean. This is personal and affectionate.

The Lord Jesus lived among men for thirty-three and a half years. This was the way in which God came to build up His relationship with man. This is the personal, affectionate way recorded in the New Testament from the incarnation to the day of resurrection. On the morning of His resurrection, the Lord's empty tomb was discovered by three sisters (Mark 16:1). When

they entered into the tomb, an angel gave them a message from the Lord, saying, “Go, tell His disciples and Peter...” (v. 7). Peter’s name mentioned in this way is personal and affectionate. Peter’s intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus was particular, so it was stressed even by the angel. At the beginning of his contact with the Lord, Peter’s response was not too personal, but gradually Peter’s transaction with the Lord became personal and affectionate.

The apostle John could lie on the Lord’s bosom (John 13:23). How personal and affectionate that was! The very God, the very Lord whom we seek, sets up a feast and invites us to feast with Him (Rev. 3:20). We must have such a personal and affectionate contact with Him. If we mail someone a letter, that affects him in a certain way. But if we come to him with a personal visitation and an affectionate contact, that makes a great difference.

Hymns, #437 (stanzas 1 and 6 with the chorus) says:

Hast thou heard Him, seen Him, known Him?

Is not thine a captured heart?

Chief among ten thousand own Him;

Joyful choose the better part.

Captivated by His beauty,

Worthy tribute haste to bring;

Let His peerless worth constrain thee,

Crown Him now unrivaled King.

‘Tis that look that melted Peter,

‘Tis that face that Stephen saw,

‘Tis that heart that wept with Mary,

Can alone from idols draw:

Only the face of tears that Peter saw, only the face of glory into which Stephen looked, and only the heart that wept with Mary can keep us away from the idols, the attractions, of this world. The Bible tells us that Jesus wept with Mary (John 11:35). Have you ever heard that God weeps? Many say that Jesus came to express God, but they mainly refer to the miracles He did, not to the tears that He shed.

Dear saints, my burden in this message is to share that you have to start seeking the Lord in a personal and affectionate way. I want to stress these

two words: personal and affectionate. The very God whom we pursue is personal and affectionate.

I have been in the Lord's fellowship for about seventy years, but there was one particular occasion when the Lord touched me in the most personal and affectionate way. In 1943 Japan invaded and occupied China. One day the military police of the invading Japanese army arrested me and imprisoned me for thirty days. Every day I was subjected to two very stern and strict examinations. At that time the Chinese knew how cruel the invading Japanese army was. They would kill a Chinese as they would a chicken. I do not believe that there were many Chinese who were arrested by the Japanese army and released after thirty days. All my relatives, friends, and brothers and sisters in the church were very concerned for my life.

On the first day of my imprisonment, the Japanese military police put me into a soldier's bedroom; that night the Lord gave me a dream, indicating to me that the Japanese army would not hurt me. The next day they began to interrogate me. They threatened to pour cold water upon me if I did not tell the truth. I said to myself, "You don't need to threaten me, because I will surely speak the truth. I am a man of truth." After many times of their testing, they could not find anything wrong with me. After fifteen days of being imprisoned, I was alone in my small cell in the night. I stood up and I can testify that the Lord was in my presence embracing me. I said with tears, "Lord, You know why I am here." This experience of the Lord was personal to the uttermost. In my whole life I never had a time like that in which the Lord was so personal to me. I was so personal and affectionate to Him, and He was the same to me.

We all need this kind of personal, affectionate, intimate contact with the Lord every day. This has become my habit. Every morning after rising up I go to my desk and the first thing I say is, "Lord Jesus, I love You." I am not just a poor man praying to a merciful God, but I am contacting a Savior who is personal and affectionate to me, as I am personal and affectionate to Him. We all need to take heed to what the seeker says: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" Right away her tone changes: "Your love is better than wine." This is a personal, intimate prayer. "Draw me; we will run after you." This is personal and affectionate. We need this kind of personal and affectionate seeking after Him, and we need to build up such a relationship with Him that is so personal and affectionate.

(Crystallization-study of Song of Songs, Msg. 1)

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FELLOWSHIPING

IN THE INNER CHAMBERS OF CHRIST

In saving us and in building up a relationship with us, God came to visit us personally and affectionately. How personal and affectionate Jesus was in the Gospels! But this was His visitation to His chosen people in the physical life. He was a man physically, but was not yet the Spirit.

One day He told His disciples of His intention to die. They could not understand this. They thought that He had come to build up the kingdom of God and that they would be with Him on the throne. James and John wanted to sit at His right and left in His kingdom. When the other ten heard this, they were indignant, showing that they also were ambitious to be with the Lord on the throne (Matt. 20:20-28). They were in the physical realm.

Through His death and in His resurrection, He became “another kind of Jesus.” He was no longer physical, because He became a life-giving Christ, a life-giving Spirit. The last Adam, who was Jesus in the flesh, became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). I would like to ask, “Are you still preaching and ministering a physical Jesus or a pneumatic Christ?” Mostly, those in Christianity preach a physical Savior, but the Bible unveils to us that this physical Savior, after He accomplished God’s full redemption through His death, changed into a life-giving Spirit in resurrection. They do not believe that Christ has become another kind of Person, not physical but spiritual.

When Christ was in the flesh, He could visit His disciples outwardly and openly, but there was no possibility for Him to visit His disciples inwardly and privately. Today Christ visits us privately and spiritually because He is the life-giving, compound, consummated, all-inclusive Spirit. He is the Spirit as the consummation of the processed and consummated Triune God, so He visits people secretly, privately, not openly.

I. THE KING, CHRIST, BRINGING US

INTO HIS INNER CHAMBERS,

OUR REGENERATED SPIRIT

First, in Song of Songs the Lord captivates His seeker, and she with all her companions follows Him. To pursue Christ for satisfaction is the first “crystal” in Song of Songs. The second crystal is the King bringing His seeker into His inner chambers. Song of Songs is a book of figures. In a figure of speech, the king’s inner chambers signify our regenerated spirit as Christ’s inner chambers.

God created man that man may become Him by His being received by man so that He can enter into and stay in man. For this reason God created us with a spirit. According to the New Testament teaching, our regenerated spirit is not only for us to have a means to receive Him but also for us to contain Him. Second Timothy 4:22 says, “The Lord be with your spirit.” Ephesians 3:16 says that we need to be strengthened into our inner man. The inner man is our regenerated spirit. Ephesians 2:22 shows that our spirit is a habitation, a dwelling place, to God. The real inner chambers to God are our spirit.

Regretfully, the majority of Christians in today’s Christianity do not believe that there is such a thing as the human spirit. They say that the human spirit is synonymous with man’s soul or heart. The Chinese translation of the Bible mixes up the heart, the soul, and the spirit by using the terms “spirit-soul” or “heart-spirit.” Not many Christians today know definitely that they have a spirit. When I came to the United States in the early 1960s I began to teach concerning the human spirit. Many told me that before I taught this, they never knew that they had a spirit.

There are three verses in the New Testament that show the divine Spirit and the regenerated human spirit. John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit.” In this verse are God the Spirit and our spirit, with which we worship God the Spirit. John 3:6 says, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.” I came to the United States with a burden to release all the high-peak truths. One among these is the human spirit. Another is that Christ, as the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit. Christ as the life-giving Spirit dwells in our human spirit, and these two spirits are mingled together to be one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

In this message we want to stress the words private and spiritual. Christianity preaches the physical Jesus, but we preach the pneumatic Christ, the Christ who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). This One is private and spiritual. We have seen that the king’s chambers signify our spirit. He visits us in our spirit privately, and He comes to us in a spiritual way, not a

physical way. He visits us privately as the all-inclusive, consummated Spirit.

Christ the King brings His seekers into His chambers, that is into their regenerated spirit, His dwelling place. Let us consider the application of this. When I was young, I was taught to pray to God as the heavenly Father. I was also told not to pray to the Spirit, because in the entire New Testament you cannot find a verse concerning praying to the Spirit. But the more we pray, the more we have the feeling that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us (Eph. 4:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rom. 8:9). According to our experience, our spirit is the Holy of Holies—the dwelling place, the inner chambers, of the Triune God. In this first chapter of Song of Songs He and we have the private and affectionate fellowship.

The seeker in Song of Songs prayed, “Draw me; we will run after you.” Then the king drew her and she followed, but she did not know where to go. The King knows where to go. We must go to our spirit. The inner chambers of Christ are His lovers’ regenerated spirits mingled with and indwelt by Him as the life-dispensing Spirit (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:11) and are the practical Holy of Holies in Christ’s lovers for their participation in and enjoyment of the pneumatic Christ as the consummated Triune God (Heb. 4:16).

After we were saved we began to pray and eventually we realized that the heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit are all in us. But at that time we did not know in what part of our being the Triune God dwelt. We did not know that we had a human spirit, but gradually we found out that the Triune God dwells in our regenerated spirit. The seeker followed the Lord, and He immediately brought her to her regenerated spirit to have fellowship with Him.

II. SINFUL IN ADAM BUT JUSTIFIED IN CHRIST

Song of Songs 1:4b-8 shows the fellowship in the mingled spirit of Christ’s lovers (2 Cor. 13:14; Rom. 8:4b). This fellowship is in the joy of Christ’s lover with her companions, in their extolling His unrivaled love (S.S. 1:4c). She and her companions extol the Lord’s love, but this seeker stands out. She says, “I am black but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, / Like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon” (v. 5). Kedar is a place in Arabia. The black tents of Kedar were dried up by the sun, but the lovely

curtains of Solomon were within the king's home. She was black because of the scorching sun: "Do not look at me, because I am black,/Because the sun has scorched me" (v. 6a). In her fellowship with the Lord, she was enlightened to see that she was a sinner in Adam (black) but that she has been justified in Christ (lovely). She stands out among her companions as one who is pleasant to God and man. She wants the Lord Himself, whereas the others are satisfied in a general way. She was enlightened to see that although she is sinful in Adam, she is beautiful in Christ in the eyes of God.

III. RECEIVING THE REVELATION CONCERNING HOW TO ENTER THE CHURCH LIFE

Then the seeker said, "My mother's sons were angry with me;/They made me keeper of the vineyards,/But my own vineyard I have not kept./Tell me, you whom my soul loves, Where do you pasture your flock?/Where do you make it lie down at noon?/For why should I be like one who is veiled/ Beside the flocks of your companions?" (vv. 6b-7). "My mother's sons" signifies the denominational brothers who persecute the seeking one. Noon is the time when the sun is at its highest, a scorching time. The seeker wanted to know where the Lord makes His flock lie down at noon. At the time of hardships, she needed someone to shepherd her. She was telling the Lord, "Lord, I want to have You. I don't want to miss You. I want to enjoy Your presence. Bring me to where You shepherd Your flock at noon, so that I can be under Your shelter to have rest and satisfaction." Christ's presence has two issues. If you have Christ's presence, you have Christ's rest and satisfaction.

The seeker received the revelation concerning how to enter the church life. The seeker realized that she was separated from Christ's flock by the denominational people and that she needed Christ's feeding and rest with satisfaction (vv. 6b-7; John 10:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). Christ led us into our spirit and in our spirit, in fellowship with Him, He directed us to the church life. She was instructed by Christ to leave the place where she was kept away from the church and go forth on the footsteps of the flock (S.S. 1:8a). The flock is the church in the proper sense according to the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. The footsteps of the flock have laid a line showing us the proper way to follow the Lord in His recovery.

In the Lord's care for His seeker, the Lord was very wise. She was seeking after the Lord for her own satisfaction. That was her concern. But the

Lord's concern with His saved sinners is not just for their satisfaction but for God's eternal economy. Thus, the concerns are different. Our concern is very low, personal, but the Lord's concern is God's economy. God's economy is to save sinners to gain the churches, so that the essence of these churches can become the organic Body of Christ for the consummation of the New Jerusalem. The Lord's intention in saving us is for us to be in the church so that we can be built up in the Body of Christ and be in the consummation of God's economy, the New Jerusalem.

First, God saves us; then the Lord leads us to know how to contact Him in our spirit privately and spiritually. Because we want to enjoy His rich presence with His rest and satisfaction, He tells us clearly that He is only with His flock, the church. The essence of the church is the organic Body of Christ which consummates the New Jerusalem. After we were saved, our concern was merely for our satisfaction, but Christ's concern is God's satisfaction, to have His eternal economy accomplished by having us as the members of the church, the essence of which is the organic Body of Christ, which ultimately consummates in the New Jerusalem. We have to learn to say that our concern is God's concern for the church, for the Body of Christ, and for the New Jerusalem.

What I am doing is building the New Jerusalem and will be consummated in the New Jerusalem. My concern is not soul-winning, nor is it just for us to have satisfaction. My concern is for others to be brought into the church life through Christ's private, spiritual fellowship. When we fellowship with Christ privately and spiritually, He will direct our feet to go forth on the footsteps of the flock. Then we will be in the church for the Body of Christ and for the consummation of the New Jerusalem.

(Crystallization-study of Song of Songs, Msg. 2)

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE EXERCISE OF SPEAKING

I. WORDS REVEALING A PERSON'S HEART

Speaking occupies a great part of a person's life. It is, in fact, a very crucial part of his life. The Lord Jesus said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). A person's words express his heart; they reveal the things in his heart. It is not easy to know a man through his conduct, but it is very easy to know a man through his words. A person's conduct may often give others the wrong impression, view, and judgment of him, but it is very easy to know a person through his words because no one can easily restrain or control his own words. Out of the depth of a man's heart the mouth speaks. A man speaks from the fullness of his heart. If a man lies and deceives with his mouth, it means that lies and deceits rest in his heart. When a person does not open his mouth, it is difficult to know his heart. Once he speaks, his heart is exposed. When a person is silent, no one can know his spirit. Once he speaks, others can touch his spirit through his words. His condition before God will be exposed. After we believe in the Lord, we must undergo a fundamental training in the way we live and speak. Our past ways and walk must be completely laid aside. From the day we believe, we have to start everything anew, even the way we speak. We must take care of and pay attention to the way we speak.

II. DEALING WITH LIES

There are four or five portions in the Word that tell us how to speak.

John 8:44 says, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it."

When Satan speaks a lie, he speaks out of his own possessions. He is a liar. Moreover, he is the father of liars. This world contains more lies than anything else on earth. Satan has as many liars as those who are called his. He has as many people lying for him as the number of subjects under his hand. He needs lies to establish his kingdom, and he needs lies to overturn God's work. Everyone who is born of Satan can lie and is engaged in the

work of lying. Once a person is saved and becomes God's child, the first lesson he needs to learn is to deal with his words before God. We should reject all lies. We also should reject inaccurate, exaggerated, or distorted words. We should reject all conscious or unconscious lies. God's children must rid themselves of all lies. As long as some lies remain, Satan will have the ground to attack us.

A. Lies Being Common

A person never knows how well he lies until he tries to reject lies. The more he tries to reject lies, the more he will find out how well he lies. Even the inclination of his heart is toward lies. There are more lies in this world than we can imagine. There are also more lies in us than we can imagine. We will not know how much we lie until we try to reject lies. When we try to reject them, we will find out how many there are. There are too many lies in the world, and there are too many lies in us. It is sad that lies seem to be unavoidable even among God's children. It is sad that lies occupy such a place among us. The Lord's Word is both serious and clear. Everyone who lies is a child of Satan, and Satan is the father of all liars. The most unfortunate thing in the whole world is for the satanic seed of lying to remain in the hearts of God's children. We cannot remain believers for years yet remain indifferent toward our lies. It will be too late if we wait for many years to deal with them. We have to learn to speak accurately as soon as we believe in the Lord.

B. What Lies Are

1. Double-tongued

To be double-tongued is to lie. A person is lying when he first says one thing and then turns around and says something else, when he first says yes and then no, when he first says that something is good and then says that it is bad, or when he first agrees that something is right and then says that it is wrong. This is not just a matter of a wavering mind but a matter of lying.

2. Speaking according to What One Likes or Dislikes

We tell others what we like and keep silent about what we do not like. We speak about what is profitable to us and keep silent about things that are not profitable to us. This is also a kind of lying. Many people purposely

withhold half of a story. They withhold the things that are profitable to others, especially things that are profitable to their enemies, and remain silent about them. Instead, they talk about things that hurt, damage, or bring loss to others. This is lying. Many people do not speak according to truth and reality, but according to their own likes and dislikes. Many words are not based on facts but on sentiments. Such people speak certain things because they like to speak them, or they speak about certain persons because they like them. They change their tone when the conversation turns to people or things they do not like. This kind of speaking is totally according to one's likes and dislikes. It is speaking according to one's emotion, not according to truth and reality. Please keep in mind that this is lying. Inaccurate words are a serious sin. Willful deception is even more serious, and it is a greater sin before God. We must not speak according to our emotion but according to facts. Either we must not speak at all, or we must speak according to facts and the truth. We cannot speak according to our feeling. If we do, we are lying willfully before God.

3. Speaking according to One's Hopes

Furthermore, we must learn to put away our own feelings; we should not have any expectations of others. Many words today represent hopes rather than facts. They do not convey facts; they only convey a man's hopes. A person often reviles a sister or a brother according to his sentiment rather than according to fact. He only hopes that a sister is as bad as he thinks, yet he speaks as if the sister is indeed that bad. Or he only hopes that a brother will fall, yet he speaks as if the brother has fallen already. He speaks according to what he wishes would happen, not according to what has actually happened. Do you see the fundamental problem here? Often a person speaks according to what he expects in his heart. His words do not convey what has actually happened. Rather than speaking of the actual situation, he speaks of what he expects the situation to be.

4. Adding One's Own Thoughts

Why is it that many words are altered when they pass from one mouth to another? A statement often is changed completely after passing through three or four mouths. Why? This is because each person adds his own thoughts instead of finding out the facts. No one tries to find out the facts, yet everyone tries to add his own thoughts. This is lying.

There is one basic principle of speaking: One must not speak according to his feeling or hope. A person is lying when he is not speaking according to truth and reality but according to expectation and hope. We should learn to speak according to facts and not express any opinion of our own. If we are giving our opinion, we need to make it clear that this is our opinion. When we are speaking a fact, we need to state that this is a fact. We must separate our opinions from facts. We should not mix facts with our opinions. What we think a person is and what a person actually is are two different things. At the most we can say that the fact indicates one thing but we have a different thought concerning the matter.

5. Exaggeration

There is another type of lie which is very prevalent in the church—exaggeration. Please bear in mind that inaccurate numbers and inaccurate words, as well as the love of big words, strong words, or exaggerated words, are different forms of lies because there is falsehood in all of them.

Today if you want to know where a saint's heart is before the Lord, all you have to do is tell him something and ask him to tell others about it. You will immediately know where his heart is before the Lord. A person who fears God, who has learned the proper lessons, and who has been dealt with by God will consider speaking a great thing. He will not dare to speak carelessly or spread words carelessly. He will pay attention to accurate words. When you commit a word to a person who has not been dealt with or disciplined by the Lord, he will spread the word zealously. In his spreading you will find that he is a frivolous, deceitful, and dishonest person. He can add many words of his own and withhold words that should be spoken.

6. Inflated Numbers

When many people speak, inflated numbers are quoted. No church in Shanghai has a sitting capacity of five thousand. Any preacher with some training will know the capacity of a hall with just one look. However, many reports about revival meetings have described the attendance at ten or even twenty thousand people. Even if every person stood on the head of another, there would still not be enough room for everyone. Yet these are words from Christian workers. This is exaggeration! This kind of exaggeration is

lying. We magnify others' mistakes and minimize our own. We exaggerate others' errors and try the best to reduce our own. This is lying as well.

C. Conscientiously Learning to Be an Honest Person

Today I cannot say that all of God's children become honest after they are saved. If they set their minds before the Lord to learn these lessons for five years, perhaps they will be an honest person by the end of the five years. Allow me to say a strong word: A person must continually reject all kinds of lies. Whenever you find yourself speaking something inaccurately, you have to repudiate it relentlessly. If you practice this, perhaps you will become an honest person after three or five years. You cannot expect a person who is careless and capricious about his speaking to become an honest person overnight. Lies and inaccuracies are common maladies among Christians. Everyone in this world follows Satan and everyone lies. Some people are slow, while others are smart, but everyone lies. Some lie without skill while others lie with skill, but everyone lies. We need to deal with the Lord constantly so that we are warned as soon as we lie or touch the spirit of lying.

How important it is to be honest, yet how unnatural it is to be honest! Our very nature is dishonest, and from the time we were born, we have lied. We like to speak according to our preference, but not according to truth. A child must learn to do things step by step from the very beginning of his human life. As God's children, we also need to learn our lessons from the very beginning. If we become careless, we will lie and speak inaccurate words.

The problem of lying is a very common one. It is the darkest sin and the most common sin. Many people regard this as a light matter. If we have a problem with our speaking, two things will happen: First, the church will find itself filled with death, and Christians will find it impossible to walk in oneness. Second, God cannot make us ministers of His word, and our usefulness will stop. We can still speak a little on the Bible, on truth, and on doctrine, and we can still give a speech, but we will not be able to serve as ministers of God's word. In order to be a minister of God's word, one must be honest in his speaking. If he is not honest, God cannot use him.

May we all see the need to reject lies. We should not speak according to our own desire. We should reject all lies completely. We should not speak in a subjective way, but in an objective way. We should speak according to

facts, according to what we hear, and not according to how we feel. If God's children practice this, a straight path will await them.

III. NO IDLE WORDS

Another type of words which should never come out of our mouth is idle words. Matthew 12:35-37 says, "The good man, out of his good treasure, brings forth good things, and the evil man, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil things. And I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

Before the Lord Jesus said this, He said, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt; for by the fruit the tree is known" (v. 33). According to the context, the fruit does not refer to one's conduct, but to one's word. This means that a person's words are good if that person is good, and a person's words are evil if that person is evil. We know a person by the words he speaks. There are some who gossip day and night. They tell tales all the time about others and are full of slander, railing, criticism, and judgment. Their mouths are filled with all kinds of filthy, dirty, and evil things. It is obvious that they are corrupt trees.

The problem among God's children today is that they cannot judge others by the words they speak. They cannot judge, because they are the same. The Lord tells us that the good man, out of his good treasure, brings forth good things, and the evil man, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil things. The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. By its fruit the tree is known.

If a brother spreads evil, critical, or sinful things all the time, we do not need to determine whether his words are true. We can tell him that his act of spreading such things is itself an unclean matter. We must realize that the words of God's children are the fruit of their mouth. No one whose heart is holy will speak filthy things. No one whose heart is filled with love will speak hatred. By its fruit the tree is known.

This does not mean that we can speak anything as long as it is true and factual. Sometimes it is not a matter of whether or not something is a fact. Something may be a fact, a definite fact, yet it should not be a fruit of our mouth. It may be true, but we should not utter it. This is not a matter of

truth, but a matter of idle words. The word may be true, but it is an idle word. I have just said that our speaking must be according to facts. However, not all facts need to be spoken. We cannot and we need not speak idle words.

The Lord said, “And I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment” (v. 36). Idle words from a Christian’s mouth will not be spoken once but twice. Whatever is spoken carelessly today will be repeated again in the future. It will be repeated in full, sentence by sentence. When it is repeated the second time, we will be justified or condemned based on it. We will have to render an account on the judgment day for every idle word we have spoken. I hope that God’s children will learn to fear Him. We should learn to reject every inaccurate word and to speak accurately. We should never speak about things that do not concern us, and we should not say anything that reaps no benefit to others or to ourselves.

One can tell how much a person has been dealt with by the Lord by the words out of his mouth. No one who has been disciplined by God has an undisciplined mouth. A person who lies or who speaks idle and careless words is of little use to God; he is good only for the day of judgment. We have to learn this lesson from the beginning. Those who speak defiled words are defiled persons. Those who speak corrupted words are corrupted in themselves. The kind of words we speak reveals the kind of persons we are. By its fruit a tree is known. By our words we are known.

It is important that we pay attention to this matter. We know a brother by the way he speaks. Today the church is filled with lies and idle words. How strange it is that few children of God ever condemn them! No one among us has the right to speak any idle words.

IV. NO EVIL WORDS

First Peter 3:9-12 says, “Not rendering evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing one another, because you were called to this, that you might inherit blessing. For ‘he who desires to love life and see good days, let him cause his tongue to cease from evil and his lips to speak no guile. And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it; for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears incline to their petition; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’”

Another kind of words which should never come out of a Christian's mouth is evil words. What are evil words? Evil words are words of reviling, words of cursing. A child of God cannot render evil for evil or reviling for reviling.

A. Learning to Speak Words of Blessing

Many people think that they have the right to speak a certain way because others have spoken the same way. Today the world argues about who said what first, but the Lord is concerned about whether or not one has spoken at all. We may ask, "Since others have already said this, can I not say it as well?", but please bear in mind that we cannot render evil for evil or reviling for reviling. It is not a matter of who spoke first, but a matter of whether or not you spoke at all.

A new believer must learn to speak words of blessing from the very beginning. Do not allow reviling or cursing to come out of your mouth.

B. Controlling One's Temper

Furthermore, a person must control his temper. He must control his temper before he can control his words before God. A person's words are not controlled if his temper is not controlled. Many evil words come out of a person's mouth because his temper is not controlled. If God's children are not exercised, reviling and filthy words will come out of their mouths. Many people do not know how to control their temper, and their mouths are full of reviling words. On the one hand, these words do not glorify God. On the other hand, they deprive a person of any blessing from God.

V. BEING RESTRICTED IN WORDS

Now we need to see what we should pay attention to in our speaking. James 3 specifically deals with our words. Verses 1 through 12 deal with how God's children should speak.

A. Not Becoming Many Teachers

Verse 1 says, "Do not become many teachers, my brothers." Why? "Knowing that we will receive greater judgment." The most outstanding characteristic of those who are undisciplined in their words is their desire to be teachers. Wherever they go, they like to teach. Wherever they are, they have something to say. They want to be teachers of others under any

circumstance. They can give their lectures free of charge. Many people like to be teachers and counselors. When they are among others, they always have a great deal to say. Do you see the problem here? A Christian must not only stop lying, gossiping, and speaking evil words. He should not even be wordy at all. No matter what kind of words he speaks, he is wrong as long as he speaks too much. As soon as a man speaks too much, he loses all of his blessing before the Lord.

B. The Mark of Self-control Being Seen in One's Words

Verse 2 says, "For in many things we all stumble. If anyone does not stumble in word, this one is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." Whether or not a person can bridle himself depends on whether he can bridle his words. Whether or not a person has self-control—a fruit of the Spirit—depends on whether he can bridle his words. Many brothers and sisters misunderstand the Bible. They think that self-control is moderation. Please keep in mind that self-control is self-control. The teaching of moderation has nothing to do with us. Christians should exercise self-control, which means that they should control themselves.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5 shows us what the fruit of the Spirit is, while James tells us what the mark of the fruit of the Spirit is. James says a person who is able to bridle his whole body is surely able to bridle his words. Those who are loose in their words are loose in their living. Those who speak foolishly conduct themselves foolishly. A person who is indiscreet with words is surely indiscreet in everything he does. A person who has many words is bound to be a careless person before God. Whether or not a person can bridle his whole body depends on whether he can bridle his mouth. I hope that from now on all the new believers will learn to bridle their words before God.

Many brothers and sisters pray for God to deal with them and to grant them mercy. I will say a word to them: If God can deal with your speaking, He can deal with you. There are many people whose speaking constitutes the very life of their being. Their speaking represents their strength, the very hollow of their thigh. If God can deal with their speaking, He can deal with their whole being. Many people have not been defeated by God in their speaking. As a result, their very being has not been defeated by God. If a man has no self-control over himself, he may act in certain ways. But once others talk to him for half an hour, they realize the kind of person he is. As soon as a man opens his mouth, his very being is exposed. Nothing exposes

a person more than his words. As soon as a man speaks, his very being is fully exposed. If you want to see whether a man can control himself, simply ask if he can control his speaking.

C. The Smallest Affecting the Greatest

Verse 3 takes a bridle for an illustration, while verse 4 takes a rudder for an illustration. The tongue is like a bridle. It is also like a rudder. It is the smallest thing, yet it can exert the greatest influence. Verse 5 says the smallest fire can ignite a great forest. Verse 6 says, “And the tongue is a fire; the very world of unrighteousness, the tongue is set among our members as that which contaminates the whole body and sets on fire the course of life and is set on fire by Gehenna.” Verse 3 speaks of a bridle. Verse 4 speaks of a rudder. Verse 5 says that the tongue is a little member that boasts great things. Verse 6 shows us that the tongue is a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is a world of its own, a world of unrighteousness. Many people are redeemed; they have experienced God’s mercy, yet their tongues have never been bridled. Everywhere they go, they ignite the fire of Gehenna with this world of unrighteousness.

This is a strong word: The tongue can set on fire the wheel of nature (v. 6, ASV). Life is like a wheel; it is turning all the time. The tongue is like a fire that can set the wheel of life on fire. This means that it can stir up all kinds of fleshly activities. Man’s wrath, flesh, temper, and anger can all be ignited by the tongue. The tongue can ignite the fire of Gehenna. Many troubles flare up through words by God’s children. That is truly something from Gehenna. The tongue is an igniting fire and is a world of unrighteousness.

We must learn to diminish our words. The less words we speak, the better we are. There is transgression in the multitude of words. Proverbs advises us to have few words. Only fools are profuse in words. The more foolish a person is, the more words he has. The more lessons a person has learned before God, the more steadfast he is and the fewer words he has.

D. The Tongue Being a Restless Evil

James 3:7 says that every living thing can be tamed, while verse 8 says that no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. The tongue cannot be tamed by man. It is full of deadly poison. It is an untamed evil, “a restless evil.” There are evils that can be tamed, but the

evil of the tongue cannot be tamed. How foolish it is to loosen one's tongue! If a man relaxes his tongue, he is a very foolish man indeed.

E. A Spring Cannot Gush Out Two Types of Water

What follows is clear and obvious. One cannot bless God with his tongue and use the same tongue to curse the man created by God. He cannot bless on the one hand and curse on the other hand. A spring cannot gush out two types of water. A fig tree cannot produce olives, nor can a vine produce figs. Salt water cannot produce sweet water. The fruit reveals the tree. The water reveals the spring. A person whom God uses surely produces sweet water; there should not be any bitter taste to his words.

God's way of salvation today is to install a new spring and a new tree in us. If I am a fig tree, I will surely not produce olives. If I am a vine, I will surely not produce figs. If God gives me something new, if He places a new life in me, surely I will produce sweet water.

VI. PAYING ATTENTION TO LISTENING

In addressing the matter of speaking, we must not neglect the matter of listening.

A. Resisting an Itching Ear

Let me speak a frank word to all of you. Many improper words in the church would disappear if all the brothers and sisters learned the lesson of listening. The church has so many improper words because there are many brothers and sisters who want to listen to them. There is the demand; therefore, there is the supply. There are so many defiling words, criticisms, evil speakings, slanders, double-tongued speakings, because many people want to hear them. Man's heart is deceitful, wicked, and defiled. Because the heart wants to hear these words, someone is always ready to speak them.

If God's children know the kinds of words they can and cannot speak, they will know the kinds of words they can and cannot hear. One brother put it aptly when he said, "Many people's ears are like trash cans." Does anyone ever dump trash into a rice pot? No one would do such a thing. If you accept all kinds of lecherous words and do not consider them harmful, clearly you are a trash can; that is the kind of person you are. Only a certain kind of person will listen to certain kinds of words.

We must learn to listen to healthy words. We should not be led away by those who spread rumors and improper words. We must say, "I do not want to listen to these things." Many sins will cease and many brothers will be edified if you do this. There is a lust among us for unhealthy words. This is why these words multiply. People find these words tasteful. We must be delivered from these things. If a person is saying something improper to you, perhaps you should walk away quietly and leave the speaker to himself. This will kill his interest in you the next time. Alternatively, we also can testify to him saying, "As Christians we should not speak such words." This will stop any further speaking. We may even say something stronger, such as, "Brother! What do you think I am? I am not a trash can. Please do not dump all this trash on me."

Many problems in the church are like Gehenna fire; they need to be quenched as soon as they catch fire. We must not allow them to spread. Many troubles related to words are actually troubles related to listening. The speaker, of course, bears a greater part of the responsibility. But the listener also bears a small part of the responsibility. The listener must learn before God to reject this lust for words. Man has a lust for words; he has a lust to know everything. If we can reject this lust, we will quench much fire from Gehenna. We should say, "I am sorry. I am a Christian, and I cannot take such words." We will cut short the words of others. If we keep on listening, hoping to learn a little more and to probe a little more, we are fanning the flame, not extinguishing it. Many idle, evil, and deceptive words are prompted by the interest of the listeners.

B. "Like a Deaf Man"

Psalm 38:13-14 says, "But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; / And I am like a dumb man, who does not open his mouth./ Indeed I am like a man who does not hear/And in whose mouth there are no reproofs." Many people indeed need to be as a deaf man who does not hear. When others speak unbecoming things, you should act like a deaf man who does not hear anything. You should simply say, "I cannot hear." If you want to be a little stronger, you can testify something to him. If you want to be stronger still, you can rebuke him, saying, "Brother! What do you think I am? Why do you dump so many words on me?" You can also give a word of testimony: "I think a Christian should not say such things. Such words should not come out of a Christian's mouth." You may also say, "Brother! Wait a minute before you continue to speak. I am leaving." If you are a deaf man, you will

be blessed. Many times you have to act like a deaf man who does not hear anything. You must also learn to be like the dumb who cannot speak anything. Words are a great temptation, and you must learn to overcome them.

In Isaiah 42, which is altogether a prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus, verse 19 says, “Who is blind except My servant, /And as deaf as My messenger, whom I will send?/Who is as blind as the one at peace with Me,/And as blind as the servant of Jehovah?” When the Lord was on the earth, there were many words He would not listen to.

Please remember that the less filth and gossip we hear, the less trouble we will have. We have enough troubles, problems, and filth within ourselves already. If we add more to them, we will not be able to go on at all. A new believer must learn from the beginning to reject the temptation of listening. We must be deaf like the Lord Jesus was. Who is deaf like our Lord? The way of our Lord is most upright. This is why He is not bound by anything.

C. Making a Conscious Effort to Learn

New believers must be taught in the matter of speaking. They must be taught the way to speak, and they also must be taught the way to listen. They must learn to fear God in the matter of speaking. This is a great matter, and it is a definite threshold which one has to cross definitely.

This lesson does not come without a price. We need to spend much time to develop the habit of speaking accurately. I do not believe a new believer in the Lord can overcome in this matter in a short time. I have found out that accurate words are more difficult to come by than many other things. If we allow a little carelessness to come in, we will find mistakes in our words and motives. Lying is one example of this. Speaking inaccurate words is a form of lying, and so is any attempt to mislead others. Sometimes a person may say the right thing with the intention of misleading others. This is lying as well. A new believer must pay attention to this matter and must exercise considerable effort to deal with it from the very beginning.

Psalm 141:3 says, “Set a watch, O Jehovah, before my mouth;/Keep the door of my lips.” We need to have such a prayer. We need to say, “Set a watch over my tongue so that I will not speak rashly.” Perhaps some will need to pray, “Set a watch over my ears so that I will not listen carelessly.”

If we do this, the church will be spared many troubles and we will advance in a proper way.

One thing surprises me greatly. Many saints are bold to speak carelessly, and many people listen to them with no sense of fear at all. This is a great sickness among us! Clearly this is a grave malady! Whenever we lend our ears to improper words, we are sick! It is a serious sickness for anyone to accept words without reservation or discretion! We must learn to reject filthy fruit. Any kind of poison will spread among God's children and will bring in ungodliness, rebellion, and looseness. May God be gracious to us and have mercy on us so that we would learn to speak in a proper way from the very beginning. May we learn to run the straight race before us!

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, set 3, vol. 50, chapter 36)

CHAPTER NINETEEN

IDLE WORDS LEAKING LIFE

Scripture Reading: Prov. 13:3; 15:4; Matt. 12:34, 36-37

If a water container has a hole, the water inside will leak away. It is not a question of whether or not there is water in the container but whether there are holes. Some brothers and sisters greatly desire to know about the cross and, at times, are very willing to bear the cross. Such ones should be full of life. Yet it is strange that even though they are so seeking, desirous, and willing to bear the cross, they do not touch any life in them. Instead, they touch death, because all the life that they have gained has leaked away.

Proverbs 13:3 says, “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life:/but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.”

We are not sure whether Solomon was referring to physical life or spiritual life when he wrote this proverb. But let us consider spiritual things based on this principle. A seeker of the Lord, who has life and wishes to supply the church with life, must be careful with his words. If we are not careful with our words, life will leak away. Why are some people not very useful in the hand of the Lord? They are not useful because life has leaked away. One only touches death in them; one does not touch any life in them because the life has leaked away through their words. Therefore, we have to guard our mouth, even keeping a close watch on it. Many stories testify that nothing leaks away life as much as idle words. This does not mean that sin is better than idle words. However, it does mean that next to sin the most debilitating thing for our life is our idle words.

Matthew 12:36 says, “And I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment.”

Does it say “every filthy word”? No. Does it say “every blasphemous word”? No. Does it say “every evil word”? No. It says “every idle word.” Idle words are redundant words, incongruous words, unnecessary words, and gossiping words. “Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.” This is what the Lord Jesus said. We have to realize that not only are blasphemous

words serious but loose words are also serious. It is a serious thing to speak idle words as well as filthy words. We have to realize that we can make recompense for certain sins, but we cannot make recompense for other things and sins. If we offend anyone through idle words, there is no way to make a recompense for this. We can confess to others, and we can retract our words, but the sound has reached others' ears, and we cannot take it back. It is possible to make a recompense if we have stolen from others. But it is impossible to make a recompense if we have offended others with idle words. This sin will have to go before the Lord. Therefore, the Lord said, "Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

Proverbs 15:4 says, "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: /but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit."

To be wholesome is to be temperate, mild, and moderate. When a man speaks too much, his tongue becomes hot, and when his tongue is hot, the tree of life is gone. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life. A wholesome tongue is a tongue that is not quick, foolish, or excessive. Such a tongue is like a tree of life. One cannot smell the flavor of Christ in a Christian who loves idle words. Those who love idle words cannot supply life to others. Idle words are a big hole which leak away one's life.

Idle words leak away life. What then should we do? In order to keep our mouth, we must first deal with our heart. The Lord says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). When the heart has something, the mouth speaks it out. If we have something in our heart, sooner or later, it will come out of our mouth. If we do not speak it here, we will speak it elsewhere. If we do not speak it in this house, we will speak it in another house. Whatever is in the heart, the mouth will speak out. Therefore, in order to learn before the Lord to stop our idle words, we must start by dealing with our heart. If we do not deal with our heart, our mouth can never be dealt with properly. It is the heart that is first filled with all kinds of things before the mouth speaks of them. Never think that a word can be said in a heartless way. The Lord's Word shows us that there is not such a thing. As long as there is a word, there is a heart for it. Because there is a heart for something, the mouth speaks. Hence, in order to deal with idle words, we must first deal with the heart.

Paul exhorted the Corinthian brothers who were in trouble to "all speak the same thing." How can this be? He continued by saying, "That you be

attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion” (1 Cor. 1:10). The life of the church is like the life of an individual. The life of an individual can leak away through idle words. The life of the church can also leak away through idle words. Because we have the same life, we should be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion. Once we are attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion, we can speak the same thing, and we will not have idle words. Therefore, to deal with idle words, we must first deal with the heart.

James 3:11 says, “Does the spring, out of the same opening, gush forth the sweet and the bitter?” If a spring cannot gush forth two kinds of water, a mouth cannot speak two kinds of words. A spring can only gush forth one kind of water. In the same way a mouth can only speak one kind of word. We must deal with idle words before the Lord in a definite way. If this leakage is not stopped, undesirable things will keep pouring in, and things that should not leak away will continue to leak away. The loss will be immeasurable. We have to stop this leakage at any cost. We need to ask the Lord, saying, “Lord, deal with my mouth so that I can be preserved by Your grace.”

You must deal not only with your own mouth but also with others’ mouths. You have to help those who love idle words, gossip, and idle reports. Some people like to come to you with idle words. You should not allow them to start. You can say to them, “Brother, let us pray.” You should not allow them to speak idle words. You should lead them to pray or recite Scripture verses. You should lead them to the proper path. You can even be more blunt by saying, “Brother, we have to learn to speak words that edify others. It is better that we do not speak any idle words.”

If we want to be one who stops the leakage, we must first ask God to deliver us from our curiosity. We should learn to fear God. Many Christians are curious; they like to hear novel things and even filthy things. Their ears are like a garbage can which takes in all kinds of things. If we are delivered from this, we will save ourselves from many sins and help many brothers and sisters from many sins. If our ears are not itching and if we do not afford others the opportunity to speak idle words, we will preserve our mouth from leaking life and help others to stop their leakage.

May the Lord deliver us from idle words that leak life. Other than sin, idle words leak life the most. If we are preserved in our words, we will be able to preserve life.

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 2, vol. 37, Ch. 9)

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE OPINION OF MARTHA HINDERING MAN FROM ENJOYING THE LORD'S RESURRECTION LIFE

In John 11, after the Lord went out of Jerusalem, He went to a home in Bethany of one brother and two sisters who loved Him very much. Before He came, something happened in this home. The brother, Lazarus, became seriously ill, and the sisters sent a message to the Lord, which means that they prayed to Him (11:3). There is nothing wrong with prayer. If you are in trouble, you must send a message to the Lord. At any time you can send a word to Him. You may send Him the information about any situation. But what He would do is up to Him.

I. THE HUMAN OPINION HINDERING

THE RESURRECTION POWER OF THE LORD

Chapter eleven serves a very specific purpose: it shows us that besides the opposition of religion, human opinions are the strongest frustration to life. Throughout the foregoing chapters, the problem that life faced was with religion. As we have seen, in every chapter life was opposed by religion. However, there is no religion in chapter eleven. But there is another kind of frustration—the frustration from human opinion. What is revealed in this chapter that frustrates the resurrection power of the Lord? It is the human opinions. This chapter vividly portrays how the human opinions frustrate the Lord's resurrection life. Once human opinions are subdued, resurrection life is manifested. This is not a matter in religion, but in the church, at the home in Bethany, which is a miniature of the church life. In Jerusalem, you are in religion; in Bethany, you are in the local church. In Jerusalem you have religion; in the local church you have the problem of human opinions. In chapters one through ten, Christ as life is fully revealed and, at the same time, religion is exposed. Now, in chapter eleven, Christ as the resurrection life is unfolded, but, at the same time, human opinions are brought to the surface. Although there is no problem of religion in the church, there is nevertheless another kind of hindrance, the hindrance of human opinion. The Lord is the resurrection life, but He is hindered by the opinions. This chapter is filled with human opinions.

Martha and Mary considered that the Lord should have come immediately. This was their opinion. But the Lord never acts on the basis of anyone's opinion; He always acts according to His own will. They thought that the Lord should come immediately, but the Lord purposely stayed away for two more days.

The Lord is the resurrection and the life and death is no problem to Him. It is easy for Him to swallow up death. Death may be a problem to us, but it is not a problem to Christ. He as resurrection can overcome death and swallow it up. However, when we come to applying Him as resurrection, we face the problem of human opinions. In this message I want to impress you with this matter of our opinions. The problem in the local church life which keeps us from seeing the resurrection of Christ is our opinion.

If you read this chapter carefully, you will see that even the death of Lazarus was provided by God. In His sovereignty, God prepared the environment which allowed Jesus' follower to die. God's sovereignty provided such a death situation in order to unfold Christ's resurrection power. Without death there is no way to express resurrection. Resurrection needs death. How could resurrection be manifested without it? We need to praise the Lord for the death of Lazarus. If Martha and Mary had seen that resurrection can never be manifested without death, they would have praised the Lord when they saw their brother dying. They would have known that this death would manifest the Lord's resurrection. In such a case, there would have been no human opinion.

We may apply this to situations in the local church. There is always someone dying in the local church. Someone or something is always dying. Whenever the responsible ones see such a death situation, they are troubled and say to the Lord, "O Lord, isn't this Your church? Don't You love the church? Don't You know that something in the church is dying? Lord, come quickly." This is a good prayer, but it is a prayer according to human opinion. The more you pray like this, the more the Lord will stay away. He will delay His coming in order to exhaust the human opinion.

When I first saw the light in this chapter, I was laughing. I had never seen how many opinions there were in this chapter. Surely the Lord knew that Lazarus was sick and He knew exactly how to handle the situation, even if they had not sent any news to Him. However, they sent the news to Him, but He was not moved by it. Sometimes it is very difficult to move the Lord. In a prayer meeting you may say, "Lord, we move Your hand," but the more you try to move His hand, the more His hand refuses to be moved. The

Lord will never be moved according to your opinion. When He heard the news, His heart was hard and unmoved. He remained where He was for another two days.

II. MARTHA'S OPINION

When the Lord came, Martha was the first one to meet Him (11:20). But before the Lord could say anything, Martha opened her mouth and gave forth another opinion: "Lord, if You were here, my brother would not have died" (11:21). She was complaining that the Lord had come too late. The Lord said to her, "Your brother shall rise again" (11:23). This means that the Lord would raise him immediately. However, Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day" (11:24). Martha expounded this word of the Lord so as to postpone the present resurrection to the last day. What an expounding of the divine word! What devastating knowledge of fundamental teaching that frustrates people from enjoying the Lord's present resurrection life! Then the Lord Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he should die, shall live; and every one who lives and believes in Me shall by no means die forever" (11:25-26). The Lord seemed to be telling her, "It is not a matter of time. There is no problem of time with Me. Nothing is too late, and nothing is too early. As long as I am here, everything will be all right, for I will raise up your brother." Then the Lord asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" Martha replied, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (11:27). What she answered absolutely was not what the Lord asked. She was not clear about what the Lord was saying. Her old, preoccupying knowledge prevented her from understanding the Lord's new word.

Martha is like many Christians today who have a great deal of knowledge and doctrine. Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day." This sounds quite scriptural and correct. Then the Lord asked her if she believed that He would raise Lazarus up, and she said, "I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God." She believed in a certain kind of doctrine that the Lord is the Christ and the Son of God. She believed in the doctrine that the Lord will raise up all of the dead saints in the last day. She had all the knowledge, but it was not the living knowledge that the Lord taught. All of her different opinions were due to the fact that she had all the knowledge. Today, many Christians have opinions because they have so many teachings. When someone talks with

them about the inner life, they immediately begin to share their opinions. Too much knowledge and too many doctrines breed endless opinions.

After Martha said that she believed the Lord to be the Christ, the Son of God, she went away and called her sister Mary. Martha said, “The Teacher is here and is calling you” (11:28). However, I cannot find a word saying that the Lord had called for Mary. That was Martha’s suggestion. It was her self-assuming opinion. Again we see in Martha a person who was so full of her own opinions. She was so active in her opinion that she could never be silent. Perhaps you also love the Lord very much, but, like Martha, you cannot be silent.

III. MARTHA’S OPINION AGAIN

When the Lord came to the tomb, He told them to take away the stone. Once again, Martha frustrated the Lord with her opinion. She said, “Lord, by now he smells, for it is the fourth day that he has been there” (11:39). She felt that there was no use in moving the stone. In this chapter there is nothing religious, but there are many opinions standing in the Lord’s way. Although the Lord is life to the people in the church, He meets a great number of human opinions from the people in the church. It is just like His meeting the opinions of the disciples, Martha and Mary, and their Jewish friends.

IV. OPINIONS BELONGING TO THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE VS. THE TREE OF LIFE

All opinions come out of man’s mind. So they all belong to the tree of knowledge, which is versus the tree of life. The tree of life is actually the Lord Himself for our enjoyment. When we stay with our opinions, we are kept away from the enjoyment of the Lord as our resurrection life. When our opinions are subdued, it is easy for us to enter into the full enjoyment of the Lord Himself.

(Life-study of John, Msg. 23)

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
MARY'S FULL KNOWLEDGE
AND EXPERIENCE OF GOD
PRODUCING EXCELLENT PRAISES
AND PROPHECY

I. THE PRAISE OF MARY

In Luke 1:46-56 we have the praise of the Man-Savior's mother. Mary came to visit Elizabeth. When Elizabeth saw Mary, she blessed her. Mary responded to this blessing not by giving a blessing, but by offering praise to God.

A. Full of Quotations from the Old Testament

Mary's poetic praise is composed of many quotations from the Old Testament. This indicates that she was a godly woman, qualified to be a channel for the Savior's incarnation. It also indicates that the Lord Jesus would grow up in a family which would be filled with the knowledge and love of God's holy Word.

Although Mary was a young woman, she was very knowledgeable concerning the Old Testament and could quote verses from it in her praise to God. Actually, her praise was a composition of quotations from the Scriptures. Surely she was the right person for God to use in conceiving the Savior who was to be born.

Before Mary was visited by the angel to receive the word concerning the conception of the Man-Savior, she was already full of the knowledge of God's Word. Many verses of the Scriptures had been absorbed into her being. Therefore, at the proper time she could pour out what was within her as she offered up praise to God.

Mary's praise indicates that in order for us to be used by God, we need to have certain qualifications. One qualification is the proper knowledge of the Word of God. I hope that the young people in particular will learn of Mary in this matter. Do you intend to be used by the Lord to bring forth something of the Lord, even, in a spiritual sense, to "conceive" the Lord

Jesus and bring Him forth? If so, then you need to be qualified by being filled with the Scriptures, filled with the Word of God.

B. Her Spirit Having Exulted in God Her Savior

In verses 46 and 47 Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior.” First Mary’s spirit exulted in God; then her soul magnified the Lord. Her praise to God was initiated from her spirit and then was expressed through her soul. Her spirit was filled with joy in God her Savior so that her soul manifested her joy for the magnification of the Lord. She lived and acted in her spirit, which directed her soul. Her exultation in God in her spirit was due to her enjoyment of God as her Savior, and her magnifying of the Lord in her soul was due to her exaltation of the Lord—Jehovah, the great To Be.

Mary’s spirit exulted in God. To exult is higher than to rejoice. It is significant that Mary said that her spirit exulted in God her Savior, rather than in God her Creator. She regarded God as more than her Creator; she considered Him her Savior. She realized that she was a created person who had become fallen. Therefore, she needed her Creator to be her Savior.

C. Her Soul Magnifying the Lord

We have seen that in verse 46 Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Mary’s praise was to magnify the Lord based upon her experience of God as her Savior through His everlasting mercy (vv. 47-50) and her observation of others’ experience of God’s merciful and faithful doings (vv. 51-55). In content and standard, her praise is like some of the Old Testament Psalms. However, she does not say anything concerning Christ as does Elizabeth in her blessing (vv. 41-43) and Zachariah in his prophecy through the Holy Spirit (vv. 67-71, 76-79).

First Mary’s spirit exulted in God her Savior. Then her soul magnified the Lord. In these verses we see that Mary regarded God as both her Savior and Lord. We all need to experience what Mary experienced in knowing God as our Savior and Lord. When we enjoy God as our Savior, exulting in Him, then we shall magnify Him as our Lord.

When we magnify God as our Lord, we serve Him. Actually, to magnify the Lord is to serve Him as Lord. We need to be impressed with the fact that to serve the Lord is not mainly to do things for Him. On the contrary, the most important aspect of serving the Lord is to magnify Him. We need

to be those who live a life not merely of doing things for God but of magnifying Him.

Magnifying the Lord is a matter of our soul, not of our spirit. This means that magnifying the Lord involves our mind, emotion, and will. It involves our thoughts, our likes and dislikes, and our decisions. In all these things the Lord should be magnified. He should be magnified in our thoughts, in our likes and dislikes, and in our decisions concerning our direction.

Mary enjoyed God in the spirit as her saving One. Then her soul, her being, with her mind, emotion, and will, magnified the Lord. When Mary spoke these words, she was still living at the conclusion of Old Testament times. She had not yet fully been brought into the New Testament age. Nevertheless, she could be a person whose spirit exulted in God her Savior and whose soul magnified the Lord. We certainly need to learn of her to exult in the Lord with our spirit and magnify Him with our soul.

D. Praising God's Mercy and His Mighty Doings

In 1:48-50 Mary says, "Because He has looked upon the low estate of His slave. For behold, from now on all generations will count me blessed; because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name; and His mercy is unto generations and generations to those who fear Him." Both Mary and Zachariah stress God's mercy (vv. 54, 58, 72, 78), realizing their low estate (v. 48) and humbly (v. 52) recognizing that they are not worthy of being favored by God. Both God's mercy and His grace are the expression of His love. When we are in a pitiful condition, His mercy first reaches us and brings us into a situation where God is able to favor us with His grace. For example, 15:20-24 tells us that when the father saw the prodigal son returning, he had compassion on him. That is mercy, as expressing the father's love. Then the father clothed him with the best robe and fed him with the fatted calf. That is grace, which also manifests the father's love. God's mercy reaches further and bridges the gap between us and God's grace.

In a sense, Mary was more knowledgeable of God than many believers today. In her praise she speaks of God's mercy, but she does not mention His grace. In order to receive God's grace, we need to be in a suitable condition. However, Mary realized that she and all the people at that time were in a poor condition. Because they were in a pitiful condition, they needed God's mercy.

Mary praised God for His mercy and His mighty doings. In 1:51-52 she says, “He has done mighty things with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in the understanding of their heart. He brought down potentates from thrones and exalted the humble.” God did mighty things in taking care of His people in their low estate. Because their estate was so low, they needed God’s mercy to reach them, for His mercy extends further than His grace.

In 1:53-55 Mary says, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He sent away empty. He has succored Israel His servant to remember mercy, even as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.” Verse 55 refers to God’s faithfulness in keeping His word. Both Mary and Zachariah emphasize not only God’s mercy but also His faithfulness (vv. 70, 72). God’s mercy takes care of their condition, and His faithfulness takes care of His position so that He can favor them with His gracious doings. God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were His faithful word. Now God was visiting His people according to those promises.

We should appreciate Mary’s praise. When she uttered this praise, she was a young woman, probably still in her twenties. Even though she was so young, she could offer up a praise that was a composition of quotations from the Old Testament related to her own experience of God as her Savior and Lord. She could speak concerning God’s mercy and His mighty doings in caring for His people according to the faithful promises given to the fathers.

As we consider Mary’s praise, we can see something of the reason she was chosen by God for the conception of the Man-Savior. No doubt Mary also taught the Lord Jesus many portions from the Scriptures as He was growing up.

Mary’s praise is not doctrinal; on the contrary, it is experiential. She praised God from her experience. Mary said that her spirit exulted in God her Savior and her soul magnified the Lord. This was based on experience. Then she went on to praise God in His mercy and in His faithful doings in taking care of His people, who were in a low estate. God’s doings were according to His promise, according to His faithful word given to the fathers.

(Life-study of Luke, Msg. 4)

II. THE PATTERN OF MARY’S PROPHESYING

Mary's prophecy in Luke 1:46-55 is deeper and higher than that of Elizabeth. Although Elizabeth was older and more experienced than Mary, the spiritual content in Mary's speaking is higher and deeper.

**A. First Her Spirit Exulting in God Her Savior,
Then Her Soul Magnifying the Lord**

In verses 46-47 Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior." The verb tenses used in this sentence indicate that first Mary's spirit exulted in God her Savior; then her soul followed to magnify the Lord. To exult is more than merely to be happy or joyful. It is to rejoice with shouting and excitement. To magnify the Lord is to show or declare the Lord to be great, exalted, or extolled. Mary's poetic expression indicates that she had the proper spiritual experience.

B. The Utterance of Mary's Prophesying

1. Based on Her Knowledge of the Scriptures—

Being Composed of Quotations from the Old Testament

The utterance of Mary's prophesying was based, first, on her knowledge of the Scriptures. Her entire prophecy was composed of quotations from the Old Testament. By this we can see that Mary as a young woman was very familiar with the Old Testament. Mary was the right person, the proper vessel, selected by God to be the channel for the Savior's incarnation. In ancient times, females were not as well educated as males. However, although both Mary and Elizabeth were females, they both had gained a great deal of knowledge from the Old Testament.

I hope that some, especially the young people, will compose a praise or a prayer by quoting all the special terms from the current ministry in the Lord's recovery, such as "God's New Testament economy," "the New Testament priesthood of the gospel," "the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity," and "the mingling of divinity with humanity." In order to do this we must be well acquainted with all these spiritual terms. Many Christians can sing songs concerning God's goodness and mercy, but who has composed a song concerning God's New Testament priesthood of the gospel to fulfill His New Testament economy? God's goodness and mercy are elementary matters; God's New Testament priesthood of the gospel to fulfill His New Testament economy is much higher.

2. Based on Her Knowledge and Experience of God

The utterance of Mary's prophesying was based also upon her knowledge and experience of God, that is, on what God had done over her and for her. Verses 48-50 refer to God's dealing with Mary herself in particular. In verse 48, Mary said, "Because He has looked upon the low estate of His slave." Mary considered herself to be not merely a maid but a slave to God. Moreover, she considered her estate to be low because she was poor. Mary was a descendant of David, but at that time she was a lowly virgin, not in Jerusalem or in Bethlehem, the city of David, but in Nazareth, a despised city in a despised region. Nevertheless, God overshadowed her in her low estate, in her humble situation, and selected her to be the vessel for His incarnation.

In verse 48, Mary prophesied, saying, "For behold, from now on all generations will count me blessed." All generations have blessed Mary. God lifted her up from her low estate to a high position, to be "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). A young woman from Nazareth was uplifted by God to be the mother of the Lord. In verse 49, Mary continued, "because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name." This is an indication that Mary believed in the word the angel spoke to her in verses 30-37. In verse 50, she continued, "And His mercy is unto generations and generations to those who fear Him." Mary was a young woman who feared God. Therefore, God's mercy came to her as well as unto generations and generations of those who fear Him. The thought here is marvelous, and the composition, the expression, is very poetic. Mary was not a professor but a "country girl" from Nazareth, yet she could utter such a poetic prophecy. This is a shame to us. We are not "country girls"; many of us have obtained college degrees, and some among us have earned Ph.D. degrees. However, not many among us can compose such a meaningful and poetic prophecy.

3. Based on Her Knowledge of God's Dealing with People

Mary's prophesying was also based on her knowledge of God's dealing with people in general. Verses 48-50 speak of God's dealing with Mary in particular, whereas verses 51-53 concern the principles by which God deals with people in general. In verses 51-52 Mary said, "He has done mighty things with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in the understanding of their heart. He brought down potentates from thrones and exalted the humble." God is able to deal with everyone. In view of the

principles revealed in these verses concerning God's dealing with people, we should not be proud. In his arrogance, Mussolini, the dictator of Italy, invaded Ethiopia in 1935. Likewise, Hitler in his arrogance broke his promise to the British prime minister and invaded Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1939. These events began the Second World War. Eventually, God scattered these two exceedingly arrogant men. To this day no one knows the location of Hitler's corpse. God brought down potentates, including Mussolini and Hitler, from their thrones and exalted the humble. In history God has done this often.

In verse 53 Mary continued, "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He sent away empty." To give good things is outward and objective, but to fill is inward and subjective. God has filled us with good things, and the rich He sent away empty—not merely empty-handed, but empty inwardly and subjectively. If we consider ourselves rich, we shall be poor; we shall be empty in everything. But if we are poor and are hungry, we shall be filled. In Matthew 5:3 and 6 the Lord Jesus spoke according to this principle: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens....Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

4. Based on Her Knowledge of God's Merciful Doing to Her Forefathers

Mary's prophecy was also based upon her knowledge of God's merciful doing to her forefathers. In Luke 1:54-55 she said, "He has succored Israel His servant to remember mercy, even as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." God exercised His mercy toward Abraham and toward his seed, including Mary. Mary inherited the blessings of God's dealings with her forefathers.

Verses 46-55 constitute a complete and meaningful prophesying. In her speaking, Mary covered her own experience of God, God's dealing with people in a general way, and God's merciful doing to her forefathers. In the prophesying of this young sister, there are the riches of the knowledge of the Bible, the knowledge of God's dealing with people, and the knowledge of God's merciful doing to her forefathers. After seeing all these high points regarding Mary's prophesying, we surely should be humbled and realize that we need much learning to be able to speak as Mary did.

(The Practice of Prophesying, Msg. 2)

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE ADORNING OF SISTERS

Verse 3 says, “Whose adorning, let it not be the outward plaiting of hair, and putting on of gold, or clothing with garments.” Women’s hair was intended by God for their glory and a sign of their submission (1 Cor. 11:15; S. S. 4:1; 6:5; 7:5). But it was abused by many, especially by those who lived in the luxurious and corrupt life of the Roman Empire at the time of this Epistle, to beautify their lustful flesh by its extravagant adornment with gold and other costly things. Christian wives, as holy women, should absolutely abstain from this God-condemned matter.

Many years ago, a young woman began to attend the meetings of the church in Chefoo. She was intelligent and modern, a student of law. When she first came to a meeting, her hair was arranged like a high tower. I noticed that as she continued coming to the meetings, this tower became lower and lower. Eventually, after she attended more meetings, the tower was completely gone. She repented and was saved, and the Lord touched her concerning the way she styled her hair.

I. THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART— A MEEK AND QUIET SPIRIT

In verse 4 Peter goes on to say, “But the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is costly.” The hidden man of the heart is the meek and quiet spirit. Our heart is composed of all the parts of our soul—mind, emotion, and will—and of the main part of our spirit, the conscience (Heb. 4:12). Among all these, our spirit is the center. Hence, our spirit is the hidden man of the heart. The hidden man is in contrast to the outward plaiting, putting on, and clothing in verse 3; and a meek and quiet spirit, in contrast to hair, gold, and garments. The wives’ adornment before God should be their inner being—the hidden man of their heart, which is their spirit, in meekness and quietness. This is the incorruptible adornment in contrast to the corruptible hair, gold, and garments. This spiritual adornment is costly in the sight of God.

In his writings Paul does not use the expression, “the hidden man of the heart.” What is this hidden man of the heart? It is a meek and quiet spirit. A spirit that has become meek and quiet is the kind of adornment that should be possessed by all Christian wives.

I believe that Peter wrote this Epistle according to his experiences and also according to his observations. He may have used the words “meek” and “quiet” because he knew that often the spirit of Christian wives is not meek and quiet.

Whenever we become angry and lose our temper, our emotion is upset. But that kind of upset in our emotion affects our spirit. This is the reason it is easy for us to release our spirit when we lose our temper. When a person loses his temper, he will have a genuine release of the spirit. Much of what we call the release of the spirit is not genuine. The genuine release of the spirit can easily be seen when a person loses his temper in full. At such a time, his spirit comes forth. However, this may not be a release of a meek and quiet spirit.

Many times the spirit of a Christian wife is not meek. Sisters, when you exchange words with your husband, do you have a meek and quiet spirit? It is a common, even universal, phenomenon for wives to exchange words with their husbands. For example, a husband may make a proposal regarding a certain matter, but the wife will disagree. The husband may want to go in one direction, but the wife wants to go in the opposite direction. The result of this disagreement is an argument.

As an elderly man with much experience in human life, I can testify that a wife’s exchanging words with her husband is a sign of rebellion. Unconsciously and sub-consciously, she has deep within her a rebellious spirit. Because she has a spirit of rebellion, she does not want to subject herself to her husband. If a wife were willing to be in subjection to her husband, why would she argue with him? Perhaps she thinks that she has a better knowledge of the situation and is able to foresee problems. Nevertheless, it is still not necessary for her to argue.

One serious lesson for wives to learn is not to argue, not to exchange words, with their husbands. The sisters need to realize that when they exchange words with their husbands, they do not have a meek and quiet spirit. But if as a Christian wife a sister maintains a meek and quiet spirit, she will not lose her temper, and she will not even exchange words with her husband. Knowing the situation of married life from experience and

observation, Peter charges the wives to adorn themselves with a meek and quiet spirit.

As we have pointed out, this meek and quiet spirit is the hidden man of the heart. We believers actually have two men. The first is in our soul with our body. This is the outward man. The other is the hidden man in the center of our heart. The fact that the hidden man of the heart is a meek and quiet spirit indicates that our spirit is the kernel of our being, hidden in the midst of our heart, which is composed of the mind, emotion, will, and conscience. Our spirit, therefore, is surrounded by the mind, emotion, and will. If our spirit is meek and quiet, this will influence our mind, emotion, and will. To be sure, if our spirit is meek, our mind, emotion, and will also will be meek. When we are meek, we are quiet. Meekness and quietness of spirit is a beautiful adornment in the sight of God.

II. A PICTURE OF GOD'S ORDINATION CONCERNING MALE AND FEMALE

What we have in 3:1-6 is not simply a human teaching or reasoning. This is a picture of God's ordination concerning male and female. Not even our experience of regeneration causes God's ordination to change. In today's church life, God still keeps the order He ordained in His creation. God ordained that wives subject themselves to their husbands. Furthermore, as we have seen, a wife's adorning should not be "the outward plaiting of hair, and putting on of gold, or clothing with garments, but the hidden man of the heart," the adornment of a "meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is costly."

In verses 5 and 6 Peter says, "For in this manner formerly the holy women also, hoping in God, adorned themselves, subjecting themselves to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose children you have become, doing good and not fearing any terror." The sisters need to be today's Sarahs. Many of the husbands, however, may feel uneasy about what Peter says in verse 6. They may think that they are not worthy to have their wives refer to them in this way. The reason is that today's situation is altogether not according to the Bible.

(Life-study of Peter, Msg. 22)

III. THE SISTERS' CLOTHING

A. Costly Apparel and Meekness

First Peter 3:3-5 says, “Let your adorning not be the outward plaiting of hair and putting on of gold or clothing with garments, but the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very costly in the sight of God. For in this manner formerly the holy women also, who hoped in God, adorned themselves.”

This is the only passage in the Bible that contains the phrase holy women. The phrase holy men is found in many portions of the Word. But this is the only place that speaks of “holy women.” For in this manner the holy women adorned themselves, subjecting themselves to their own husbands. The holy women adorned themselves with a meek and quiet spirit.

Peter’s word indicates that many sisters tended to adorn themselves with plaiting of hair, gold, and apparel. He did not feel happy about the way they dressed. The plaiting of hair and ornaments of jewelry are not suitable, nor is beautiful apparel. We are not saying that sisters should be careless in their clothing. If they are careless, it means that there is something wrong with their character. If a sister dresses herself in a careless, untidy, and unclean way, it means that she is a careless and loose person. This is not what Peter meant.

Peter was saying that it is wrong for women to plait their hair in the manner he described. The phrase plaiting of hair in the original text means to fashion the hair in many styles. Throughout history, many styles have been designed to plait the hair. Putting on of gold means to wear jewelry. Christians cannot do this. Clothing with garments may refer to colorful and stylish dresses. Peter’s emphasis is that sisters should not adorn themselves with the plaiting of hair and the putting on of gold and costly garments. Instead, they should adorn themselves with a meek and quiet spirit.

Sometimes a woman dresses herself fancily yet has a temper like a lion. You cannot help but feel that her person is incompatible with what she wears. She would be better off not wearing fancy dresses at all. It is unfitting for a fancily dressed woman to shout in rage. If a woman is meek and submissive, she has put on good apparel already. A woman who serves God should not pay too much attention to her clothing. As Christians we should not place too much emphasis on clothing.

B. Proper Clothing with Modesty and Sobriety

Let us look at I Timothy 2:9-11: “Similarly, that women adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and

gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, what befits women professing godly reverence, by good works. Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection.”

One of God’s basic requirements for the sister is modesty. It is good to feel modest and to be conscious of shame. This is a natural protection for the sisters. Sisters who are conscious of shame and who are modest are protected naturally. Do not wear dresses which are contrary to your sense of shame. ‘You must exercise sobriety. Do not wear immodest clothes. Immodesty is contrary to sobriety. Always wear “proper clothing.” Every sister knows what is proper in her particular community. We should always wear clothes which are considered proper by those around us. A Christian should not wear clothes which provide an opportunity for heathens to say, “Do Christians wear such things too?” Our standard must never be lower than that of the heathens’. We must learn to have modesty and sobriety and must know what constitutes “proper clothing.”

Verse 9 continues: “Not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing.” This particularly refers to the curling of hair. Peter was referring to the many fashions that women apply to their hair. Curling the hair means making many curls like clusters of vines. Women were already concerned with fashion two thousand years ago. Today many think that it is fashionable to curl their hair into clusters. Actually, it was being done two thousand years ago. Costly clothing is spoken of here as well. Some dresses have the same value but are priced differently. We should not wear the costly ones or spend extra money on them.

Sisters must take care of propriety in their clothing. We have no intention, nor did Paul or Peter, to ask a sister to be careless, loose, or unconcerned about her attire. Neither should we set our mind on fancy dresses and costly clothing. Sisters should wear proper clothing; they should learn to manage their wardrobe properly. They should set their wardrobe in proper order, using ordinary material at reasonable cost. No sister should be unconcerned about the way she attires herself.

Some sisters spend too much time on their clothing. They pay too much attention to fancy clothes and costly dresses. Other sisters do not care for the tidiness and the cleanliness of their attire; they are very careless about their clothing. This shows that they are sloppy. A woman’s dress is a true reflection of her character. If one does not pay attention to personal grooming and cleanliness, such a person is loose, sloppy, and careless. Our clothing must be proper, neat, and clean. It must be simple, but clean.

IV. THE SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON ONE'S CLOTHING

Leviticus 8:30 says that, according to the command of God, “Moses took some of the anointing oil...and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he sanctified Aaron, his garments, and his sons and the garments of his Sons with him.” Thus, our clothing must be sealed with the mark of holiness. There should be the seal of the Holy Spirit, the seal of the anointing oil, on our clothing. When one is anointed, his garment is also anointed, and both are sanctified together.

In Numbers 15:38 God also commanded the Israelites to make tassels on the corners of their garments and put a cord of blue upon the tassel of each corner. Blue is the color of heaven. This serves to remind men of the heavenly things. A believer's clothing must have a heavenly taste to it. It must not express the world. Do not follow the world in its freedom and fancy. We should have the expression of heaven in our clothing. Our clothing, as well as ourselves, should be fully sanctified.

V. PRINCIPLES CONCERNING CLOTHING

A. Personal Freedom

I would like to say a general word according to my personal opinion on clothing. I am not saying that every child of God should dress the same way. I have no intention to ask all the sisters to ignore outward beauty altogether. I am not saying that all the brothers and sisters should use the cheapest fabric and the worst materials for their clothing. The Bible has no such commandment. When John came, he was clothed with camel's skin. But when the Lord Jesus came, His undergarment was a seamless garment, the best of the time. There is one basic principle of Christian clothing—God has given everyone the freedom to wear what he likes. We are free to choose the materials we like and to pick the style we prefer.

B. Not Attracting Attention

However, we should take note of one thing: No one should wear anything that draws attention to his clothes rather than to his person. No Christian should do this. If our clothing always draws others' attention to us, there is something wrong with it. What we wear should express our being. If I put a bouquet of flowers into a vase and others only pay attention to the vase,

something is wrong with the vase. Clothing is meant to express the person. Our clothing should not usurp who we are. The worst thing would be for us to wear clothing that draws attention away from our person to our appearance. This is a great mistake.

C. Clothing Needing to Match One's Status

Another matter needs special attention: A person's clothes should match his status. Do not dress too poorly and do not dress too well. Please bear in mind that poor clothing attracts attention in the same way that fancy clothing does. We should not pay that much attention to our clothing, neither should we draw the attention of others to it. It is wrong to give others the impression that we are particularly well dressed. However, it is also wrong to be so poorly dressed that others begin to feel uneasy about us. Our clothing must match our status. Others should not feel that we are too much or too poor in our attire. Our clothing must glorify the Lord.

D. Clothing Not Arousing Self-consciousness

Furthermore, our clothing should not arouse our own consciousness. Some people are always conscious of what they wear. This means that something is wrong with their attire. They have become a coat hanger to their clothes, and their clothes have become more important than they are. They are not wearing their clothes. Instead, their clothes are wearing them. They are always conscious of what they are wearing. They pay too much attention to their appearance. This means that their dress is either too good or too poor. When a person is poorly dressed, he becomes conscious of his clothes in the company of others. When he wears fancy attire, he becomes conscious of his clothes as well. Both are wrong.

It is best to wear something which does not arouse your attention or the attention of others. Your clothes should be very ordinary. At the same time, it should match your status and should be worthy of Christ. Anything that goes beyond this limit is improper. It is a great thing to present a Christian testimony in our attire today. This means that others can identify us as Christians by our appearance.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE MATTER OF EATING

In Genesis 2 God gave man food to sustain his life. This happened before man sinned. The matter of food is found as early as Genesis 2. Clothing began in Genesis 3, but food began prior to man's fall. God ordained that man should partake of fruits of every kind. Before man sinned, the God-ordained food for man was fruit.

I. THE NEED FOR MEAT AFTER THE FALL

In Genesis 3, after man fell, God gave man herbs for food and ordained that man would eat bread in the sweat of his face. This was God's food for man in Genesis 3. When we come to Genesis 4, God put His seal of approval upon Abel but not Cain, even though no ordinance of any kind had yet been instituted. Cain was a farmer, and Abel was a keeper of sheep. Abel shepherded sheep, and God's seal of approval was upon him. He offered sacrifices to God, and God accepted him. Cain was a tiller of the ground. He brought the produce of the land to God, but God did not accept his sacrifice. Genesis 4 does not say anything about God's will. But when we come to Genesis 9, God gave the animals to man for food (v. 3), just as He had given fruit to man for food in the beginning.

A. Sacrificing Life to Preserve Life

Why did God give animals to man for food? First, this indicates that man has a need for food. But this is not all. Man's need for food before the fall was different from his need for food after the fall. We must understand the meaning of food. Food sustains our life. If a man does not eat, he will die. No one can live and survive without eating. In addition to eating herbs, vegetables, and fruits, God ordained that man should take meat in order to live and survive. In other words, God shows us that after sin entered the world, life must be sacrificed to preserve life. There is the need for an animal to lose its life to maintain our life. After sin entered this world, there was a need for the shedding of blood to maintain life. This is the reason that man's food after the fall is different from his food before the fall. Christians should not be vegetarians; they should be free to take meat.

This does not mean that meat will necessarily do our body any good. Whether or not it is good for our body is a different thing. We are not medical researchers. Researchers claim that animal protein is better than vegetable protein. The basic principle with us is that since sin has entered the world, man can no longer have life without the sacrifice of life. After man sinned, he could no longer receive life without death. Life can only come through death. Without death, man cannot live. In order for man to live, there is the need for the shedding of blood. When we have death, we have life. This is the basic principle of eating after the fall.

Since the time of Abel, and in particular after the flood, God placed this way before men. Being a vegetarian is a subconscious declaration that we can live without death, that we can live without the shedding of blood. By eating meat, we are indicating that we cannot live without death and the shedding of blood. Is this principle clear? This is the reason that God gave animals to man for food after the flood. Man can no longer have life without the loss of life. Thank God! Christ gave up His life. Now we can receive life.

Romans 14 indicates that some people still believed that they could be vegetarians like Adam before the fall. Some of them only ate vegetables. Paul told us not to criticize these ones. He told us not to stop them or to condemn them. Those who eat meat should not judge those who do not, and those who do not eat meat should not judge those who do. However, Paul pointed out one thing: Those who only eat vegetables are weak (v. 2). Do not criticize them for their weakness. But this does not mean that vegetarianism is right. It only means that we do not want to embarrass others over the matter of food.

However, we must realize that Christian redemption involves life out of death. Before there can be life, there must first be death. Vegetables alone are not enough; death must precede life. Life is sustained through death. This is a fundamental Christian principle. Some may be weak in their conscience and may only eat vegetables. We should not expose their weakness. But a Christian's stand is that meat is needed because it sustains life.

B. Abstinence from Foods Being the Teachings of Demons

First Timothy 4 says that there will be the teachings of demons that forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods (vv. 1, 3). D. M. Panton has shed some clear light on this. He said that only by abstaining from marriage and foods can one's soul power be developed. We must

realize that we are not those who abstain from meat. In the last days there will be such things as abstinence from foods. This is the teaching of demons; it is not the teaching of the Lord. Some abstain from meat because they do not know the Christian principle of life through death. Eating only vegetables means that one's life is maintained by the vegetable life alone and that he has no need of a Savior, no need of death, and no need of salvation. We must be clear about this principle.

II. NOT TAKING BLOOD

A. The Taking of Blood Being Forbidden in Three Dispensations

With regard to not taking blood, abstinence from blood is a consistent teaching throughout the Bible. When God spoke to Noah in Genesis 9, He forbade men from taking the blood of the animals (v. 4). Taking blood was something forbidden by God.

Leviticus 17:10-16 clearly and repeatedly says that man should not eat the blood of any beast. God did not allow His people to eat animal blood. Whoever ate blood would be cut off by God; He would not recognize such a one as one of His people.

In the New Testament we find the record of the first council in Jerusalem in Acts 15, in which the church met to settle the great issue of the law. James, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and other apostles of the Lord decided that God's children should be free from the law, but at the same time that they should abstain from sacrifices offered to idols, from fornication, and from blood.

Blood is something that bears a great significance, not only during the time of Noah and in Leviticus, but also at the time of the book of Acts. In the dispensation of the patriarchs, God forbade Noah from taking animal blood. In the dispensation of the law, God spoke through the mouth of Moses and forbade the same thing. In the dispensation of grace, God banned the same thing through the apostles. This matter is forbidden in all three dispensations. Blood is not to be taken in the dispensation of the patriarchs, the dispensation of the law, or the dispensation of grace.

B. Drinking Only the Blood of the Lord Jesus

There must be a reason for this observance. Men of the past did not understand this, but one day God's Son came to the world and pronounced

that He was the bread from heaven and that He came to be man's food. Many did not know what He meant. He said that His flesh was true food and His blood was true drink. The Lord repeated over and over again in John 6 that His blood was the true drink and that a man must drink His blood before he can receive His life. He also said that unless a man drank His blood, he would not have life in himself. Those who (drink His blood will be raised up in the last day and will receive life from Him. The Lord repeated this many times.

This is a marvelous thing. All three of the basic dispensations in the Bible forbid the eating of blood. Yet Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, said, "My blood is true drink" (v. 55). He charged men to take His blood. Do you see this? God forbids us from eating the blood of animals, yet those who take the Lord's blood are saved. What does this mean? This means that after one takes the Lord's blood, he cannot take any other kind of blood. There is only one kind of blood which we can take.

In other words, God's ordinance regarding abstinence from blood tells us that there is only one redemption and one salvation. We cannot have another redemption besides this one. We cannot have another salvation besides this one. Only the blood of Jesus of Nazareth can be taken. All other blood is forbidden. The Lord's blood signifies redemption. It also signifies salvation. Rejecting other kinds of blood means that we reject other kinds of salvation. I know of no other salvation except the salvation of Jesus. There is only one kind of blood for me, not two. Only one kind of blood can save me. I will not accept any other blood.

This may be a small thing to you, but it is one of our many crucial testimonies. As Christians, we bear many testimonies. This is one of them. Other religions may ask why we do not take animal blood. We have to tell them that we have already taken blood. By not taking other blood, we make a strong testimony before men. We do not take other blood because we have taken one kind of blood. We have taken this blood; therefore, we cannot drink any other blood. The blood of Jesus of Nazareth is our only redemption. We can no longer accept any other redemption. We have already accepted the Lord's redemption, and we have rejected all other ways of salvation. This is why we do not take animal blood.

III. NOT EATING THINGS SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

Fourth, 1 Corinthians has much to say concerning things sacrificed to idols. First Corinthians 8 tells us that idols mean nothing. God is God, and

idols are just vanity. To those who are advanced in knowledge, it is all right to eat things sacrificed to idols since idols are nothing. There may be evil spirits behind the idols, but God is much greater than the evil spirits. He who dwells in us is greater than he who is in the world.

Many new believers worshipped idols in the temple in the past. They had dealings with the idols, and they are ignorant of the meaning of fellowship with demons. If they see someone who has knowledge eating in the temple, they will think that they can do the same as well. The conduct may be the same, but the condition of the heart may be different. You eat because you realize that idols are vanity, but it is wrong for them to eat, because in their hearts the idols are something. You may cause them to sin if you are careless about your eating.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8 that it is better for believers not to eat things sacrificed to idols, because this will stumble the weak brothers. It is better not to eat such things at all. Paul considered those who ate only vegetables to be weak. But 1 Corinthians says that it is better to refrain from things offered to idols. We have to catch the emphasis of the writer here. God's children must know that idols are vanity and nothing. But they should not cause others to be stumbled through them. This being the case, it is better not to eat things sacrificed to idols at all.

This principle has nothing to do with demons; it has to do with the weak brothers. We must be clear about this. Many are concerned about the demons; they are the weak ones. We do not eat because we do not want to stumble our brothers, not because of the demons. Satan has no power over us. Idols have no power over us. We are not afraid of demons. But before God we must learn to care for our brothers. I do not eat because I do not want to stumble my brothers.

IV. PERSONAL OPINION

Finally, I will give a word of personal opinion. Eating means a great deal in the Bible. We should keep this significance in mind.

A. Food Being for the Sake of Nourishing the Body

Food, like clothing, is governed by certain principles. The first principle concerning food is that it is for the nourishment of the body. We should eat more of that which nourishes and less of that which does not nourish us. We should never make the belly our god or spend too much energy on food.

As God's children, we must realize that food is for the nourishment of the body and for the preservation of our physical life.

B. Contentment and "Addition"

God's children should be content with food and clothing. The birds of heaven do not sow, neither do they reap, yet God feeds them. This has to do with eating. The lilies of the field toil not, neither do they spin, yet they are better clothed than Solomon. This has to do with clothing. Everything is in God's hand. Today we need only to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to us (Matt. 6:26-33). I like the word added. What is the meaning of added? If I ask, "How much is three plus zero?" you would say, "It does not make sense to add zero to three. It makes no sense to add zero to anything. Zero plus three is redundant." What can you add to a number? It only makes sense to add a positive number to something. For example, you can add one to three. You should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. This means that to those who have God's kingdom and His righteousness, God will add food and clothing. I hope that all the brothers and sisters will seek God's kingdom and His righteousness. To those who have God's kingdom and who live in God's righteousness, the rest will be added to them. I hope that God's children will know how to maintain a proper testimony among men in the matter of clothing and food.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIANS' MANAGEMENT OF FINANCES

Scripture Reading: Luke 6:38; 1 Tim. 6:7-10, 17-19; 2 Cor. 9:6; Mal. 3:10;
Prov. 11:24; Phil. 4:15-19

I. MANAGING ACCORDING TO GOD'S PRINCIPLES

Here we will cover monetary offering and giving. After a person has sold everything, he will still receive income; money will still find its way back to his hand. How should he manage his money? Even after a person has offered up all of his money, we should not think that money will no longer have an influence on him. Some people can give away their money all at once, but money can gradually regain its power over them. Eventually, they will consider their money to be their own once again. Therefore, a believer must learn to continually let go of his money.

The Christian way of managing wealth is completely different from that of an unbeliever. The Christian way of financial management is the way of giving. The unbeliever's way is the way of accumulating. Today we are concerned with how a Christian should live in order to be free from want. God has promised us that we will have no lack on earth. The birds of the air have no lack of food, and the flowers of the field have no lack of clothing. Even so God's children should have no lack of clothing and food. If they have any lack, there must be a reason or cause for it. If a brother is financially hard-pressed, he is not managing his wealth according to God's principle.

After you have forsaken all of your possessions to follow the Lord, you should walk according to God's principle. If you do not follow God's principle, you will eventually end up in poverty. There is a great need for many of God's children to learn to manage their wealth. If they do not learn to manage their wealth, they should expect nothing except hardship in the way ahead of them. Today we want to consider the way to attain God's prosperity.

II. GOD'S PROVISION BEING CONDITIONAL

As believers we have to look to the Lord for our food, clothing, and other needs while we live on earth today. Without God's mercy, we cannot pass through our days on earth. This is true even for the rich ones; they have to look to the Lord also. During World War II, we saw many rich people stripped of clothing and food. One day many people will be in remorse over their wealth. Paul warned us not to depend on unpredictable riches. A greedy person is always an anxious person. Those who trust in the Lord may not have much in the way of savings, but the Lord will not leave them in difficulties. He can supply all their needs. However we must also realize that God's supply is with conditions.

If God can feed the birds in the air, He can keep us alive. In reality, no one can feed all the birds or supply enough fertilizer to grow all the lilies of the field. But God has enough riches to keep the birds of the air and the lilies of the field alive. He also has enough riches to keep His children alive. God does not want to see us come short in anything. He does not want our living to be deprived in any way. Everyone who falls into deprivation falls because he has a problem in himself; he has not managed his wealth according to God's way. If we manage our money according to God's law, we will not be in poverty.

Let us read Luke 6:38. This portion of the Word describes the type of person God will supply. God is always willing to supply. When He supplies us, the supply can come in such abundance that it comes out of our mouth and even becomes loathsome to us, as described in Exodus. God has no problem in doing such a thing. We should never think that God is poor. The cattle upon a thousand hills are His, and the goats upon ten thousand hills are His. If everything belongs to Him, why are God's children poor? Why do His children experience lack? It is not because God cannot supply. Rather, we need to meet His requirements before we can receive His supply. We need to meet certain conditions before our prayers can be answered. Even our salvation had certain requirements to it—we had to believe. Every promise has conditions, and we must fulfill these conditions before we can receive the promise. Likewise, we need to fulfill God's requirements before we can receive His supply. His requirement is to give. The Lord says, "Give, and it will be given to you."

III. GIVE, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN

I have seen a few brothers and sisters who fell into dire need because they were unfaithful in the matter of giving. They were not actually lacking

in income. The Bible shows us a fundamental principle—one must give to become rich and one becomes poor by accumulating riches. Whoever cares only for himself is destined to be in poverty. Whoever learns to give is destined to have riches. God's Word says it, and it is true. If we want to escape poverty, we have to give again and again. The more we give, the more God will give to us. Since we are willing to share our surplus with others, others will also be happy to share their surplus with us in the future. If we give one-twentieth to others, others will also give one-twentieth to us. If we give one-thousandth to others, others will also give one-thousandth to us.

With what measure we measure to others, with the same measure others will measure to us. In what capacity we treat our brothers and sisters, with the same capacity God will treat us. If we are willing to sacrifice our livelihood, others will also sacrifice their livelihood for us. If we only give others that which is totally useless, things which we never use, others will certainly give us totally useless and unusable things. Many people have problems with their income because they have problems with their giving. If a person has no problem with his giving, it is hard to imagine that he will have problems with his income. God's Word is quite clear. If we give to others, the Lord will give to us. If we do not give to others, the Lord will not give to us. Most people only exercise faith when they ask God for money; they do not exercise faith in giving money. It is no wonder that they have no faith to receive anything from God.

Brothers and sisters, as soon as we become Christians, we have to learn the basic lesson of financial stewardship. Christians have a unique way of managing their wealth: What we receive depends on what we give. In other words, the Christian way of financial stewardship is to receive according to what we give. Worldly people give according to what they have received, but we receive according to what we give. Our inflow depends on our outflow. Those who crave money and cling to it can never receive God's money; they will never receive any supply from God.

We should all look to the Lord for our needs, but God will supply the needs of only one type of people—those who give. The words good measure, which the Lord uses in Luke 6:38, are wonderful words. When God gives to man, He is never stingy. He is ever generous and overflowing. Our God is always generous. Our God's cup is always running over. God is never petty. When He gives, He says that it will be a good measure, pressed down, and shaken together. Consider the way in which we buy rice. Most rice

merchants will not let us shake the measure. They do not allow the rice to settle before pouring it out. But the Lord said, “Pressed down, shaken together.” Not only so, it is “running over.” Our God is such a generous God. He gives by pressing down, shaking together, heaping up, and running over. However, He also says that with what measure we measure to others, it will be measured to us in return. If we are shrewd and exact in giving to others, God will only touch others to give to us in a shrewd and exact way.

We must give first to others, before others will give to us. Most people never learn to give. They always want God to answer their prayers. We have to give first before we can receive. If we have not received anything recently, it means that we have a problem in giving. I have been a Christian for more than twenty years, and I can surely bear witness to this principle. Whenever a person has a problem with his giving, he will experience a lack.

We have to believe in every word of the Lord. Most people have difficulty taking God’s Word as God’s word. If you do not give, you definitely will not receive. If you give to others, others will surely give to you. This is why we need to learn to give. Giving is not the end; it enables God to give to us. This is the principle of Christian financial stewardship. Do not expect God to supply you with anything if there is excess in your house.

A co-worker once told me, “During the past twenty years, every time money has remained in my hand, there has always been a problem.” If there is a problem in giving, there will be a problem in receiving. The more you want to keep, the less you will have. The more you want to give, the more you will have. Most people hold on tightly to all that they have, and so God lets them hold on to that little amount. They have not learned to give. If the grace of giving is not in you, the grace of God will not be upon you. If you do not have grace for others, you will have little of God’s grace for yourself.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The Christian way of managing money is not to hold on to money. The tighter you hold on to your money, the more it dies. The more you grasp it, the more it disappears; it will evaporate like vapor. But the more you give away, the more you will have. If God’s children would learn to give more, God would have many ways to work out His miracles. Keeping back money only makes God’s children poor. God will not entrust Himself to those who hold on to their money and who will not give. The more you give, the more God will give to you.

A. Sowing with One's Money

Please read 2 Corinthians 9:6, which says, “He who sows sparingly shall also sparingly reap; and he who sows with blessings shall also with blessings reap.” This is also a scriptural principle of financial management. When Christians give, they are not throwing their money away; they are sowing. The Word does not say, “He who throws away his money sparingly shall also sparingly reap; and he who throws away his money with blessings shall also with blessings reap.” It says, “He who sows sparingly shall also sparingly reap; and he who sows with blessings shall also with blessings reap.” When you give, you are sowing. Do you want your money to grow? If you do, you need to sow. When you give your money away, it grows. When you do not give it away, it does not grow.

Brothers and sisters, can anyone be so foolish as to expect a harvest without sowing? How many times has God not answered your prayer for your needs? You are a “hard man,” trying to reap where you have not sown and gather where you have not winnowed. This is impossible. Why do you not sow some of your money? There are many brothers and sisters who are in difficulty. Why do you not sow money upon them so that you may reap when the reaping time comes? The more a person holds on to his money, the less he will have. In the above portion of the Word, we see a very beautiful picture. The Corinthians gave to those in Jerusalem, remembering their needs, and Paul said that it was a kind of sowing, not a kind of throwing away. Please remember that money can be our seeds. If you see a brother or sister in difficulty, and you remember him or her, God will cause that money to grow and harvest thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and even a hundredfold. I hope that more of your money will be sown.

A new believer should learn to sow, so that when he has needs, he can reap what he has sown. You cannot reap what you have not sown. [here are many brothers who are getting poorer and poorer. If you eat what you have, of course, there will not be anything left. But if you keep half of your seed for sowing, you will have a harvest next year. If next year you also keep half for planting, you will have another harvest the following year. [f you want to sow anything, you must not eat all that you have. Some people always eat and never sow. They also never receive anything when they are in need. Suppose some young brothers sow some money upon other brothers, praying as they sow, “O God, I have sown upon the brothers. When I have needs, I want to harvest.” If they do this, God will honor His own words.

B. Offering to God

This is not all. In the Old Testament, God said to the Israelites, “Bring the whole tithe to the storehouse that there may be food in My house; and prove Me, if you will, by this, says Jehovah of hosts, whether I will open to you the windows of heaven and pour out blessing for you until there is no room for it” (Mal. 3:10). Here we see the same principle.

At that time, the Israelites were in great poverty and difficulty. How could they carry out the words of Malachi 3:10? The Israelites might have asked, “If we cannot get by with ten loads of rice, how can we get by with nine? If ten bags of flour are insufficient, how can nine bags be sufficient?” These are words out of a carnal and foolish mouth. God reproached the people and told them that what is impossible with man is possible with God. He seemed to be saying, “Bring to My storehouse, and test Me if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing that there shall not be enough room to receive it.”

Ten loads are the reason for poverty, while nine loads are the cause for abundance. Man thinks that the more he has in his hand, the better off he will be. However, keeping things in one’s hand is the very cause for poverty, while offering things to God is the very cause for blessing. If I have an additional load in my hands, it will become my curse. But if it is put in God’s storehouse, it becomes my blessing. The principle with the Israelites was poverty for those who tried to hold back what was due to God. When you hold something back, you end up in poverty.

C. Scattering Money

Now read Proverbs [1:24: “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; / and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.” Many people have not scattered, and they are left with nothing. Many people have scattered, and they become prosperous. This is what God’s Word shows us. This is the Christian principle of managing finances.

D. Giving All for God

Consider another wonderful portion of the Word—Elijah’s prayer for rain on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). There was a drought, and it was so dry that even the king and his chamberlains had to go out to search for water. Elijah was repairing the altar on the mountain. He wanted to offer a sacrifice, and he asked men to pour water on the altar and the sacrifice.

How precious was water at that time! Even the king had to go out to look for water. But Elijah told the men to pour out the water. He told them to pour it three times until the water ran round about the altar like a river. Was it not a waste to pour out so much water before any rain came? Would it not have been a pity if no rain came after they poured out so much water? But Elijah told them to bring jars of water and pour them out. Next he knelt down and asked God to send fire to burn the sacrifice. God heard his prayer, received the sacrifice by fire, and sent the rain. We must first pour the water out before rain will come. The rain will not come if we are reluctant to pour out the water.

The problem of many people is that they hold on tightly to what they have and yet expect God to answer their prayers. Although God wanted to dispel the drought, man had to pour out the water first. The human thought is always to have some backup. If no rain came, at least there would be some jars of water. But those who count the jars of water on hand will never see rain. To see the rain, one must be like Elijah, willing to part with the water that is on hand. Everything has to go. If new believers are not delivered from the power and grip of money, the church will never be able to run a straight course. I hope that you will be a consecrated person and will offer up everything you have for God.

E. The Promise of Supply

Philippians 4:19 is a very special verse. The Corinthians were parsimonious in giving, while the Philippians were very generous. Paul received from the Philippians time and again. He told the Philippians, “My God will fill your every need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus.” Do you see something special in Philippians 4? Paul emphasized, “My God will fill your every need.” The God who receives the money and the gifts will supply the needs of the givers.

This is very clear. The Philippians had been caring for Paul again and again, and Paul’s God supplied their needs. God will never supply those who do ‘not give. Today many people hold on to Philippians 4:19, but they do not really understand it, because God does not supply those who ask, but those who give. Only those who give can claim Philippians 4:19. Those who do not give cannot claim this promise. You must give before you can say, “O God, today supply all my needs according to Your riches in Christ Jesus.” God supplied all the needs for only the Philippians. God will only supply the needs of those who are practicing the principle of giving.

When your vessel is empty of flour and when your bottle is empty of oil, please remember that you must first make bread for Elijah with what little you have left. You must first feed God's servant. Take the little oil and flour and make bread for the prophet first. After a while, this little flour and oil will feed you for three and a half years. Who has ever heard of a bottle of oil feeding a person for three and a half years? But let me tell you, if you take your little flour and oil and make bread for the prophet, you will find the bottle of oil feeding you for three and a half years (cf. Luke 4:25-26; 1 Kings 17:8-16). What one has may not be enough to feed him even once. But when it is given away, it becomes the means of one's livelihood. This is the Christian way of financial management.

V. LETTING GO OF OUR MONEY

Both the New Testament and the Old Testament teach us the same thing. The 'Christian way should not be the way of poverty. God does not want us to be poor. If there is poverty or want among us, it is because some people are holding back their money. The more you love yourself, the more you will go hungry. The more importance you attach to money, the poorer you will become. I may not be able to testify of other things, but I can surely testify of this one thing. The more one holds back his money, the more miserable and depleted he becomes. This is a sure principle. During the past twenty years, I have seen many such cases. I only wish that we could release our money and allow it to circulate around the earth, to work, and to become part of God's miracles and answers to prayers. Then when we have needs, God will supply us.

Not only are we in God's hands, but Satan is also in His hands. The cattle on a thousand hills and the sheep on ten thousand hills are His. Only foolish ones think that they have earned their own money. A new believer must see that tithing is our duty. We should give what we earn to take care of the poor saints. Do not be so foolish as to always receive. Do not try to save up your money or hide it away. The Christian way is the way of giving. Always give what you have, and you will find money becoming something living in the church. When you have any need, the birds in the air will work for you, and God will perform miracles for you.

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 50, chapter 28)

SECTION V:
SISTERS' MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

CONCERNING MARRIAGE

In order to be a good Christian, one needs to deal with all the basic issues in a thorough way. If there is one basic issue that is not settled, whether it be the family or one's occupation, problems will eventually come back. As long as there is one unresolved issue, a Christian will not be able to take a straight path before the Lord.

A new believer should know what God's Word has to say about marriage. We need to consider this subject from various angles.

I. MARRIAGE

The first question to address with regard to marriage is the matter of sex. We need to be clear that human beings have an awareness of sex in the same way that they have an awareness of hunger. Just as the consciousness of hunger is a natural demand of the body, the consciousness of sex is also a natural demand of the body. To feel hungry is natural; it is not a sin. But to steal food is sin; that is not natural. Likewise, having a consciousness of sex is natural and is not a sin. But if a person uses improper means to satisfy his demand, he falls into sin.

Marriage was ordained and initiated by God. Hence, the consciousness of sex also was given by God. Marriage is not something that was instituted after man's fall; it was there before man sinned. It was not instituted after Genesis 3; rather, God ordained marriage in Genesis 2. Hence, the consciousness of sex existed before, not after, sin entered the world. It is definitely not a sin for a person to have the consciousness of sex. There is no element of sin in this consciousness. Rather, it is a consciousness created by God Himself.

New believers must be clear concerning this point. I have contacted many young brothers and sisters in the course of my Christian life and service during the past thirty years. Many of them were troubled by the matter of marriage. They were unnecessarily condemned in their conscience because they were ignorant of God's ordination as well as God's Word. They had the consciousness and need of marriage, yet they thought that this was sin. Some brothers have fallen into serious doubts about God's work only because of their consciousness of sex. It is a heathen thought to treat sex as

something sinful. We need to be clear about God's Word. Just as it is not sin for a man to feel hungry, the need for sex is not sinful; it is a natural consciousness.

Hebrews 13:4 tells us, "Let marriage be held in honor among all." Marriage is not only honorable but even holy. God considers sex not only natural but even holy.

Dr. Meyer, a co-worker of D. L. Moody, wrote many good books on edification. He once said, "Only the most filthy mind would consider sex as something filthy." I think this was well said. Man injects filthy thoughts into sex because he himself is filthy. To the clean everything is clean. To the defiled everything is defiled. Because man's mind is defiled, his thoughts also become defiled. We need to realize that marriage is clean. A God-ordained sex relationship is holy, clean, and undefiled.

In 1 Timothy 4:1-3 Paul said that in later times, there would be the teachings of demons, one of which is the forbidding of marriage. Here we see that even demonic teachings pursue holiness. G. H. Pember pointed out clearly in his writing how men would forbid marriage in the pursuit of holiness. They thought that this would make them holy. However, in his Epistle to Timothy, Paul told us that forbidding marriage is a doctrine of the demons. God has never forbidden marriage.

No one should be condemned unnecessarily in his conscience because of heathen religious teachings. The consciousness of sex is something natural and is not sin. It is only when one begins to deal with this consciousness that the possibility of it becoming a sin arises. It is not a question of the presence of this consciousness; the presence of this consciousness is natural and is not sin. It is the way a person deals with this consciousness that determines whether or not it is sin. This matter needs to be thoroughly cleared up. Otherwise a person's conscience will be condemned, and he will not grow. This feeling of guilt is, in fact, not sin at all but the result of ignorance.

II. BASIC ELEMENTS OF A MARRIAGE

A. Rendering Mutual Help

Marriage is ordained by God. In Genesis God said that it was not good for man to be alone. God said "good" to everything that He created. With the exception of the second day, God proclaimed that what He had created was good. God did not say that "it was good" on the second day, because the

firmament was the place of Satan. Moreover, on the sixth day, God did not say that “it was good”; in fact, He even said that something was not good after He created man. God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). This is not to suggest that man was not created well. It means only that it was not good because there was just one man. Only half of man was created.

God created a help meet for Adam on the sixth day. Eve was also made on the sixth day, and she was brought by God to Adam. She was made for the purpose of marriage.

The words help meet mean “meet to help.” This word in Hebrew means “someone that matches, someone that renders help.”

In considering Genesis 2:18, many Bible readers think that when God created man, He created a male plus a female. However, the Bible says only that God created man. His creation of man was His creation of male and female. The male and female made a complete man. It was as if God created half of a man in the beginning and then the other half after seeing that this man was only one-half. The two halves were joined together to become one. Only when the two halves were joined together was man complete. This is why God did not say that “it was good” until Eve was made. This shows us that marriage is not initiated by man but by God. The institution of marriage did not come after man’s fall but before it. Man did not sin on the first day of his creation; he was married on the first day of his creation. On the same day that God created Eve, He gave her to Adam. This is not something that happened after man sinned. Marriage is something initiated by God.

In Genesis 2 we see marriage in God’s creation. In John 2, at the beginning of the Lord Jesus’ ministry, there was also a wedding in Cana. During that wedding the Lord Jesus changed the water into wine. This shows that the Lord not only allowed marriage but even approved and endorsed it. The Lord Jesus not only attended the wedding but even enhanced it and made it better. It is clear that marriage was initiated by God and particularly approved by the Lord Jesus. Therefore, it is something entirely of God.

Here we see the place of marriage before God. God’s purpose is to have a husband and a wife, who will mutually help each other. Thus, He called Adam’s wife a help meet. Help meet in Hebrew means someone who is meet to help. Here we find that God wants man to live in a corporate way,

to have mutual fellowship, and to render mutual help. This is God's purpose.

B. Preventing Sin

In the Old Testament God instituted marriage before sin came into the world. In the New Testament, Paul said that marriage not only is allowed but also is a necessity because of the presence of sin (1 Cor. 7).

Marriage can prevent sin. This is why Paul said that men should have their own wives and women should have their own husbands. This is to prevent the sin of fornication (v. 2). Paul did not condemn the consciousness of sex as sin. On the contrary, he showed us that both the male and the female should marry in order to prevent sin.

Paul said that we should make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). If a man constantly committed the sin of pride, Paul could not have said, "Since you always commit the sin of pride, you can be proud at home so that you will not be proud elsewhere! If you exercise your pride in one place, perhaps you will not exercise it elsewhere." Saying this would have been to make "provision for the flesh." God would never agree with his pride or my making some arrangement for him to exercise his pride. Consider a man who loves to steal. You should not say, "Since you like to steal, I will allow you to steal the things which belong to Brother So-and-so so that you will not steal from others." You should not say this; instead, you need to say, "You cannot steal at all." Stealing is definitely a sin, and we should not make any provision for it. Pride is definitely a sin as well, and we cannot make provision for it either. But sex is not a sin in an absolute sense. This is why men should have their own wives, and women should have their own husbands. If we do not understand this, we may think that Paul's word was making provision for the flesh. But we know that the apostle did not make provision for the flesh. Therefore, we cannot consider marriage to be a sin. Marriage is not God's provision for the flesh. We want to hold marriage on a high plane. It is something holy and ordained by God Himself.

Marriage is necessary because sin has entered. Marriage can prevent sin. This is not to make provision for the flesh. There is a clear difference.

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul spoke about marriage. He began by saying that a wife does not have authority over her own body, and a husband does not have authority over his own body (v. 4). Paul's teaching is quite clear. Except for the purpose of devoting themselves to the service of the Lord,

the husband and the wife should not be separated. This prevents fornication (v. 5). In order to prevent fornication, God ordains that male and female should marry and not be separated.

Paul used strong words to speak of those who have a compelling desire for sex. He said that they should marry in order to avoid burning with desire (v. 9). He did not reprimand such persons. Paul did not say, “You are wrong to have such a strong desire. You have sinned in having such a strong desire. Therefore, you have to make some provision for your flesh.” Instead, he said, “If you have a strong desire, you should marry. It is better to marry than to live with such a strong desire.” The Word of God is very clear concerning this. The consciousness of sex is not a sin. Even a strong sex urge is not a sin. But God has ordained that those who have a strong consciousness of sex should marry. They should not abstain from marriage on the one hand and fall into sin on the other hand. This is what the Lord has shown us.

The institution of marriage has a New Testament aspect and an Old Testament aspect. The Old Testament shows us that marriage provides help that is meet. The New Testament says that it is instituted to prevent sin. One aspect of the Christian marriage today is mutual help, and the other aspect is the prevention of sin.

C. Inheriting Grace Together

There is a third aspect. In his first Epistle, Peter said that the wives are “fellow heirs of the grace of life” (3:7). In other words, God delights to see husbands and wives serving Him together. God delighted to see Aquila and Prisca serving Him. He delighted to see Peter and his wife, Judah and his wife, serving Him together.

Therefore, there are three basic elements of a Christian marriage. First, there is mutual help; second, there is the prevention of sin; and third, there is the joint inheritance of grace of two persons in the presence of God. One should not be a Christian alone but a Christian together with another person. One should not inherit grace alone but together with another person.

III. MARRIAGE PARTNERS

Concerning the matter of marriage, God has laid down definite guidelines on whom one can marry and whom one cannot marry. The Bible shows us

clearly that the marriages of God's people should be restricted to those among themselves only. In other words, if one is to be married, his spouse must be sought from among God's own people, not from other people.

A. The Old Testament Commandments

There are sufficient commandments in the Old Testament to show us that we should not marry anyone outside of God's people.

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 says that the Israelites should not marry the Canaanites. They should neither give their daughters to the Canaanites' sons, nor take their daughters for their sons, because the Canaanites would turn them from following the Lord and would seduce them to serve other gods. God clearly shows through the Old Testament that one should look for a marriage partner among the Lord's people. One cannot look for a wife or a husband among unbelievers. The greatest problem with going after unbelievers is that the other person may turn one away from the Lord to serve other gods. It is easy for wives to follow their husbands to worship idols. It is also easy for husbands to follow their wives to worship idols. Since both are married, it is very easy for one to follow the other to worship other gods.

Joshua 23:12-13 warns the Israelites against marrying the people of the land. They were warned that the latter would become snares and thorns in their eyes. Their wives or their husbands would become their thorns, and they would be ensnared.

At the time of Nehemiah, the Israelites returned from captivity to the land of Judah. Many had married Gentile wives and could not speak the Hebrew language. Nehemiah charged them in 13:23-27 to sever all ties with the Gentile women and not to have any dealings with them. Here we see a basic problem in marrying a Gentile woman: Sooner or later the children will follow the mother and not follow the father to serve God. If you marry a Gentile, your children will easily follow your Gentile partner and go into the world. This is quite a problem.

Malachi 2:11 shows us that the Israelites committed treacherous sins and profaned the holiness of God because they took Gentiles to be their wives. In God's sight, marrying a Gentile woman is to profane the holiness of God. Hence, Christians should look for marriage partners only among the believers.

We can also take warnings from the failure of Solomon. Solomon was the wisest king, yet he fell into idolatry through marrying Gentile women.

B. In the New Testament

Paul's word in the New Testament is clear enough. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, he told the widows to marry those who were in the Lord.

Second Corinthians 6:14 is a well-known portion of the Bible. It says that believers and unbelievers should not share the same yoke. These words do not refer to only marriage. But they certainly speak also of marriage. Believers and unbelievers should not be engaged in the same business; they should not join themselves in one goal, like two animals plowing the field with one yoke. God does not allow this. He does not allow a believer and an unbeliever to bear the same yoke. In the Old Testament, an ox and a horse could not be yoked together, and an ass could not be equally yoked with a horse. You cannot have one that is fast and another that is slow. It is impossible to have one going one direction and the other going another direction, or one turning to heaven and the other turning to the world. You cannot have one seeking after spiritual blessings and the other seeking after worldly riches. It is impossible for one to pull in one direction and the other to pull in the other direction. If you do, the yoke will break.

Of all unequally yoked relationships, none is more serious than the marriage relationship. One may be unequally yoked with others in business ventures or in other things. But no yoke is more severe than the marriage yoke. When a believer and an unbeliever share the responsibility of a family together, the result will be nothing but problems. The ideal marriage partner is a brother or a sister. Never choose an unbeliever capriciously. If you pick out an unbeliever carelessly, you will surely encounter problems later. One will be pulling to one side, and the other will be pulling to the other side. One will turn to heaven, and the other will turn to the world. One will seek a heavenly gift, and the other will seek worldly riches. The difference between the two is tremendous. This is why the Bible charges us to marry those in the Lord.

IV. IF MARRIED TO AN UNBELIEVER

But here is a problem: Suppose a brother is already married to an unbeliever, or a sister is already married to an unbelieving husband. What should they do? We mentioned earlier that a single person should seek a

partner who is in the Lord. However, there are some who are already married. They already have an unbelieving wife or an unbelieving husband. What should they do?

A. If He Wants to Go Away

First Corinthians 7 has something to say about this matter. Verses 12, 13, and 15 address this point. They tell us what to do when a dispute arises in a family that has only one member who is a Christian. Please bear in mind that many such families today complain little, simply because the believers in these families are not absolute enough. The Lord Jesus predicted in the Gospels that there would be much contention within the family. If a believer is absolute, there is bound to be contention in the family. There are cases of “three against two and two against three,” as in Luke 12:52, because some family members have become believers. Suppose a husband leaves his wife because she has believed in the Lord. Suppose he says, “You have believed in the Lord; I do not want you anymore.” What should the wife do? The Lord’s word in 1 Corinthians 7 is clear enough: “Let him separate” (v. 15). Therefore, if a husband wants to separate because the wife has believed in the Lord, or vice versa, the word is, “Let him separate.”

However, one thing must be clear: You must not be the one who initiates the separation. You must not be the one who asks for the separation. The other party must be the one who asks for it. He is the one who is not happy with your faith in the Lord. He is the one who thinks that there is no future with you now that you have believed in the Lord. It is he who wants to go. If he wants to separate, “Let him separate.”

B. If He Does Not Care, the Lord Will Save Him

Paul said that there is no need to separate if the other party does not care. How do you know that the Lord will not save him through you? If he does not care and wants to continue living with you, Paul said that you should be at peace with him and should not leave. He said that an unbeliever can be sanctified through a believer. He said also, “For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” (v. 16). If the other party wants to leave, that is his concern, not yours. But if he does not want to leave, you have to believe that the Lord will save him. Paul said that it would be easy for him to be saved. It may not be that easy for the Lord to save others, but it would

surely be easy for the Lord to save one who is already yours. We need to deal with this matter by taking such a stand.

V. IF ONE NEEDS TO BE MARRIED YET CANNOT FIND A BELIEVER

This is a real problem; it is not an imaginary one. But we can only say that there is no teaching in the Bible concerning this matter. However, we need to touch Paul's heart. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul wished that the widows would remain single if possible. But then, he also wished that the widows would marry those who are in the Lord (v. 39). Therefore, widows can remarry if there is the need. According to this principle, we can say that the best thing for a brother to do is to marry a sister in the Lord. If it is not possible to do this, it is best if he does not marry at all. However, if he must marry, we still would be happy to see him marry. Even if the other party is an unbeliever, we still would like to see him marry.

When we say this, we are not advocating, as the world says, "Choose the lesser of two evils." We are saying that we would rather see a person commit a sin against God's government rather than a moral sin. If by not marrying I fall into sin, I commit a moral sin. If I marry an unbelieving woman, I commit a sin against God's government. There are two types of sin; one is moral sin, and the other is sin against God's government. Please bear in mind that moral sin is more serious than sin against God's government. If a brother needs to marry and he cannot find a sister, the best thing for him to do is stay single. But if he must marry, we should let him marry even if it means marrying an unbeliever.

If you marry an unbeliever, you need to have your eyes open and realize that serious problems lie ahead. It is particularly hard for a believer to marry an unbeliever. The hardship is greater than that of an unbelieving couple in which one becomes a believer. A husband or wife who becomes a believer after being married may encounter hardship, but many times the Lord will bring him through. However, a believer who marries an unbeliever will face many difficulties. We need to warn him ahead of time, and he needs to open his eyes to the hardships ahead.

If a person marries an unbeliever, we must warn him of another thing: He should be careful not to be carried away. He has to remember that he is marrying an unbeliever, and if he is careless, he will be easily led away. Of course, those who are married or engaged have to be careful as well, but

those who are considering marriage should exercise even more care. In other words, they need special protection, preservation, and prayer, so that they will not be carried away by the other party.

If you have no choice but to marry an unbeliever, you must also lay down the terms clearly beforehand. You need to tell the unbeliever, “I have already believed in the Lord. I will not force you to believe, but you cannot interfere with my faith. You must give me absolute freedom in this respect.” You need also to bring up the question of children. “You must give me the freedom to lead our children to the Lord. I want my children to believe in the Lord. I do not want them to worship idols or to be conformed to the world.” If you emphasize this point enough, perhaps you can get by with this issue.

I will speak a few words to the more mature brothers and sisters. When you see a new believer struggling with such a problem, you must be very careful. Do not open the door too wide. Do not allow him to arbitrarily marry an unbeliever. On the other hand, do not close the door too tightly. Do not keep him away from governmental sin while exposing him to moral sin. It is better to let someone fall into God’s governmental hand than to let him fall into moral sin.

I have something more to say about this. We have many young brothers and sisters in every locality. Most of the problems in finding a spouse arise when too many saints have too many expectations concerning the background and status of others. A brother who has a higher social status does not want to marry a sister with a lower status, and the reverse is also true. Today there is no lack of brothers and no lack of sisters. But the question of status has caused many problems. I think this question would be easily solved if the brothers and sisters would change their concept about occupation. It would be easy for sisters to marry if they did not belittle brothers who are farmers. It would also be easy for brothers to marry if they did not belittle sisters who are farmers. Today we look down upon occupations which God honors and exalt occupations which men worship. This is what makes things complicated. Today we have no lack of sisters and brothers, but we do not have many matching pairs according to status. Since the matter of status is a worldly consideration, we need to have a complete turn in our concept concerning occupation in order to solve this problem.

VI. DIVORCE

The Bible speaks of divorce, but divorce is sanctioned by the Scripture under only one condition. There are many ordinances regarding divorce among the nations of the world. Some countries have more than twenty ordinances on the subject. The Chinese also have many ordinances. For example, if either party is mentally unsound or if there is incompatibility of any kind, the couple can divorce each other. But the Bible gives only one condition for divorce—adultery. Factors such as mental instability or prolonged separation do not constitute legitimate reasons for divorce. The only reason for a divorce is extramarital sexual conduct. In Matthew 19 and Luke 16 the Lord Jesus shows us clearly that divorce is permitted only if adultery is involved.

A. What God Has Joined Together, Man Should Not Separate

Divorce is allowed in the case of adultery because man should not separate what God has joined together. In other words, the husband and wife are one in the sight of God. All divorces violate this oneness. What is adultery? It is the destruction of that oneness. If you commit sexual acts with someone other than your wife or your husband, you have committed adultery and have violated that oneness. A wife or a husband may be missing for years or may be mentally sick. There may be psychological harassment or other factors involved, but if one party turns away and marries someone else, he is breaking the oneness and has committed adultery in reality.

B. One Being Allowed to Separate Only When the Oneness Is Broken

Divorce is allowed in the case of adultery because the oneness has already been broken. Originally, the wife was one with her husband. When the husband commits adultery, she becomes free. When the oneness was there, she had to preserve it. Now that the oneness has been broken by the husband, the wife is free. Thus, adultery is the only condition for divorce. A wife can leave her husband if he has committed adultery. If a sister finds her husband committing adultery or taking another woman, she can divorce her husband, and the church cannot stop her. She can divorce her husband, and she can remarry. Anything that destroys the oneness is sin. A person can leave his or her spouse only where adultery is involved, because

adultery has destroyed the oneness. Divorce is but a declaration that the oneness between a husband and a wife is gone. Since the oneness is gone, one can remarry.

Matthew 19 and Luke 16 are two clear passages concerning this subject, and we have to pay much attention to them. Divorce is based on adultery. Adultery breaks the original oneness between a husband and a wife. The two are no longer one, but have become two. Therefore, they can divorce. They can divorce each other because there is no more oneness between them. Actually a divorce has already occurred when one party commits adultery; it does not begin with the divorce proceedings. The so-called divorce proceedings are but a procedure. Marriage begins with the declaration of oneness, and divorce is a declaration that such a oneness no longer exists. This is why divorce is permitted where adultery is found. A divorce that is not based on adultery means that both parties are committing adultery. Suppose neither a husband nor a wife has committed adultery. They cannot have a divorce even if they cannot get along with each other. Once they divorce each other, they have committed adultery. If the oneness has not yet been broken when one tries to remarry, he or she is in reality committing adultery. Only when the oneness no longer exists can a person remarry.

We need to know what marriage is. Marriage means oneness; it means that two persons are no longer two, but one flesh. Adultery destroys this oneness, while divorce is but an announcement of the destruction of this oneness. Today if the oneness is gone between two persons, a remarriage is justified. But suppose the oneness is still there. The two may quarrel bitterly, they may not get along with each other, and they may threaten to divorce each other. The world and civic laws may even allow them to divorce each other. But in God's eyes, the two still cannot divorce each other. If they divorce each other, they have committed adultery in reality. Divorce is allowed only where adultery has already occurred. We must see that no one can separate what God has joined together. Since there is already a union, one must never try to break it for any reason at all.

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 49, ch. 30)

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE

The best way to approach Paul's treatment of married life in the chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians is to consider the basic principles. I believe that this is the best way to understand the many points covered in this chapter.

I. GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO TOUCH A WOMAN

The first basic principle is found in verse 1. In this verse Paul says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." This depends upon the gift from God (v. 7).

II. DEVOTING OURSELVES TO PRAYER

Speaking to married believers, Paul says in verse 5, "Do not deprive each other, except by agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer and again be together, that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." The Greek word rendered devote literally means have leisure, be free for; hence, to give oneself to. Prayer requires that we be free from persons, matters, and things. Any prayer that requires staying away from the spouse for a time must be special and heavy.

Married life often distracts us from prayer and interferes with our prayer life. It may even keep us from praying altogether. However, there are unusual cases where a husband and wife help one another in the prayer life. But for the most part, marriage is a distraction from the prayer life.

III. GIVING NO OCCASION TO SATAN

In verse 5 Paul warns the married ones not to be tempted by Satan because of their lack of self-control. The tempter, Satan, is crouching to capture the believers. Their lack of self-control may give him the opportunity to do this.

IV. DEPENDING UPON THE GIFT WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM GOD

In verse 7 Paul says, "But I wish all men to be even as myself; but each has his own gift from God, one of this kind, another of that." Since the

Apostle Paul is so absolute for the Lord and His economy, he wishes all men to be as he is (v. 8). He desires them not to marry but to remain as he that they also may be absolute for the Lord's interests without distraction (vv. 33, 35). In this wish he expresses the Lord's aspiration concerning His called ones.

For a believer in Christ to be able not to marry is a gift from God (Matt. 19:10-12). For those who have not received such a gift, it is better to marry (1 Cor. 7:9). It all depends upon the gift we have received from God. If a person does not have the gift not to marry and yet deliberately refrains from marrying, he will face difficulties and may damage himself. Married life is troublesome. But if anyone does not have the gift, the ability, not to marry, that one should marry and accept its troubles. Otherwise, by choosing not to be married, he may have even greater difficulties.

V. GOOD TO REMAIN UNMARRIED

Verse 8 says, "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, It is good for them if they remain even as I." This was the apostle's wish and opinion in his earlier ministry (vv. 7, 25, 40). Later, after witnessing the actual outcome, he charged young widows to marry (1 Tim. 5:11-15).

According to Paul's word in this verse, it is good for a believer to remain unmarried. However, we are not able to fulfill this word without receiving the necessary gift from the Lord.

In verse 26 Paul says, "I consider then that this is good because of the present necessity, that it is good for a man to be as he is." Here Paul indicates that, because of the present necessity, it is good for virgins not to marry. The Greek word for present may also mean that the presence of a certain thing foreshadows and inaugurates something to come. The present necessity or distress indicates more anguish to come, as prophesied by the Lord in Matthew 24:8, 19, and 21. The word rendered necessity means force, constraint; hence, distress, anguish. It refers to the needs of the life in the present age, the demand of which constrains and presses people and becomes a distress and anguish to them. Therefore, it is good to remain unmarried (vv. 27, 40a).

VI. BETTER TO MARRY IF LACKING SELF-CONTROL

In verse 9 Paul says, "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." According to this verse, if someone

does not have self-control, it is better for that one to marry. The Greek word for self-control here also means continency. The same Greek word is used in 9:25 for athletes abstaining from sensual indulgences during preparation for the games.

VII. REMAINING IN MARRIAGE THAT THE UNBELIEVING PARTY MAY BE SAVED

In verses 13 and 14 Paul says, “And a wife who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the brother; otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.” In verse 16 Paul refers to the possibility of a wife saving her husband, or of a husband saving his wife. Here we have the principle of remaining in marriage that the unbelieving party may be saved. This means that a believer who is married to an unbeliever should not take the initiative to give up that marriage. Instead of seeking to change his status, he should remain in the married life in order to save the unbelieving party.

In verse 14 Paul speaks of an unbelieving husband being sanctified by the wife and an unbelieving wife being sanctified by the husband. To be sanctified is to be made holy, separated unto God for His purpose. As the believing wife is of the Lord and for the Lord, so her unbelieving husband is made holy, sanctified, separated unto God, because he is for his wife, who is of and for God. It is similar to the temple and the altar making the common things holy when they are attached to them (Matt. 23:17, 19). The same principle applies to the unbelieving wife and the children. To be sanctified in this way does not mean the person is saved, just as the sanctification of food through the saints’ prayer has nothing to do with salvation (1 Tim. 4:5).

VIII. THE UNBELIEVING PARTY BEING ALLOWED TO LEAVE SO THAT THE BELIEVING PARTY MAY LIVE IN PEACE

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, “But if the unbelieving one separates, let him be separated; the brother or the sister is not enslaved in such cases; but God has called us in peace.” To be not enslaved here means not under bondage, but freed from the marriage of a believer with an unbeliever, when the unbeliever leaves the believer.

According to this verse, “God has called us in peace.” God in His salvation has called us to Him in the sphere and element of peace. Hence, we should live in this peace. If the unbelieving party in our marriage desires to leave, we should allow it. But in order that we may live in the peace in which God has called us, God does not want us to initiate any separation as long as the other party consents to remain (v. 13). The following verses (vv. 16-24) are based upon this, that God has called us in peace. The word “for” at the beginning of verse 16 indicates that verses 16 through 24 are an explanation of the statement that God has called us in peace. To remain in this peace we must keep the word in verses 16 through 24.

In verse 16 Paul asks, “For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” Since we do not know whether we shall save our unbelieving husband or wife, we should not insist that they remain with us, nor that they leave. God wants us to remain in the state in which He called us (vv. 20, 24), not to initiate any change. Therefore, we should leave the entire matter to the unbelieving party.

IX. REMAINING IN THE STATUS OF OUR CALLING

In verse 20 Paul declares, “Each one, in the calling in which he was called, in this let him remain.” Here we see that we should remain in the status of our calling. If we were married when called, we should remain in marriage. Likewise, if we were unmarried when called, it is better, if possible, to remain unmarried.

Verse 24 says, “Each one, brothers, in what state he was called, in this let him remain with God.” After being called, the believers do not need to change their outward status, but they do need to have a change in their inward condition, that is, from being without God to being with God, in order to be one with God and have God with them in their state, whatever it may be.

X. SEEKING TO CARE FOR THE THINGS OF THE LORD WITHOUT OTHER CARES

Another principle here is to care for the things of the Lord and for the Lord’s interests without having any other care. Verse 32 says, “But I desire you to be without care. The unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord.” In verse 33 Paul points out that the one who is

married cares for the things of the world and how to please his wife. As a result, he is distracted. The Greek word translated distracted literally means divided. A man who would please his wife is distracted, divided, from the things of the Lord (v. 35).

XI. WAITING ON THE LORD WITHOUT DISTRACTION

Verse 35 says, “But I say this for your own profit, not that I may put a noose on you, but for that which is comely and waiting on the Lord without distraction.” The Greek word rendered “put a noose on” means to entangle with a snare, to constrain to obey one’s word. It was not Paul’s intention to put a noose on the saints, but that they may wait on the Lord without distraction. There are distractions in married life. A married person will always have distractions.

XII. DOING WELL BY GIVING ONE’S VIRGINITY IN MARRIAGE, AND DOING BETTER BY DECIDING TO KEEP ONE’S VIRGINITY

In verses 37 and 38 Paul says, “But he who stands firm in his heart, not having necessity, but has authority over his own will and has decided this in his own heart to keep his own virginity, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virginity in marriage does well, and he who does not give it in marriage will do better.” In verses 36 through 38 virgin refers both to male and female, as in verse 25. According to verse 36, there is nothing wrong, if need requires, for one to give his virginity in marriage.

If need requires, a virgin, male or female, may give oneself to marriage. This is to do well. However, to keep one’s virginity is to do better. Paul’s word indicates that it is better to remain unmarried. However, we must remember that this depends upon the gift each one has received from the Lord.

XIII. AFTER THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND A WIFE BEING FREE TO BE MARRIED ONLY TO ONE IN THE LORD

Concerning remarriage, Paul says in verse 39, “A wife is bound for so long a time as her husband lives; but if the husband should sleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” After her husband

dies, a wife is free to be married to another, only in the Lord. This is another basic principle concerning married life.

(Life-study of 1 Corinthians, Msg. 41)

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION

I. THE NORMAL MARRIAGE LIFE

Let us read a very familiar passage: “But as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:24-25). The brothers have been telling me for many days that I have to attend this meeting today and that I have to speak a few words. I prayed and considered what I should speak and how I should speak. God gave me these two very familiar verses.

Needless to say, this is a happy occasion and most people like to say “congratulations.” While this, of course, is a fact, we also have to admit that there are troubles ahead. Before a person is married, he or she may have no trouble being a single person. But after a person is married, there is definitely trouble. Troubles for a single person are a possibility, but troubles for a married couple are a certainty. If we are not prepared to face these troubles, we will see one trouble after another. Troubles will perpetuate and propagate themselves. The first thing a Christian should realize is that no trouble within a family can be solved instantaneously.

II. LEARNING TO BE A GOOD HUSBAND AND A GOOD WIFE

Brothers, do not think that you can be a proper husband in an instant. You may need three to five years to learn this. Sisters, I will say the same to you; it takes three to five years before you learn how to be a wife. Yet I must say that you have to learn. If you do not learn, you will never be able. Never think that you are born a husband or that you are born a wife. Many brothers and sisters think that they can become husbands and wives without learning. Some think that when a man earns forty to fifty dollars a month, has grown to over five feet in height, and is twenty-four or twenty-five years old, he is qualified to get married. There is no such thing. Unless you are determined to learn to be a wife, you will not succeed in becoming a wife. Unless you are determined to learn to be a husband, you

will not succeed in becoming a husband. If a student does not have the heart to be a student, he cannot be a student. If an employee does not have the heart to be a good employee, he cannot be an employee. Similarly, if you do not have the heart to be a husband or a wife, you cannot be a husband or a wife. Many things come by accident; many things can be done mindlessly. But a good husband or good wife does not come by accident. Every good husband and every good wife become so through learning.

I just want to ask whether our brother and our sister have the heart to be a husband and a wife or whether they are merely trying their luck. There is no such thing as being fortunate by chance in marriage.

III. WIVES BEING SUBJECT TO HUSBANDS

In these verses we have a biblical principle. Concerning the family, Ephesians 5 first exhorts the wife. Verse 24 is directed at the sisters, and verse 25 is directed at the brothers. I am not saying that everything related to the family first comes from the woman, but I can say that many things in the family come from the woman. Verse 24 says, "Let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything." If a sister wants to be married and she comes to me and asks, "Should I marry a certain person?" I will surely answer, "Can you be subject to him?" If you cannot be subject to him, you are not qualified to marry him. You can only marry him if you can submit to him. If you have never intended to submit to him in your heart, you should not be his wife and should not marry him. The day before yesterday, the brothers came and discussed this wedding with me and asked whether my words should be given before or after the wedding ceremony. Finally, we agreed that my words should be spoken after the wedding ceremony because we were afraid that the words would affect the wedding ceremony itself. Yet what I am saying is a fact. Marrying a person means that you are willing to offer yourself up and say, "I am willing to submit."

A fleshly man cannot submit. If you are of the flesh, you cannot get married. Do not think that marriage is something for the flesh. You have to realize that only a spiritual person can marry. In the eyes of the flesh, submission is most difficult. But in the eyes of the spirit, every time you are not submissive, you suffer a wound. If you do not submit, you can give yourself some breathing space, but you will be inwardly wounded.

Once a person asked me, "Why should wives be subject to their husbands?" I do not know. I do not know why wives should be subject to husbands. I only know that the God whom I serve says that wives should be

subject to their husbands. I do not know why it is right to do this. I only know that wives should be subject to their husbands. One thing I do know: If a wife is subject to her husband, she always brings in spiritual blessing.

IV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUBMISSION AND OBEDIENCE

Here we may ask a question: What is submission? Ephesians 6:1 is Paul's word concerning parents and children. He told the children, "Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." It is interesting to note that 5:24 uses the words "be subject" or "submit," while 6:1 uses the word "obey." A wife submits to her husband, whereas a child obeys his parents. There is a great difference. What does it mean to submit? Submission is a matter of attitude, a matter of the spirit. What does it mean to obey? Obedience is a matter of the conscience, a matter of outward behavior. Submission is inward, whereas obedience is outward. Suppose your husband tells you that he wants to eat at twelve o'clock, yet you like to eat at half-past twelve. You realize that wives should submit to their husbands, so you set the table at twelve. But how do you do it? Do you make a great deal of noise setting the table? Have you readied the meal by twelve? Yes, you have. But are you submitting? No, you are not. In God's eyes this is obedience; this is not submission. Obedience is carrying something out; it is accomplishing a task. God did not say that wives should obey. If God had said that wives should obey, then wives should do whatever their husbands want them to do. What God asks from wives is submission. Submitting means to be meek and nonresistant. It does not necessarily mean obedience. For example, many sisters among us have unsaved husbands. The Lord is telling you to submit to your husband, not to obey him. If he asks you to go to a dance hall and you go with him, you are obeying, not submitting. What does it mean to submit? Submission is a matter of the heart, an inward matter, a matter of the spirit, whereas obedience is outward and superficial. Do you see the difference?

Then how do we distinguish the difference? Often wives can disobey their husbands yet at the same time be very submissive. I know of a brother who is not too young; he is in his twenties. When the Bible says that children should obey their parents, it means little children not adults. The father of this brother asked him to do something which a Christian cannot do. When many people obey, they do not submit. But this brother was wonderful; he submitted, but he did not obey. Listen carefully to this word: Submit but

not obey. This is a very important word. His father forced him to do something that a Christian cannot do. What could he do? If he did not do it, he would be disobeying, but he had to submit. What could he do? He said, "Father, I wish I could do it, but I cannot." He knelt down before his father, and said in tears, "I wish I could do this, but I really cannot do it." Although he did not obey, he was very submissive. How many times have you said that you wish you could do something? Whether or not you can is a different question. But wishing that you could is submission. I like the expression "I wish I could." I wish is submission, whereas I could is obedience. Every one of us should be submissive. Not only should our sister submit, but also every brother and every sister should submit as well. We should all submit to one another, and no one should have a hard, rebelling, or insubordinate attitude. Often we may do something unwillingly and reluctantly. This is insubordination. We should all learn to submit from our heart.

V. THE SUBMISSION OF THE WIFE BRINGING IN BLESSING TO THE FAMILY

The husband's demands on the wife are not always that pleasant. Once I was a guest at a brother's house. There was a constant difference of opinion in the house. One person wanted to do one thing, and the other person wanted to do another thing. But the wife in the house was very submissive. Although there were differences in opinion, she was very submissive. Although she did not follow her husband's opinion, she was still very submissive and gentle in her attitude. She said to her husband in a very gentle way, "I cannot do this." Although she did not obey, she was very gentle in her attitude, and the family was a very harmonious one. The cushion of a family is the woman. The floor beneath us does not make any noise because the carpet cushions it. The cushion of a family is the gentleness of the woman. Once we have such a cushion, there will not be much noise in the family. It is true that an unsaved husband may not allow you to be baptized or bind up your hair. But sisters, when you have a husband that does not allow you to do these things, what attitude will you take? Will you say in your heart that you wish you could obey his word but that you cannot? I can tell you honestly that after being a Christian for many years, I have often failed to obey God. Yet God disciplines me and shows me something, and I still fear my God. I have not succeeded in doing many things, but I still fear God; I am still fearful before Him. I wish I could

obey. Of course it is another thing when God makes us able to obey. I say this to show you God's demand for us today. There is one element that will keep a family in peace: submission in the sisters.

VI. LOVE IN THE BROTHERS

On the other hand, the brothers have to love; they have to love their wives. Verse 25 is after verse 24. In a family, after the wife submits, the demand is on the husband to love. A husband's love is something active; it is manifested in making provisions for many things. This is not a passive love but an active love. The husband has to actively assume the headship in the family; he has to make arrangements and provisions, provide protection, and take up the responsibility in the family. The ugliest thing in this world is finding a wife who is not submissive. It is also very ugly finding a husband who does not know how to be the head.

VII. MAINTAINING THE POSITION THAT GOD HAS ORDAINED

There are four kinds of marriages in this world. Only one of the four is good; the other three are bad. The first kind is for a man to marry a woman, that is, for a proper man to marry a proper woman. This is the best kind. The second kind is not as good, which is for a "woman" to marry a woman, that is, for a submissive man to marry a submissive woman. The third kind is for a man to marry a "man," that is, for a responsible man to marry a responsible woman. The fourth kind is for a submissive man to be married to a responsible woman; it will end up being a terrible family. Such a family is hopeless; nothing can be worse than this kind. I thank the Lord that God's ordination is always wonderful. He ordains a man to be a man. The man has to love and actively take up the responsibility of the family. He has to make arrangements for everything in the house. God loves to see a man be a man. He hates to see a man looking like a woman. The woman should submit. God wants the woman to submit. Submission is in a woman's nature; it is the woman's nature to submit. This is very important. You can never say to your wife, "Why can't I do what you can do?" You can say this anywhere else, but you cannot say this in the family. You can never say to your wife, "Why can't I do what you can do?" You have to remember that you cannot do what she can do. Similarly, she cannot do what you can do. A wife cannot say to the husband, "Why can't I do what you can do? ", and the

husband cannot say this to the wife. If you can do what your wife can do, you have become a woman already, and you have not stood on the position that God has ordained for you. A wife cannot say this to her husband, and a husband cannot say this to his wife. This is God's ordination.

May the Lord bless our brother and our sister and show them their responsibilities. You may say, "If I had known that it would be that troublesome, I would not have come this far." This is why I told you earlier that you cannot have a family unless you are spiritual; you will not be able to make it. Many people think that it is a simple thing to have a family. But I must tell you that a family will be an acid test to you. It will show what you can and cannot do. May the Lord bless our brother so that he can love his wife and take up his responsibility to protect, arrange, provide, supply, and be the head of the family. At the same time, may the Lord bless our sister so that she can become a genuine wife and submit in a genuine way. If we all do this, many of the problems in our families will be eliminated, and many blessings will be ushered in.

VIII. DEALING WITH THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HUSBAND AND THE WIFE

There is one final word. Today is the first day for you to begin to deal with your problems together. Do not misunderstand, this is not the first day for you to take a nice walk in the park. If you learn your lesson well, perhaps in five years you will have a wonderful family. What is a honeymoon? A honeymoon is the beginning of days of suffering. When will you begin to have some sweet days? If you deal with the differences between the husband and the wife properly, you may have sweet days after five years. But you have to begin to learn before you can expect those days to come. You have to put in some effort before you learn.

Once again, may the Lord bless the two of you and pour down His blessings upon you, and may you be dealt with and learn your lessons day by day. May the Lord bless both of you.

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 2, Vol. 38, ch. 67)

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

ADJUSTING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES

I. ADJUSTING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A COUPLE

We have mentioned one thing again and again among us; perhaps, it is good to mention it again. I have said over the past few years that we should not consider marriage to be nothing but happiness. If our hope is too high, our disappointment will become great. Brother and sister, this may be the beginning of happy days, but there are surely days of suffering ahead. It seems that the word suffering is not a very appropriate word for an occasion like today. Perhaps I should say that all of the days ahead may not be happy ones. A few days ago I said that happiness will come after five years. Two years ago I met a family in Hangchow. Perhaps I can say that it was an ideal family, the best that I have seen. I asked the brother, "It seems to me that you have an ideal family, but at what point did your family become so ideal? Did it start from the day that you were first married, or did it begin sometime afterward?" He wondered what I meant, so I said, "I somewhat hold to the notion that a happy family life begins five years after the marriage. The honeymoon is the beginning of bitter waters; the waters do not turn sweet until later." In the evening we sat and talked in the courtyard. He was silent for a while and then suddenly jumped up and said, "You are right. At the beginning there was quite a lot of friction and noise between the two of us. Later it went away." This couple married today has bought their wok, their dishes, their broom, and their towels. But tonight I will ask you to bring home one more thing. If you do not bring this home, you cannot form a real family. You have to bring this home before your family can become a family. This one thing is the adjustment of the differences between the husband and the wife.

Formerly you both lived as individuals, and you were free to do whatever you wanted. But now your tent has been nailed down; the stakes are there, and something binds you. From now on there is another person in your life and living. The two are together and have become one. The Chinese have a saying: "To make two become one." If there is only one person, nothing will happen; there is no need for harmony if there is only one person. Oneness

is the representation of harmony. The ultimate expression of harmony is oneness. Therefore, it is right to say, “To make two become one.” But this is exactly where the problem lies. In the beginning everything was well between Adam and Eve because God made Eve out of Adam and gave her back to Adam. The two became one. They were one becoming two and two becoming one again. The problem today, however, is that this sister did not come out of this brother. The first part of the story is missing; only the second part is present. Our wedding meeting is only the second half—putting together two persons with different lives, different educational backgrounds, different upbringings, and differences in everything. If we merely put the two together, they are still two. Only when the two become one will the family be free from trouble. If the two cannot become one, the family will never be a success. You can do without all the miscellaneous things in a family, but you cannot do without this one thing.

You may ask me whether I have the assurance and the way to deal with the differences between husbands and wives. Brother and sister, are you ready? You have to start picking up this matter immediately. This is one item of furnishing that you must have. From now on, you will see each other more, and you will also rub each other more. The question is whether or not there is oil in your rubbing. It may be difficult to find such a thing among the unbelievers or in the world. But thank the Lord that we are Christians, and it is easy to find this. Some among us today are not yet believers, and it is impossible to find this among them. But we are believers, and we can consider this matter from God’s view. God has divided all people into two categories: those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ. If our brother and sister remain in their position in Christ, this couple, this family, will never run into trouble. But if they live in the other realm, if they live in Adam, it will be impossible to not get into trouble as a couple and as a family. We should never think that as long as the woman manages the home well and the man keeps his job, the family will be kept together. Just as spirituality is needed in a meeting, spirituality is needed in the family as well. Just as the meeting life has much to do with our spirituality, the family life also has much to do with our spirituality.

II. HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES

I have seen many families. I have been a guest in at least a hundred to two hundred homes. Of course, the number of families I have contacted

exceeds this number. Many people think that a golden era will come after they are married and that they will have a wonderful life and family. But after three days, the husband discovers that his heavenly angel is just an ordinary girl, and the wife discovers that her imaginary hero is just one from among two hundred million Chinese. If a couple lacks the calibrating factor, what will be the result? What will happen after one month, two months, a year, or two years? If they were given the choice again, they would say that they would be the last ones to get married. Many regrets and thoughts of change occur because a couple did not adjust their differences at the beginning of their marriage. Therefore, I will speak a little on the adjustment of differences.

A. Realizing That Getting Married Is Taking Up A Job

A husband has to set his mind on becoming a husband, and a wife has to set her mind on becoming a wife. Many husbands become husbands in a mindless way; they have no intention of living like a husband. Likewise, many wives become wives in a mindless way; they have no intention of living like a wife. They bump into each other, and one happens to become the husband, while the other happens to become the wife. If you want to be someone's husband or wife, you have to do it intentionally. You have to be a husband or wife consciously and conscientiously. Nothing in this world can be accomplished in a haphazard way. Even if you want to be a nanny or a rickshaw driver, you can succeed only if you do it intentionally and conscientiously. No one can succeed in being a husband or a wife in a mindless or haphazard way. Once, a brother and a sister were about to be married, and they asked me for a word to symbolize marriage. I said that marriage is like taking a job. It is a job to be a husband, and our brother is here to take this job. It is also a job to be a wife, and our sister is here to take this job. If you do not regard being a husband as a job, you cannot be a husband, and if you do not regard being a wife as a job, you cannot be a wife.

B. Allowing Christ To Be The Lord In Everything

The wife should never think that her husband will have the same opinion as she does. You may as well drop this dream now, because tomorrow you will wake up from this dream. Perhaps, you have awoken from it already. Perhaps, while the two of you were shopping the last few days, you awoke from that dream. The wife cannot expect her husband's opinion to be the

same as hers, and the husband cannot expect his wife's opinion to be the same as his. You have to remember that your husband is an individual person, and you have to remember that your wife is an individual person. You must be prepared to accept this fact. Then what should you do? Many people consider that the only way is through compromise; they step back a little and close their mouth. Suppose you want to buy something red, and I prefer green. Since there is this difference, I let you choose the red and give up the green. But please consider that only the most foolish woman in the world would allow her husband to step back and shut up. He may be stepping back, but in his heart he is secretly saying, "I let her have her way this time, but _" You should never think that you have gained the upper hand. You have just put a hole in your boat with a nail. Nothing may leak out, but something will surely come in. The solution does not involve retreating or stepping back.

Thank the Lord that you are Christians, and it is easier to deal with this matter. This is not a matter of stepping back or giving way. You should allow the Lord to say what you should do. You should let the Lord be the "bad man." You do not have to allow your husband to be a "bad man," nor do you have to allow your wife to be the "bad man." Let the Lord be the "bad man." As the husband, you should put your proposal aside, and as the wife, you should put your proposal aside. Both the husband and the wife should put their proposals aside and together consider what the Lord is saying. If the Lord says to choose red, neither will have anything more to say. Christ must be the Head of the household. Brother, you are not the head of your household. Sister, you are not the head of your household either. The Head of the household is Christ. Just as Christ is the Lord who is controlling you in your personal life and living, so Christ should also be the Lord who is controlling your family affairs. If your wife insists that something should be done one way, then you should ask whether or not she is assured that this is the will of the Lord. I am not saying that you should merely step back; I am saying that you should step back to God. Those who fear God will not fabricate God's will. If she does not know God's will in the matter, you may be able to say, "I know what God's will is." However, if you do not know God's will either, you should say nothing and buy neither the red thing or the green thing.

C. Avoiding Irritation Or Provoking Anger

The family is the place where one can easily become irritated. I believe no place on earth irritates a person more easily than the family. One common problem in the family is that some husbands complain that their wives have a quick temper, while the wives complain that their husbands have caused them to have a quick temper. Or the wives complain that their husbands have a quick temper, while the husbands complain that their wives have caused them to have a quick temper. We have to deal with this matter properly. Every time something like this happens, you have to ask whether the other side provoked you or whether you provoked the other side. The one who loses his temper has sinned, but the one who caused the other to lose his temper has also sinned. If the husband is nice, quiet, and gentle but the wife is quick and impatient, there will be no peace in the family. A wife may be quick and impatient, but her anger is often aroused by her husband. Many people are impatient because others force them to be impatient. We often encounter problems in the family, and we believe that the blame belongs to the other person. However, we should not think in this way. We should ask whether we have contributed to the other person's blame. This kind of thought will help build a good family.

Let me give an illustration. Many wives complain that their husbands are not generous in spending money. Of the many wives that I have met, at least eighty percent have this thought. It is often true that the husband is hesitant in spending money; he does not buy the utensils, food, and clothes that are needed. However, you must realize that there is a reaction for every action in this world. There are two sides to everything in this world. On the one side there is action, and on the other side there is reaction. If you want your husband to spend money, you must not spend money. This is a fact. A man does not have to speak with his mouth; he can speak with his eyes, ears, or actions. The word protestant means one who protests. Every person is constantly protesting. Man's condition is in a constant state of protest. The wife may say, "My husband does not want to spend money. Therefore, since he will not spend money on what is necessary, I will spend more." The husband may then say, "If you decide to spend so much, I will spend even less." The husband protests by his actions. His holding back is a kind of protest, whereas the wife's spending is also a protest. They smile at each other when they meet, they are polite to each other, and they say nothing with their mouth, but when one of them does anything, the other does exactly the opposite. They do not agree with what the other is doing, so they do it the other way. Soon matters become worse, and they do not

understand the reason for the change. Brother, you should not say that your wife is a spendthrift. She is so good at spending money because you will not spend money. Sister, you should not say that your husband is stingy or reluctant to spend money. He does not want to spend money, because you spend too much money. Both sides are maneuvering.

A family is often like the pendulum of a clock. One minute it is on one side, and the next minute it is on the other side. If you push it to one side, it will swing all the way to the other side. But if you put it in the middle, it will no longer swing. This is the way between the husband and the wife. If the husband puts the pendulum all the way to one side, he may be trying to hold his wife to one side, but the more he tries to hold her to one side, the more she will swing to the other side, and the whole family will be thrown into turmoil. The husband will push to one extreme, while the wife will push to the other extreme. This is where the problem lies. Brothers, please remember that this is where the greatest problem in a family lies; this is where husbands and wives fall most easily into arguments. If there is a problem in your family, you should immediately consider, "Have I provoked her in anything? What have I done or what attitude of mine has caused her to act this way?" Please remember that whatever she does may not be that serious. The more serious matter involves what you have done to affect her behavior. Behind all the arguments and problems in a family are the standoffs within the family.

III. CONCLUSION

When I visit others' homes, it is mainly for the purpose of acting as a reconciler. Although I am not that old, I have done a great deal of reconciling work. I often point out the reason for a couple's protests. One time I was a guest in a family. Both the husband and the wife were not young; they were middle-aged. At the table, one was speaking one way, and the other was speaking another way. After one said something, the other overturned what the first one said, and vice versa. This went on and on. The two of them did not know what they were doing. Yet as an outsider, it was very clear to me. Later, they turned to me and asked, "What is happening with the two of us? There is really nothing wrong with us. Yet we cannot say that we are all right. There is really nothing bad about us, yet we cannot say that there is anything good. There is nothing spiritually wrong with both of us. We do not hate each other. Yet neither do we love each other. What is happening with the two of us?" I told them, "You are trying to outmaneuver

each other.” They asked what I meant. I pointed out how they had been maneuvering. They laughed and agreed with me readily. Please remember that you have to pay attention to the matter of adjustment. You have to adjust yourself properly. Today is the wedding day for both of you. It is also the day of your inauguration into your jobs. As you live together, you will find that there are many wonderful days ahead of you. You have to commit everything into the Lord’s hand. As the husband, you should not step back, nor as the wife should you step back. Let the Lord speak to you in everything. If you want to deal with this matter properly, you must not protest in attitude or in action. I hope that in five years, we will have another wonderful family. Someone said that any book published by the Shang-wu Printing Company had to go through twenty-three proof readings. Perhaps five years from now, the two of you will have gone through your twenty-third “proofreading.” I mean that you have to spend time to adjust yourselves. If you do not spend the time, you will be the same five or ten years from now. You will still be dragging along on your side while she drags along on her side. If you will deal with this matter properly, I hope that we will see a splendid family life in five years. May the Lord bless the two of you!

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 2, Vol. 38, ch. 68)

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

INHERITING THE GRACE OF LIFE WITH HUSBANDS

I. THE GRACE OF LIFE

Our married life tests how much we have been built up. Are you truly one with your husband or wife? In our married life, we have the opportunity to learn what it means to be built up in the church life. A number of times the Lord has pointed out to me that if I cannot be built up with my wife, I cannot expect to be built up with others. In order to be built up with our husband or wife, or with others in the church, our mind, emotion, and will must be dealt with.

In Ephesians 5 Paul gives a word concerning married life that is familiar to every reader of the New Testament. But Peter's writing concerning married life in 3:1-7 also has some very good points, even the topmost point. The most outstanding point is what Peter says about a husband and wife being "joint-heirs of the grace of life." Paul does not say anything about the grace of life, much less about a married couple being joint-heirs, or co-heirs, of the grace of life. In 3:7 Peter says, "The husbands, in like manner, dwelling together with them according to knowledge, assigning honor as to the weaker, female vessel, as also joint-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." Peter wanted the husbands and wives to realize that they are heirs together, not of property or material possessions, but of the grace of life.

Perhaps you have been a Christian for many years and yet do not have any understanding of what Peter means by the grace of life. Some may not even know that there is such an expression in the New Testament. Christians are familiar with the grace of salvation or the grace of forgiveness. Actually, it is not even necessary for us to read the Bible in order to have the concept of the grace of forgiveness. But the term, the grace of life, is a uniquely biblical expression. The problem is that, when we read about this, our mind may be veiled, or we may not pay adequate attention to this term. By the Lord's mercy, we would place a proper emphasis on this matter so that we may all appreciate it. I hope that we all shall see the wonderful matter of the grace of life. The grace of life is something real and substantial that we can inherit. This is not merely

unmerited favor; it is solid, substantial, spiritual property that can be inherited by a husband and wife. Hallelujah for the grace of life!

We have pointed out that in 1 Peter, Peter has much to say about grace. In 1:2 he says, “Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” Peter desired not only that grace be with the saints, but that grace be multiplied to them. With the thought of multiplied grace as the base, Peter goes on in 4:10 to speak of varied grace: “Each one according as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God.” We all should be good stewards of this varied grace in different aspects and of different categories. Then in 5:10 Peter speaks of the God of all grace. Therefore, in 1 Peter we have four unique expressions concerning grace: multiplied grace, grace of life, varied grace, and all grace. Although Paul has a great deal to say concerning grace, he does not use the unique expressions Peter uses in his first Epistle. I deeply appreciate what Peter says in this book concerning grace, in particular his word regarding the grace of life.

II. WIVES TO BE SUBJECT TO THEIR HUSBANDS

Let us now go on to consider 3:1-7 verse by verse. Verse 1 says, “In like manner, wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, that even if any disobey the word, they will be gained without a word through the manner of life of their wives.” The phrase “in like manner” refers to the subjection of the household servants to their masters, as described in 2:18. Therefore, as a household servant submits himself to his master, so the wives should subject themselves to their own husbands. This kind of word is certainly contrary to the emphasis of the so-called women’s liberation movement. That movement is against the Bible, for it is against God’s ordination in His creation with respect to male and female. Using Peter’s expression (3:7), God created the females weaker vessels. What country would use women as the main fighting force in the army? Females are weaker physically and psychologically. For this reason, it is easy for women to shed tears, which are often a sign of weakness. Furthermore, it is easy for a female to be troubled in her mind or emotion. All these are signs that the female is a weaker vessel.

Like Peter, Paul teaches the submission of wives to their husbands. However, unlike Peter, he does not tell us that females are weaker vessels. Concerning this matter, once again Peter uses a particular expression in pointing out that the females are weaker vessels.

In verse 1 Peter charges the wives to be subject to their own husbands. Paul also did this. Some women may find it easier to submit to someone else's husband instead of to their own husbands. Also, they may appreciate another's husband more than they appreciate their own husband. Even in the church life sisters may find it easier to subject themselves to a brother other than their own husband. The reason for this is that the wives know all the defects and shortcomings of their husbands, having lived with them in married life. But they do not know so much about the defects and shortcomings of others. This is the reason they may appreciate other brothers more than their own husbands.

Once a sister comes to know the defects and shortcomings of her husband, she may feel cheated. Having had the concept that her husband was very nearly perfect, she may wonder if she has made a mistake in marrying him. In the world, when wives come to this point, the result is often divorce. But by the Lord's grace Christian wives should subject themselves to their own husbands.

Paul says that the husbands should love their own wives. However, in his word concerning married life, Peter does not tell the husbands to love their own wives. First he charges the wives to be subject to their own husbands. Then he charges the husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge (v. 7).

III. AN INSPIRING MANNER OF LIFE

In verse 1 Peter tells the wives that if they subject themselves to their own husbands, the husbands will be gained without a word through the manner of life of their wives. The "word" here refers to the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23, 25; Rom. 10:8; Eph. 1:13). A husband can be gained through the wife's inspiring manner of life. Sisters, no one can inspire your husband as much as you can. You need to have such a manner of life that your husband will be inspired by it. If he disobeys the word, he will be gained by your manner of life, not through preaching.

In verse 2 Peter goes on to say, "Observing your pure manner of life in fear." The Greek word rendered "pure" here also means chaste. The Greek word is a derivation from the word meaning holy, as in verse 5 and 1:15. The pure and chaste manner of life must be the holy manner of life, the excellent manner of life (2:12), and the good manner of life (3:16). Here Peter is saying that the husbands will observe the pure manner of life of their wives.

The phrase “in fear” modifies “pure manner of life.” The word “fear,” as used in this verse, denotes a holy fear (see Phil. 2:12). This is a healthy, serious caution for us to behave in a holy manner. This kind of fear is mentioned a number of times in this 1 Peter because Peter’s teaching in this book concerns the government of God. A married sister’s pure manner of life must have a holy, pious fear.

(Life-study of First Peter, Msg. 22)

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE EXERCISE IN FAMILY LIFE

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Eph. 5:22-23

In the Bible, some portions of the Word contain teachings for husbands, and some portions contain teachings for wives. Before a person is married, he should do his best to choose someone with the fewest number of weaknesses. However, after a person is married, he or she has to learn to behave in a way that avoids causing problems to the family or the church.

I. SPENDING TIME TO LEARN TO BE A HUSBAND OR A WIFE

The first thing a married person must realize is that it is a serious matter to be a husband or a wife.

Everyone needs a certain amount of preparation before taking a job. For example, a doctor needs five, six, or seven years of training before he can practice medicine. A teacher has to spend a few years in a teaching college before starting to teach. An engineer also needs to spend four years in the university before launching his career. Even a nurse needs to study for three years in preparation for her career. But the interesting thing is that no one spends a day learning how to be a husband or a wife. It is no wonder that there are so many bad husbands and wives. They have never sat down to consider how to be a proper husband or a proper wife. I would be very hesitant and uneasy about asking someone to treat my illness if he had never studied medicine. Likewise, I would be very hesitant and uneasy about using a nurse who had never studied nursing before. I would be fearful and uneasy about hiring a teacher who had never been trained. If I wanted to build a house, I would only want to hire a civil engineer. I would worry and be afraid if he were not a trained civil engineer. Similarly, I have doubts about those who have become husbands or wives without ever being trained.

Our parents never taught us to be husbands or wives. When we grow up, we find a job. When we have the ability to support a family, we find a partner and get married. Please remember that many difficulties arise between the husband and the wife because neither has undergone any

preparation. When two persons are drawn into a marriage unprepared and suddenly find themselves husband and wife, how can they expect anything but problems for the family? Everything we do with our life requires training; we dare not jump into anything rashly. We prepare for our work and try to learn something about it before we plunge into it.

We must see that no job is more difficult than the job of being a husband or a wife. All jobs have fixed working hours. This is the only job that takes up all twenty-four hours of the day. Every job has a retirement age except this one. This is a very serious vocation and a very important one.

For now we will put the past behind us. Even though you were not prepared when you became a husband or a wife, you have nevertheless become one. You are already married and have reached this point in your life. Perhaps your looseness in the past has ruined your family. Today you have to see that the family is a very serious matter. You have to go back and learn your lessons all over again. The husbands need to go back to learn how to be husbands, and the wives need to go back to learn how to be wives.

It may not work for a person to try to apply the same earnestness he adopts in his job to his family. The truth, however, is that many people are far more careless toward their family than they are toward their jobs. This invites inevitable failure into their family. We have to pour all of our energy into building our family. We have to be more conscientious with it than with our jobs. If we behave carelessly and do not consider being a husband or a wife a serious occupation, our family will end up with nothing but failure. If we want our family to be a successful family, we have to cherish it as a job and spend time with it. We have to try our best to make it work. This is serious business, and we have to make it work at all costs. Those who are careless about their marriage and have no intention of making it a success will never have a successful marriage.

All married brothers and sisters must learn this lesson. We must spend time before the Lord to deal with this matter in a responsible way. This is a more difficult job than any other job. We need to spend time before the Lord to learn our lesson well. I hope that we will start learning it today.

II. CLOSING ONE'S EYES TO THE OTHER PARTY'S WEAKNESSES

After a person is married, he should learn to close his eyes so that he does not see.

In a marriage two persons live together as husband and wife. They do this day by day, year by year, without any leave of absence or separation. There is plenty of time for each one to find the other person's weaknesses and faults. You have to learn before the Lord to close your eyes the day you are married. The purpose of a marriage is not to discover the weaknesses in the other party; it is not to discover the other party's flaws. Your wife is not your student, and your husband is not your disciple. There is no need for you to seek out his faults in order to "help" him. Never look for weaknesses and never try to correct. If you take heed to this warning, your family will be on a firm foundation.

As I mentioned earlier, one has to open his eyes wide to discern and consider all the faults of the other party carefully before entering into a marriage. But after he is married, he should not try to know anything more. From the day he is married, he should forget about trying to understand anything. If he tries to find faults, he can easily find some. However, God has put the two together. They may have the next fifty years together. Each side will have all the opportunities he or she wants to find out the weaknesses of the other party during those fifty years. This is why the first thing to do after being married is to close your eyes to the other person's faults and weaknesses. You know a great deal already. If you intentionally try to find out more, you will end up with nothing but trouble.

When God puts two persons together as husband and wife, His intention is that there be submission and love between the two. He has no intention for them to discover each other's faults or to correct each other. God has not made you a teacher or a master. None of the husbands are the teachers of their wives, and none of the wives are the masters of their husbands. No one needs to correct her husband, and no one needs to correct his wife. Whatever type of person you have married, you should expect them to continue in the same way. There is no need to look at the faults and weaknesses of others and try to change them. A motive of trying to change the other party is basically wrong. Those who are married must learn to close their eyes. Learn to love the other party. Do not try to help or correct them.

III. LEARNING TO ACCOMMODATE

One must learn to accommodate as well. This is the first lesson one must learn after he is married. No matter how much alike the husband and the wife are, and no matter how compatible their characters are, sooner or later they will discover many differences between them. They will have different opinions, different likes and dislikes, different ideas, and different inclinations. Sooner or later they will discover many differences between them. This is why a person must learn to accommodate the other person as soon as he is married.

What does it mean to accommodate? The meaning of accommodation is to meet someone halfway. We need to take note that it is something mutual. The best thing is for both sides to give in. If it is not possible for both sides to give in, at least one side must try to go halfway. Even if one sees many problems, he should still try to move away from his own position to the other party's position. It is best to move over completely. But at least one should meet the other halfway. In other words, after two people are married, both must learn to change at least half of everything they do. It is best to change completely. But at least they should change half of what they do. Always go out of your way to meet the other party. To accommodate means to not insist on one's own view and to be willing to drop one's ideas. A person may have a certain view, but he compromises his view for the other's sake.

If a young couple would learn to accommodate each other during the first five years of their marriage life, they would have a peaceful and happy family after these five years. Accommodation means one side goes halfway and the other side also goes halfway. It means one side moves halfway across and the other side also moves halfway across. The husband gives in to the wife, and the wife gives in to the husband. If neither party knows the meaning of this during the first five years of their marriage life, it will be difficult for the family to go on harmoniously. Marriage is not a simple matter. In order to have a good marriage, one must put much effort into it to make it good.

Accommodating others means sympathizing with the other person's limitations. Some people are very sensitive to sound. Others are very afraid of silence. Some cannot stand noise while others cannot live without noise and excitement. That is why you have to learn to accommodate. If one person likes to be quiet and the other person lowers his voice for this one's sake, both have gone halfway, and there is accommodation. Suppose one is extremely clean, while the other is extremely lazy. If the lazy one has to go

along with the clean one all the way, he will throw down his pillows and clothes and sing for joy when his wife leaves for her parents. On the other hand, if the tidy wife always has to go along with the lazy one, she will want to move back to her parents' home when she cannot put up with the mess.

As Christians we should learn to deny ourselves. Self-denial makes one an accommodating person. Both the husband and the wife have to learn to accommodate each other. In this way the family will have peace, even if they do not yet have happiness. If there is self-denial in the family, there will surely be accommodation in the family. If there is no self-denial in the family, no one will be accommodating.

Accommodation is needed not only in a few things or a dozen things but even in hundreds and thousands of things. We cannot expect anything less. This is the discipline God gives to us in the family. Because we have to accommodate others in the family, we are disciplined through the family. This is the way we learn discipline. We must learn to put our views aside and accept the views of others. We must learn to accommodate.

IV. LEARNING TO APPRECIATE THE VIRTUES OF THE OTHER PERSON

Once we are married, we have to learn to appreciate each other's virtues. In a family we need to learn to close our eyes to each other's faults and accommodate each other on the one hand, and we need to learn to appreciate each other's virtues on the other hand. This means that when the other person does something good, we must be sensitive to it. If a husband does not know how to appreciate his wife or vice versa, he or she opens up a big gap in the family. This does not mean that the husband has to flatter the wife or that the wife has to do something special to please the husband. It means that both must learn to appreciate the other person's virtues, goodness, and beauty.

I know a brother who is taking responsibility in a local church. All the brothers and sisters in that locality think that he is a very good brother. But if you ask his wife about him, she will tell you that he is hopeless. The sister constantly criticizes her husband, saying that he is not qualified to be a responsible brother. In that local church, all the brothers and sisters are submissive, with one exception—his wife. You will find that this kind of family will not go on well.

We also know of cases involving the opposite circumstance, in which everyone says that a certain sister is very good, but her husband does not. One year I was in Peking talking to a few people. Everyone there spoke highly of a certain sister. Halfway through the conversation, her husband came in. As the conversation about the sister went on, her husband remained silent. He seemed to be saying, "You do not know her. I have married the wrong person." The thought that one has married the wrong person has destroyed many families.

A husband must not be behind others in his appreciation of his wife. He may not need to excel above others in his appreciation, but he must not be behind others. You are not a proper spouse if your level of appreciation is less than that of others. If you feel that your husband is wrong, why did you marry him in the first place? This proves that you were firstly wrong. In order to have a good family, the husband must know how to appreciate the wife, and the wife must know how to appreciate the husband. One must not say something bad while others are saying something good about his or her spouse. You must discover his or her virtues. You must be sensitive to his or her merits. Whenever the opportunity arises, you must publicly acknowledge his or her virtues and speak your feelings. You are not telling lies. You are telling facts. When you appreciate your husband or your wife, your family will become more united, and your relationship more solid. If you do not do this, you will bring many problems to the family. Many misunderstandings and problems in the family arise as a result of neglecting this matter.

In England, a sister once married a brother, but the brother never said anything good about her all her life. This sister was always worried, saying, "I have failed as a wife. I have failed as a Christian." She worried so much that she contracted tuberculosis and later died. Before she died, her husband said to her, "If you die, I do not know what I will do because you have done so much for me. If you pass away, what will happen to our family?" The wife asked, "Why did you not say this earlier?" Then she went on, "I have always felt that I was not good, and I rebuked myself for it. You have never once said that I was good. I was sad and worried and always thought that I was wrong. That is why I became sick and am about to die." This is a true story. The husband told her how he felt only on her deathbed. Please remember that there is always a place in the family for kind words. We should learn to speak more kind words. We should learn to appreciate our wives and our husbands.

I know of some brothers who do not do well because their wives never appreciate them. The wives always think that their husbands are useless. They say to their husbands, “Among all the brothers, you are the only useless one.” These brothers become self-condemning. They say, “I cannot do anything. My wife says that I am no good. The person who knows me the most says that I am no good.” As a result, they actually turn out to be no good. Whether or not one has a happy family life depends not only on closing our eyes to the others’ weaknesses, but also on finding out the other party’s virtues and appreciating them. Sometimes we have to tell the other party about it or acknowledge it in public. If we do this, many problems in the family will disappear.

V. BEING POLITE

One also must exercise politeness in the family. It is repugnant for anyone to be impolite to others. You should treat everyone politely, no matter who he or she may be. No matter how familiar you are with a friend, you should never give up your manners. As soon as you give them up, you will lose him. No matter how close you are to others, you will lose them the moment you give up your manners. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul told us that love does not behave unbecomingly. Love does not allow anyone to give up his manners. Please remember that problems at home often arise because of small matters. It is often at home that a person behaves with unbecoming manners. Most people think that they can throw away their manners because their wife or husband is so familiar to them. Please remember that the joy and pleasure of human relationships have much to do with manners. As soon as you throw away proper manners, the ugly side of human nature will surface. No matter how familiar people are with one another, they must maintain proper manners between them. A brother put it aptly once when he said that manners are like the lubricating oil in a machine. The machine will run smoothly only with the lubricating oil. When two persons are together and manners are lacking, friction will arise and uncomfortable feelings will breed.

A. Words

In the home, we have to learn to always say, “Thank you” and “I am sorry.” We should take care of polite words such as thank you, may I, I am sorry, and please. If you do not know how to use these words, you cannot even make friends, let alone succeed at home. Christians must remember that

love does not behave unbecomingly. You must learn to say, “I am sorry,” “Thank you,” and “May I” at home. Learn to speak polite words in the family.

B. Dress

In the family not only must our words be proper and polite, but even the way we dress has to be proper and tidy. Everyone wants to dress properly in front of their friends. But one should dress properly in his family as well. You must dress neatly and be proper with your clothing. Love does not behave unbecomingly. Do not be loose through familiarity. Once you become familiar, you become loose, and it is easy to act impolitely. Familiarity breeds disrespect and contempt. Husbands and wives are already very familiar with each other. If propriety is absent, more familiarity will breed. Therefore, be proper in the way you dress yourselves. Do not save your sloppy dress for wearing at home.

C. Conduct

One must also be proper in his conduct. Whenever one serves something, it is best to serve it on a plate and to offer it to others with both hands. If he has only one hand to spare, he should still be proper in his attitude. When he passes a knife to others, he should avoid pointing the sharp end at others. When he passes a pair of scissors to others, he should avoid giving the others the pointed end. When he serves others something, he should present it properly and not throw it at them. We have to pay particular attention to these little gestures around the house. The difference between throwing something at others and handing it to them is only three seconds. But what a great difference it makes! Therefore, learn to have manners.

I cannot say that I have known many families, but I cannot say that I have known few either. When a person is discreet at home, his family will have less problems. I have observed that when a husband and wife are polite to each other, there is more peace and less noise from the plates and chopsticks. Where manners are wanting and things are thrown around, the family is full of friction. If a husband and wife are polite to each other at home, they will at least be able to maintain a peaceful family.

I believe that if many wives treated their friends the way they behaved in their family, no one would want to come to their houses. I also believe that if many husbands treated their colleagues the way they behaved at home,

none of their colleagues would want to work with them. I want to tell the brothers that their wives have been very tolerant with them. They have tolerated what no colleagues would tolerate. I also want to tell the wives that their husbands have been very tolerant with them. If they treated their best friends the same way, their friends would desert them. Being impolite is an expression of crudeness. No Christian may be crude. A person who has learned the proper lessons will never be an impolite person.

D. Voice

There is another factor crucial to our manner—our voice. We may say similar things, but the way we say it may be different. Our tone can be different. When a boss speaks to his subordinates, he has one kind of tone. When friends speak to friends, they have another kind of tone. When people are in love, there is love in their tone of voice. When a person hates, there is hatred in his tone of voice. The problem with most people today is that they have exhausted their nice tone of voice before they get home. When they come home they have only an ugly tone of voice left. We are polite to our colleagues in the office, we are tolerant of the patients in the hospital, and we speak carefully to students in the school. But we speak bluntly when we are at home. If you spoke in the office with the tone of voice you have at home, you would be chased out of your office in two days. Many people have a very crude tone of voice at home. They use the crudest language in their homes. It is no wonder that they cannot maintain a proper family life.

We must see that the family will not be peaceful as long as the tone of voice is wrong. Any tone of voice that is improper, strong, harsh, or proud must not be allowed in the family. Any tone of voice that is self-pitying, self-loving, or that gives the impression of a self-pronounced martyr must not be found in the family. If you speak in other places with the tone of voice that you use at home, you will ruin your career. Yet you allow such a tone of voice to remain in the family. It is no wonder that you are experiencing trouble at home. Therefore, we need to learn to be polite. Love does not behave unbecomingly, even in one's tone of voice. Do not speak loosely. If one is careless with his tone of voice in the family, his family will not go on well.

VI. ALLOWING LOVE TO GROW

In order for a family to go on well, love must grow. One must not allow love to die.

Often young people ask, “Is it possible for love to die?” I will answer today, “Yes, love can die, and it dies easily.” Love is like anything organic; it needs feeding, and it needs food. Love dies without food. If you starve it, it will die. But if you feed it, it will grow.

Love is the foundation of a marriage. It is also the foundation of the family. Love leads two people into marriage, and it keeps them together in the family. Love grows easily if you feed it properly. However, it dies easily if you starve it. Many people love each other before they are married, and so they marry one another. But after they are married, they begin to starve their love, and their love gradually dies.

Marriage without love is a painful thing. A family that is without love is an even more painful thing. If a family is without love, it may not feel the pain of it now. It may not feel anything before the couple reaches middle age. But when they become old, you will find that something is wrong with this family; it is too cold! The difference between a family that has love and one that has no love is very great. Learn to feed your family with love before you reach middle age. Try your best to feed it and nourish it. If you do this, your home will be full of love.

Another point which needs much attention: Every married person should find out the things that the other person is most afraid of. Do not indulge in your own carefree lifestyle. Every person has something which he or she hates or fears the most. This hatred and fear may be related to a moral weakness. Husbands and wives must learn to accommodate each other and learn to adjust themselves in this case. One person may fear and abhor something that is not at all related to a moral weakness. In this case the other party should learn to compromise completely.

Let me give one or two examples. A few years ago I read a story about a husband in America who sued his wife for abuse. This story may sound funny, but it is also scary. This husband could not stand monotonous sounds. He simply could not tolerate them. Originally, he and his wife were deeply in love, but the marriage came to a crisis after two years. His wife loved to knit, but he could not bear the sound of it. For the first year or two, he tried to tolerate it. But gradually it became worse. By the seventh year, he could no longer tolerate it, and he sued her for mental abuse. The judge declared that it was not a crime to knit and did not grant them the divorce. The husband told the judge, “Before I was married, she was like a lamb to

me and I loved her. After a year of marriage, I found out that she was addicted to knitting. Each time she completed a piece, she would take it apart and knit it back all over again. She just loves to knit. Today I cannot bear the sight of any woolen yarn. I cannot even bear the sight of a lamb; as soon as I see one I try to kill it. If you do not grant me the divorce, do not blame me for killing someone else's lamb." Do you see the problem here? It is a real problem. His wife felt that there was nothing wrong with her knitting, but her husband hated knitting so much that he was driven to kill any lamb that he saw.

Please remember that everyone has things that he does not like and things that he fears. These things may have nothing to do with morality. A person may hate monotonous sounds; this is his peculiarity. Everyone has his own peculiarity, which has nothing to do with morality. For any family to be successful, the husband and the wife must never do anything which the other party considers obnoxious, even though he or she may not have the same feeling about it. If you do something which the other party cannot stand, yet have no feeling about it, you will end up having problems in your family.

In Shanghai I had many occasions to talk to families. During my travels, I also talked to many families. The things that a family fights over are often very small matters. To outsiders and friends, they may be small matters. But when these so-called small matters happen with such frequency that it exhausts a person's patience, major problems occur in the family.

We must realize before God that it is a very delicate thing for two persons to live together. This is not an easy task. Never think that we can be loose in this. What you consider inconsequential may be intolerable to the other party. You will be mentally torturing the other party if you do what he or she cannot stand.

VII. NOT BEING SELFISH

There is another consideration which is very important for the family: One must not be selfish.

If you are married, you must live like a married person. You should not live like a bachelor. First Corinthians 7 says that a person marries to please the other person (vv. 33-34). Selfishness is probably one of the chief causes of family problems.

I remember a pastor in America who conducted the marriage of more than 750 couples during his lifetime. In every wedding he would advise the newlyweds to take note of one thing—not to be selfish. After they were married, they had to love each other and not be selfish. When the pastor was old, he wrote to all the couples asking how they were doing. All of them replied that they were able to have a happy family life because they took his advice about not being selfish. This is very unusual in America. At least twenty-five percent of American marriages end up in divorce today. But these seven hundred or more couples had lived happily with each other.

We must see that selfishness is a big problem. We must learn to feel what the other person feels. We must learn to feel his pain, his joy, his dislikes, his problems, and his inclinations. A person cannot be a good husband or a good wife if he or she is subjective. Those who are subjective are selfish. In fact, self-love is the most subjective thing.

A basic condition for marriage is self-sacrifice. Sacrifice means learning to please the other person. If you want to please the other person, you must be objective, not subjective. It is not a matter of your likes and dislikes, but of the other party's likes and dislikes. Learn to discover what the other party likes. Learn to understand him and his views. Learn to stand on his side, and learn to understand him and yourself from his perspective. Learn to sacrifice your own feelings, your own opinions, and your own views as much as possible. Try to understand and know the other side. Pursue self-sacrifice and love. If you do this, you will have fewer problems in the family.

Many married men think that they are the center of the universe. They think that the whole universe revolves around them. When they marry a girl, they receive her into the family for their own welfare and benefit. Those who think this way surely bring problems to their family. A wife may also think that she is the center of the universe and that everyone exists for her sake. She may think that everyone is for her happiness and that when she found a husband, she actually found a slave. For her, everyone else is peripheral and she is the center. She marries a husband only for the purpose of achieving her goal. Such a marriage will surely fail. It serves nothing but self-interest. Brothers and sisters, your family will have problems unless you pay attention to this matter.

VIII. ALLOWING THE OTHER PARTY THE FREEDOM TO KEEP SECRETS AND HAVE PRIVATE POSSESSIONS

In a home, you must allow the other person to have a certain amount of freedom and confidentiality. You must also allow the other person to keep his or her private possessions.

In many homes wives do not have any rights. In other homes husbands do not have any rights. These kind of families are bound to have problems. You may be a husband or a wife, but bear in mind one thing: Anybody in the world can be loved except one type of person—a jailer. No one can love a jailer, a prison warden, or someone who imprisons him. No one can love those who take away his freedom. Many husbands are like prison wardens to their wives. For them to expect their wives to love them is like expecting a prisoner to love the prison warden; nothing can be more impossible than this. They hope for the impossible. Many wives are prison wardens to their husbands. They are asking the impossible when they want their husbands to love them. Prison wardens are objects of fear, not objects of love. You can never completely take away a person's own freedom. Although marriage does take away a man or a woman's freedom, not all freedom should be sacrificed. The husband does not have to give up all his freedom to the wife, nor does the wife have to give up all her freedom to her husband. If you expect your wife to give up all her freedom to you, this is the same as saying that you want her to fear or hate you.

No one likes to lose all of his freedom; this is human nature. Even God gives us freedom. The biggest proof of this is that there are no fences around hell. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not surrounded by the fiery sword of the cherubim from the beginning. If God did not want man to have any freedom, He would have surrounded the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the fiery sword of the cherubim in the first place, and Adam and Eve would not have eaten the fruit. But God does not infringe upon man's freedom. For this reason, every husband should leave room for the wife, and every wife also should leave room for the husband. If you take away all freedom and make all the decisions, it is only natural that the other party will fear you. If you are not careful, the other party may go further; he or she may hate you. As soon as freedom is gone, hatred comes in. At the minimum, fear will come in.

The husband must learn to give the wife some freedom, and the wife must learn to give the husband some freedom. Allow the other party to have his own time, his own money, and his own possessions. Do not think that you can borrow your wife's time for your use just because you are her husband. Both the husband and the wife have to learn to keep their place.

When you waste your wife's time, you are taking away her freedom. Small matters can become serious problems later.

Every husband and wife should have his or her own secrets. This is a legitimate thing. The right hand does not need to know what the left hand does. If he is the left hand, it is not necessary for you as the right hand to know what he is doing. Learn to respect individuality. Do not make two persons one. If you keep this rule, you will avoid many problems in the family.

IX. THE WAY TO SOLVE FAMILY PROBLEMS

What should we do when there are disputes between the husband and the wife? How do we solve family disputes? It is inevitable for husbands and wives to encounter problems and enter into arguments. However, since both are adults and are children of God, they must learn to know what the other person's problem is and where they differ. Before they can solve any disputes, they must know where the problem lies.

A. Any Settlement Needing to Be Fair

Any settlement must be fair. If it is not fair, it will not last. Do not expect one party to endure to the end. One out of ten Christians may endure to the end. But the other nine will not be able to endure to the end. If a solution is not fair, sooner or later the problem will come back again. When I was in Shanghai, I arbitrated in some family disputes. Many people wondered why tiny matters could be blown up to such a big scale. You must realize that when small matters are blown up, they are not blown up because of the matters themselves but because of history. It is the accumulation of a series of things that leads to the explosion. The explosion may be ignited by small matters, but the underlying cause may have been an accumulation of grudges over the years. Do not consider any matter to be trivial. Problems surface today because they were not dealt with in a fair way in the first place, and patience ran out in the meantime.

B. Holding Conferences between Husbands and Wives

It is best for outsiders to stay out of family disputes. Let the couple hold their own conference. Let them settle their own disputes when they get into an argument. Do not allow news to leak out of the family, while the family itself is left in the dark. Sometimes, news regarding the husband is heard

twenty miles away and yet he does not know about it himself. Sometimes news about the wife travels the same way. Let the wife tell her own husband about their own affairs, and let the husband tell his own wife about their affairs. In this way both are clear. Our experience tells us that husbands seldom know what their wives are thinking about and vice versa. Everyone else knows what they are thinking about, but they themselves do not know what each other is thinking about. Therefore, allow both to have the opportunity to speak to each other, and each should wait for the other to finish before he or she speaks. Do not allow the talkative side to dominate the talk. The husband must listen to the wife, and the wife must listen to the husband.

Many times, problems are solved as soon as the husband hears a word from the mouth of his wife, or the wife hears a word from the mouth of her husband. Many wives will only speak but will not listen to their husbands. If they would just listen, their problems would go away.

Both husband and wife should sit down and discuss the matter in an objective way, not in a subjective way. Once they become subjective, the discussion will fall apart. While they are talking, they should try to find the right judgment and the right feeling. They may not know who is right, but they should try to find out what is right. They should try to understand what each one is saying. Both must do this objectively, not subjectively. Both should speak, and after speaking, they should pray together. Always seek settlement through prayer. Ask the Lord to clearly show them where the problem lies. If they can follow this advice, the problem will be more or less settled by the time they pray together a second time. Many problems arise because they have not sat down to listen to each other and to listen objectively. As soon as they sit down and listen objectively, half of the problem is solved. As they sit and listen some more, they will discover where the problem lies.

During the first few years of a marriage life, a family should have this type of meeting two or three times a year. Each side will then learn where problems lie and how to deal with them. Many families need to learn this lesson. It will surely solve many problems within the family.

X. THE NEED FOR CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Between the two persons in the family, there must be confession and forgiveness. Many mistakes need to be confessed, not just ignored. Do not

be careless about your own faults; you must always confess them. As for the faults of the other party, you must forgive them.

When a Christian does something wrong, the basic principle is to not cover it up. It is not enough to just repent for it. When a Christian does something wrong, the basic principle is to confess. A Christian does not cover up or turn away from a sin; this is not enough to be called a Christian. When a Christian does something wrong, he must confess and say, "I was wrong in this." Every wrong must be confessed. Whenever there is any wrong between the husband and wife, there must be confession. One must acknowledge, "I have done wrong."

You confess when you are wrong. But what happens when the other person is wrong? You have to treat it the same way that you treat all Christian relationships. When there is any wrongdoing, learn to forgive. Do not delve into the matter and do not be vindictive. Love does not take account of evil. This means that it does not remember the sins of others. Learn to forgive them before the Lord. Once you forgive, you should forget. You have to lay aside what you have forgiven. Do not be like Peter, who tried to count the number of times others offended him (Matt. 18:21-22). As long as you are counting, you are not forgiving. Real forgiveness does not count the number of times one forgives. As soon as you forgive, the matter is over. In order for a family to go on, there must be forgiveness.

XI. CONSENT OF BOTH PARTIES IN SEEKING HELP FROM THE CHURCH

When a family has a problem, it must try to solve it first by calling a family meeting. In some cases one should forgive. In other cases one should confess. It is difficult for a third party to settle disputes within a family. The disputes between two persons are most easily solved between themselves. When a third party is involved, the situation becomes complicated. We should try to settle any dispute in as simple a way as possible. Do not look for complicated solutions. Referring a dispute to a third party is like adding mud to an injured leg. An injured leg without any mud is easily treated. But when mud is added, it is hard to deal with the wound. Disputes between two persons are more easily solved when a third party is not involved. As soon as a third party is informed, the problem is complicated. Therefore, a couple should learn to solve their own problems and should not try to inform a third party about it.

However, sometimes one needs to refer a certain matter to the church. Please remember that a person should not bring the matter to the church alone. The husband must seek the consent of the wife and vice versa before they can bring their dispute to the church. The two persons must have exhausted their means of handling the situation, and they now want the church to step in to help them. They should not come with their quarrels, but as those who are seeking help from the church. Both must come, and both must speak. Suppose both are willing to come to the church and say, "We are Christians. There is something between us. We would like the church to point out what is wrong." One will tell the church how he feels, and the other will tell the church how she feels as well. When both do this, it is easy for the church to step in to solve the problem. This is not an occasion for vindication. It is not the time for each person to expose the other's faults. Neither is it a time to get into a brawl. The purpose of telling the church is for both parties to sincerely discover where the problem lies.

XII. LIVING TOGETHER BEFORE THE LORD

In order to settle family problems and to have a good family life, there is also the need of positive influence. In particular, families with children should set aside a time for prayer together, a time for waiting upon the Lord and for fellowshiping about spiritual matters. Both the wife and the husband should be open to judgment from God's light concerning many matters. Neither the husband nor the wife should try to save his or her "face." Both should be willing to come under the judgment of God's light. There should be many spiritual transactions in the family. The members of the family should spend much time in prayer and spiritual fellowship together. This is especially true for families with children. They must seek opportunities to come more often to the Lord. In order for a family to go on properly, the husband and the wife should both live before the Lord. As soon as they do not live before the Lord, their family will have problems.

XIII. THE PROPER CHURCH LIFE

BEING MAINTAINED THROUGH A PROPER FAMILY LIFE

I have mentioned twelve items. I hope that you will learn these lessons in the family. Do not be careless or foolish in these matters. If you do not learn your lessons well, family problems will soon become church problems. If a man cannot live together with his wife at home and cannot be one with her,

he can never be one with the brothers and sisters in the church. This is a fact. A person cannot possibly fight at home with his wife and come to the church with hallelujahs in his mouth. One can only be a good brother in the church when he is a good husband and father at home. A good church life is maintained through good families. The husbands have to be good and the wives also have to be good. Then the church life will be free of problems.

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 49, ch. 32)

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

HOW TO BE PARENTS IN THE LORD

Scripture Reading: Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20

I. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS

Apart from the book of Proverbs, the Old Testament does not seem to give us much teaching concerning parenting. In the New Testament, however, Paul wrote something about being parents. Most books in the world teach children how to be children; not many books teach parents how to be parents. Most people pay attention to teachings for children. But the New Testament pays much attention to teachings for parents. It does not pay much attention to teachings about being children. Although it does teach us something about children, the emphasis is not on children. Both Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 put more emphasis on parents than on children. We should learn to be proper parents because God pays more attention to parents than to children.

If we summarizing the words in the Bible concerning parenting, the main thing parents should do is nurture their children in the teaching and admonition of the Lord and not provoke them to anger or discourage them. This means that parents must exercise self-control and must not be loose in any way. This is Paul's teaching concerning the subject.

As difficult as it is to be a husband or a wife, I hope you will realize that there is something more difficult—being a parent. Being a husband or a wife involves only two people; being a parent involves more. Being a husband or a wife is a matter of personal happiness; being a parent is something that affects the well-being of the children of the next generation. The responsibility over the future of the children of the next generation is on the shoulders of the parents.

We have to realize how serious this responsibility is. God has placed a person's body, soul, and spirit, even his whole life and future, into our hands. No individual influences another individual's future as much as parents. No one controls a person's future as much as parents. Parents almost have a say in whether their children will go into perdition or to be saved. We must learn to be good husbands and good wives, but above all we

must learn also to be good parents. I believe that the responsibility of being a parent is more than that of being a husband or a wife.

Here we will consider the Christian way of parenting. The knowledge of this will save us from many headaches.

A. Sanctifying Oneself for the Sake of the Children

First, all parents must sanctify themselves before God for the sake of their children.

1. The Lord Sanctifying Himself for the Sake of the Disciples

What does it mean to be sanctified before God? The Lord Jesus said, “For their sake I sanctify Myself” (John 17:19). This does not refer to being holy, but to whether or not one is sanctified. The Lord Jesus is holy and His nature is holy. But for the sake of the disciples, He sanctified Himself. There were many things that He could have done which were not contrary to His own holiness; nevertheless, He refrained from doing them because of weakness in the disciples. In many matters the disciples’ weakness directed the Lord and restricted His freedom. The Lord could do many things, but He did not do them because He did not want the disciples to misunderstand or be stumbled. As far as the Lord’s nature was concerned, He often could have acted a certain way. But He refrained from doing so for the sake of the disciples.

2. Not Walking in a Loose Way

Similarly, those who have children should sanctify themselves for the sake of their children. This means that we should refrain from doing many things which we could do for the sake of our children. There are many things which we could say, but for the sake of the children we do not say them. From the day we bring our children into our family, we should sanctify ourselves.

If you do not restrict yourself, you will not be able to restrict your children. The looseness of those who do not have children, at the most, results in trouble for themselves. But for those who have children, looseness results in damage to their children as well as to themselves. Once a Christian brings a child into the world, he must sanctify himself. Two eyes, sometimes four, are watching you all the time. They will follow you all your

life. Even after you have left this world, they will not forget what they have seen in you; the things you do will remain inside of them.

3. Acting according to Standards

The day your son is born is the day you should consecrate yourself. You must set a standard for yourself in morality, in conduct at home, and in all moral judgments regarding right and wrong. You must set a high standard for what is ideal, and you must also set a standard for yourself in spiritual matters. You must act strictly according to these standards. Otherwise, you will have problems for yourself, and you will spoil your children. Many children are ruined by their own parents, not by outsiders. If parents are lacking in ethical, moral, and spiritual standards, they will ruin their children.

I hope you could see that a young person makes decisions and judgments in his future life according to the training he received during his early years with his parents. A child may remember or forget what you say, but what he sees surely will remain in him forever. He develops his sense of judgment from you, and he also develops his system of values from you.

Every parent must remember that his actions will be repeated in his children; his actions will not stop with him. When you do not have children, you can do whatever you like when you are happy and give up and forget about everything when you are unhappy. But once you have children, you have to restrict yourself. You have to act according to the highest standard of conduct whether you like it or not. The whole life of Christian children depends on the behavior of their parents.

I remember a brother who said something when his son got into trouble. He said, "He is just a replica of me and I am just he." When a parent sees something in his children, he must realize that he is seeing himself. He must see that they are his very reflection. They are just reflecting him. Through them he can see himself.

This is why every couple should consecrate themselves anew to God as soon as they have a child. They should come to the Lord and consecrate themselves to Him again. From that time forward, the Lord has committed a human being, with his entire spirit, soul, life, and future, into their hands. From that day forward, they have to be faithful to the Lord's commitment. Some people are committed to a work for one or two years when they sign a

contract. But this work lasts for their entire life; there is no limit to the term of this commitment.

4. The Sense of Being Entrusted

Among believers in China, no failure is greater than the failure of parenting. I think this is due to the influence of paganism. Failure in one's career cannot be compared to failure in parenting. Even failure in being a husband or a wife cannot be compared to failure in parenting. A husband or a wife can protect himself or herself, because both are over twenty years of age. But when a child is placed in your hands, he cannot protect himself. The Lord has entrusted a child to you. You cannot go to Him and say, "You have entrusted five children to me, and I have lost three." You cannot say, "You have entrusted ten to me, and I have lost eight." The church cannot go on if parents do not have a sense of being entrusted. We do not want to see our children being rescued back from the world. Suppose we beget children, lose them to the world, and then try to rescue them back. If we allow this to happen, the gospel will never be preached to the uttermost part of the earth. Our children have been taught many teachings, and we have been taking care of them for years. At least these children should be brought to the Lord. We are wrong if we do not take care of our children. Please remember that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children turn out the right way.

Please give me the liberty to say this word. Throughout church history, the greatest failure among Christians is the failure in parenting. This is something no one cares much about. The children are young; they are in your hands and can do nothing much themselves. If you are loose with yourself, you will also be loose with them. We must realize that parents must exercise self-control, sacrificing their own freedom. God has committed a human body, along with his soul, into our hands. If we do not exercise self-control and give up our freedom, we will have a difficult time answering to our God in the future.

B. The Need to Walk with God

Second, parents must not only realize their responsibility and sanctify themselves for the sake of their children; they must also walk with God.

One sanctifies himself for the sake of his children. But this does not mean that he can be loose and careless when he is by himself. He should not

exercise self-control merely for the sake of his children. The Lord Jesus was not short of holiness in Himself, He did not sanctify Himself just for the sake of His disciples. If the Lord Jesus sanctified Himself merely for the sake of His disciples, but was not holy in Himself, He would have been a total failure. In the same way, parents must sanctify themselves for their children, but they themselves must also walk with God.

No matter how much zeal you show in your children's presence, they can easily see through you if you are not genuinely zealous. They are very clear, but you may not be that clear. You may be a very loose person yet act carefully in their presence. In reality you are not the person you pretend to be. Please remember that your children can see through you easily. If you are a careless person and you try to act in a discreet way before your children, they will easily detect your carelessness and pretension. You must not only sanctify yourself before them for their sake, but you must also be genuinely holy in yourself, walking with God as Enoch did.

I would like to draw your attention to the example of Enoch. Genesis 5:21-22 says, "Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters." Before Enoch was sixty-five years old, we do not know his condition. After he begat Methuselah, we know that he walked with God three hundred years. Then he was taken up by God. This is a special case in the Old Testament. Before Enoch begat children, we do not know anything about his condition. But after Enoch begat Methuselah, the Bible says that he walked with God. When the burden of the family was upon him, he started to feel his weakness. He felt that his responsibility was too great and that he could not manage it by himself. So he began to walk with God. He did not walk with God just in the presence of his son; he walked with God even when he was by himself. He felt that if he did not walk with God, he would not know how to raise his children. Enoch begat not only Methuselah but also many other children; nevertheless, he walked with God for three hundred years. His responsibility as a parent did not hinder him from walking with God; rather, it caused him to walk with God. Eventually, he was raptured. Please remember that the first person who was raptured was a father. The first person to be raptured was one who had many children and yet who still walked with God. The way one bears his responsibility in a family is a reflection of his spiritual condition before God.

We must see that in order for us to bring our children to the Lord in a genuine way, we need to be a person who walks with God. We cannot send our children to heaven merely by pointing our fingers to heaven. We have to walk in front of them. Only then can we ask our children to follow us. Even though Christian parents want their children to be better than they are in the hope that their children will not love the world and will go on in a positive way, there are many bad families because the parents themselves draw back. If this is the case, they will never realize their goal no matter how hard they try. We must remember that the standard of the children cannot be higher than the standard of their parents. This does not mean that we should set a false standard. We should have a standard that is genuine and spiritual. If we have this, our children will come up to our standard.

Please forgive me for saying something that sounds simple and elementary. I once went to visit a family and saw the mother beating her child because the child lied. However, both the father and the mother in this family also lied. I learned that they lied on many occasions. But when their child lied, he was beaten. Honestly speaking, the child's real mistake was only a deficiency in his technique of lying; he was caught lying. The only difference between the child and the parents was that one was caught lying while the others were not. It was not a matter of whether one lied, but a matter of skill. One lied, and he was caught and punished. If you have a double standard, how can you raise your children? How can you tell your children not to lie when you are a liar yourself? You must not have one standard for your life and another standard for your child's life. This will never work. Suppose your children see and receive nothing but lies and dishonesty from you. The more you punish them, the more problems you will have. Some fathers tell their sons, "Wait until you are eighteen, and I will let you smoke." Many children say in their heart, "When I am eighteen, my father will let me lie. I am not yet eighteen, so I cannot lie. But when I am eighteen, I will lie." This pushes your children into the world. You must walk with God as Enoch did, in order to raise your children as Enoch did. If you do not walk with God, you cannot expect to raise your children the way Enoch did.

Please remember that your children will learn to love what you love, and hate what you hate. They will learn to treasure what you treasure, and condemn what you condemn. You must set a moral standard for yourself and your children. Whatever your moral standard is, that will be their

standard as well. Your standard of loving the Lord will be their standard of loving the Lord. There can be only one standard in a family, not two.

I know of a family whose father is a nominal Christian. He never goes to church, but he wants his children to go every Sunday. Every Sunday morning, he gives a little money to each of his children and tells them to go to church. The money is for the children to make offerings. Later in the day, he plays a game of mahjong with his three friends. His children, however, spend the money on snack food. They play until the pastor is almost through with his sermon, and then they sneak into the building to hear a verse or two. When they go home, they give their father a nice report. They have snacks, they get to play, and they make a report. This, of course, is an extreme case.

I hope we can see that God has committed our children to us. There can be only one standard in the family. Whatever we forbid our children to do, we should not do. There must never be two standards in a family, one for the children and another for us. We must keep the same standard for our children's sake. We must sanctify ourselves to maintain a standard. Once the standard is set, we must maintain it. I hope we will all take good care of our children. They are constantly watching us. Whether or not they behave well depends on whether we behave well. They are not merely listening to us; they are watching us as well. They seem to know everything. They know if we are pushing them around, and they know if we are acting in front of them. We should not think that we can deceive our children. No! They cannot be deceived. They know how we feel, and they are clear about the true picture. Whatever we demand of our children, we must take the same position in that matter.

After Enoch begat Methuselah, he walked with God three hundred years. What a beautiful picture this is! He begat many children, yet he could walk with God three hundred years. He was a genuine father without any pretense. Such a walk is altogether proper in the eyes of God.

C. Both Parents Being of One Mind

Third, the father and mother must be of one mind in order for a family to be healthy. They must be of one mind in sacrificing their own freedom for God's sake and in raising up a strict moral standard. The father must not have one view while the mother has another. I am talking about the case where both parents are Christians. It is another matter if one of them is not a Christian.

A father and mother often do not take the same stand. As a result, they give their children the ground to sin freely. It is not easy for children to have an absolute standard if their parents are not of the same mind. If the father says yes in regards to a certain matter but the mother says no, or vice versa, the children will go to the parent they like and the one they feel most comfortable with. If it is more convenient to ask the father, they will go to the father, but if it is more convenient to get an answer from the mother, they will go to the mother. This immediately creates a big discrepancy.

I know of an old Christian couple who held different views. One would have one opinion and the other would have another. Their relationship as husband and wife was poor. As a result, they also became poor parents. Their children would ask the mother about things she agreed with, and they would ask the father about things he agreed with. They manipulated their requests in this way. If the mother came home and asked the children about their behavior, they would say, "We have checked with Father." If the father came home and asked the children about their behavior, they would say, "We have checked with Mother." As a result, their children had complete freedom by manipulating their way through their parents' inconsistencies. Twenty years ago I said to the father, "If this kind of condition continues, your children will surely turn away from the Lord." He said, "That will not happen." Today all of their sons have graduated from college, and some have gone overseas for further study, but none have believed in the Lord. They all are very undisciplined.

It is a different matter if one of the parents is an unbeliever. If both are believers, however, they have to expect God's heavy hand upon them. If one is not a believer, either the believing husband or the believing wife can pray specifically for mercy. But if both are believers and they pull their children in different directions, they can expect nothing but trouble down the road.

Whenever children get into trouble, the parents must exercise themselves to be of one mind. They must have the same mind before their children. Whatever the children ask, the husband's first answer should be, "Have you checked with your mother? What did she say? If your mother says yes, you can do it." If you are the wife and your children ask for something, you first should answer, "Have you checked with your father? Whatever he says, I will say the same." Whether or not the other person is right is a different story. You must maintain the same stand. If there is any dispute, both of you must go into your room to discuss it. Do not open a loophole for them. They will become loose once there are loopholes. Children always like to

look for loopholes. If the husband sees a fault in the wife or vice versa, any question as to why something was said to the children must be asked behind closed doors. It is important to clarify any disagreement, but you must not allow your children to find loopholes in you. If the parents are of one mind, it will be very easy to lead the children to the Lord.

D. Respecting the Rights of Children

Fourth, there is a basic principle in the Bible that children are given by Jehovah (Psa. 127:3). According to the Bible, children are entrusted by God to man. One day you must render your account of this trust to God. No one can say that his children are his and his alone. The thought that one's children are his own, that one can do whatever he wants with them, and that he has absolute control over them is a pagan concept; it is not a Christian concept. Christianity never teaches that children are ours. Rather, it acknowledges that children are God's trust and that parents cannot exercise despotic control over their children throughout their childhood.

1. Parents Do Not Have Unlimited Authority

Some people hold on to the concept that parents are always right. They hold on to this concept even after they have become Christians. Please remember that many parents are not always right. Many times the parents are quite wrong. We should not pick up pagan concepts, and we should not assume that we have unlimited authority over our children.

Please remember that parents do not have absolute authority over their children. Children have their own spirit and their own soul, over which the parents have no control whatsoever. Since children have their own spirit and soul, they are under their own control. They can be saved, or they can go into perdition. They must be responsible for themselves before God. We cannot treat them as an object or as property. We should not assume that we can exercise unlimited authority over them. God has not given us such absolute authority. God has given us unlimited authority over dead things, but He has not given us unlimited authority over human beings who have their own spirit and soul. No one can have absolute authority over another person with a spirit and a soul. The thought of absolute authority is a pagan concept. It is related to pride and should not be found among us.

2. Children Are Not the Means

by which Parents Vent Their Wrath

We are reasonable with our friends and with other members of our family. We are courteous and reasonable with our colleagues and are even more courteous and respectful to our superiors. We try to get along well with every kind of person. But we treat our children as if they are our personal property, forgetting that they also have a spirit and a soul and that they are gifts from God. It is possible for us to vent our anger on them and treat them as we please. Some people think that they need to be courteous to everyone in the world except their own children. They seem to regard their children as the means of venting their anger. I know of parents who are this way at home. They seem to think that a man must be courteous and gentle and yet, at the same time, have a strong temper. It seems that they are not complete if they do not lose their temper. Nevertheless, they realize that they will be in trouble if they lose their temper with others. Their superiors will fire them if they lose their temper with them, and their friends will despise them if they lose their temper with them. They think that there is only one place where they can lose their temper without suffering punishment—with their children. Many parents have a terrible temper toward their children. It is as if their children were the cultivating ground for their temper.

Please forgive me for saying such strong words. I have seen many parents shout at their children over dinner and then turn toward me and say, “Mr. Nee, please take some of this food. It is delicious.” When this happens. I have no heart for the food. These things often happen within a span of just a few minutes. On the one hand, they scold their children, and on the other hand, they say, “Mr. Nee, please eat.” The problem with some parents is that they consider their children to be the rightful means for venting their anger. Did God give us children so that we have a place to lose our temper? May God be merciful to us!

Please remember that God has not denied all rights of children. He has not annulled all the self-esteem, personal freedom, or independent constitution of the children. He has not put them in our hands for us to beat them and scold them. There is no such thing. This is a non-Christian thought; it is not a Christian concept. Please remember that the same standard of right and wrong equally applies to us and our children. There should be only one standard for us and our children. We cannot have one standard for ourselves and another standard for them. Let me say a word to

the new believers. You must be tender and gentle to your children. Never be rude to them. Do not scold them or rebuke them arbitrarily, much less beat them at will.

Please remember that such conduct leads to indulgence. Everyone who wants to know God must learn to control himself. In particular, he should control himself when it comes to dealing with his children. This kind of self-control comes from a proper respect of a child's soul. No matter how small or weak a child is, remember that he has his own personality. God has given him a personality and a soul. You must not damage his character, destroy his personality, or despise his soul. You must not treat him in an arbitrary way. You must learn to respect him as a person.

At the same time, our children are entrusted to our family. Their standard of morality must be our standard of morality. Whatever applies to them must also apply to us. Parents have no right to vent their wrath on their children. A Christian should not lose his temper with anyone, not even with his own children. It is wrong for us to lose our temper with anyone, no matter whom it may be. We should be reasonable and we should only reason with our children. What is right is always right and what is wrong is always wrong. Do not intimidate them just because they are small and weak. Those who oppress the weak and the small are the most cowardly people in the world.

3. Do Not Become a Cross to Your Children

Two students were once talking to each other in school. The girl said to her classmate, "I know my father. He is willing to die for me." Listen to what she said! This is the comment of a child about her father. Her father was a Christian. This was the kind of father he was to her. The other girl was also from a Christian family. Her father was harsh and lost his temper with his daughter easily. Once she heard a sermon at school. When she arrived home, her father asked her what she had learned. She answered, "I now know that the Lord has given you to me to be my cross." Both fathers were Christians. But what a difference between them!

I would say to the parents: Be slow to demand obedience from your children. Instead, first demand that you yourselves be good parents before the Lord. If you are not good parents, you can never be good Christians. God does not give us children for the purpose of making us their crosses. God gave us children so that we will learn to honor their freedom, personality, and soul before the Lord.

E. Not Provoking Children to Anger

Fifth, Paul showed us an important thing that parents should not do—they should not provoke their children to anger (Eph. 6:4).

1. Not Exercising Authority Excessively

What does it mean to provoke children to anger? It means the excessive use of authority. One can overpower his children with physical strength. This is always possible because parents are stronger than their children. Or one can try to subdue his children with financial power. He may say, “If you do not obey me, I will not give you any money. If you do not listen to me, I will take away your food and clothing.” Since the children depend on him for their living, he overpowers them with his money by threatening to withdraw his support. Some parents dominate their children with physical power, and others dominate them with their iron will. This can provoke their children to anger. When they are provoked, they will wait for the chance for their freedom. One day they will break their bondage and seek total freedom.

I know a brother whose father gambled, smoked, and behaved rudely at home. He embezzled public funds and was involved in many other unscrupulous businesses. But he still went to church, and he wanted all of his children to go to church. He would rebuke and punish them severely if they did not go. He ruined his children’s taste for the family, all the while insisting that they go to church. Later, the brother said, “I vowed that when I grew up one day, I would never go to church. As soon as I could support myself, I was going to turn away from the church.” Even though he swore this way, eventually he was saved. Thank God! Otherwise, he would have become another anti-Christian proponent. This was a very serious matter. The father did not try to make his children love him, yet he demanded that his children go to church. This never works. This provokes children to anger. Parents should not exercise excessive authority over their children or provoke them to anger. They must never make their children hardened and rebellious toward them.

I remember another man who is not saved. Not long ago I saw him. He was forced to read the Bible when he was growing up at home, and he was forced to read the Bible when he went to a parochial school. I am not saying that parents should not charge their children to read the Bible. I am saying that you must attract them and be an example to them yourself. It will

never work if you merely tell them that the Lord is precious, yet constantly abuse them. There was a mother who was a nominal Christian. She had a terrible temper. She insisted that her son read the Bible and go to a parochial school. One day he asked when he could stop reading the Bible. His mother replied, "When you finish secondary school, you can stop reading the Bible." On the day that he received his high school diploma, he took his three copies of the Bible and burned them in the backyard. You must draw children in a natural way. Otherwise, when their anger is provoked they may do anything. You want them to be good, but they will rebel against you when they become free. This is what is meant by provoking children to anger. Do not provoke your children to anger. You must learn to be proper parents, to have love, tenderness, and a proper testimony before them. You must also be an attraction to them. Do not exercise your authority excessively. Authority can only be exercised under self-control. If you are excessive in your use of authority, you will stifle your relationship with your children.

2. Showing Proper Appreciation

In addition, you should show proper appreciation for your children when they perform well. Some parents only know how to punish and scold; they know nothing else. This easily provokes their children to anger. Please remember that many children do have a desire to be good. If you have nothing for them except punishment and rebuke, they will become disheartened, according to Paul's word in Colossians 3:21. They will say that it is useless to do good because their parents will not acknowledge it. You must encourage your children when they perform well. You can say to them, "Today you have done well. I will reward you. I want to give you something special." Children do need to be disciplined, but they also need to be rewarded. Otherwise, they will become disheartened.

I read of a story about a little girl whose mother only knew how to beat and scold her children. The child had a good disposition when she was young. Since she felt that her mother did not approve of her, she decided that she would work especially hard one day to try to please her. When evening came, her mother undressed her, put her to bed, and began to walk away. As the mother was walking away, the daughter called to her. The mother asked what she wanted. She did not say anything. When the mother started to walk away again, the daughter called again. When the mother asked her again, the daughter said, 'Mother, do you not have anything to

say?” This is one of the stories told by Mr. Bervin. After the mother left, the girl cried for two hours. Her mother was too insensitive. She only knew how to beat and scold her daughter; she was insensitive to everything else.

Please remember that the New Testament has more teaching for parents than for children. The whole world speaks of the mistakes that children make, but the Lord spoke of the mistakes that parents make. Since the world speaks so much about children’s mistakes, we do not have to say too much about them. The Bible tells us parents can indeed provoke their children to anger and dishearten them through their insensitivity. This is why it speaks so much about parenting. This occupation is more difficult than any other occupation in the world. Those who are parents must devote all their energy and mind to be proper parents. Please do not be insensitive to your children.

F. Being Accurate with Words

Sixth, parents’ words are very important to children. You must not only be a pattern to your children but also realize that your words are very important to them.

1. Not Making Empty Promises

Please remember that parents should not say anything to their children that they cannot carry out. You must not make empty promises to your children. Do not promise them something if you do not have the ability to fulfill your promise. Do not make a promise to them if you cannot fulfill it. If your children want you to buy something, you have to consider your financial ability. If you can do it, do it. If not, you must say, “I will do my best. I will do what I can do. But I cannot do what is beyond my ability.” Every word of yours must be reliable. You should not think that this is a small matter. You must not allow your children to doubt your words. Not only must they not doubt your words, but they also must have the assurance that your words are accurate. If the children find their parents’ words to be unreliable, they will grow up acting carelessly. They will think that since one can be careless with his words, he can be careless with anything. Some expressions can be used only in politics; they are not factual. Parents should not use such expressions. Many parents are apparently too kind to their children. They promise whatever their children ask, but nine out of ten times they cannot fulfill their promises. Such wonderful promises produce only one result in the

children—disappointment. You must promise only things that you can do. If you cannot do a certain thing, do not promise it. If you are not sure whether you can do it, tell them so. Your words must be accurate.

2. Orders Needing to Be Carried Out

Sometimes you are not making a promise, but giving an order. If you open your mouth to ask your children to do something, you must make sure that it is done. You have to make them realize that you mean what you say. Many times you give a proper order, but you forget about it. This is wrong. You should not tell your children that it is all right if they do not carry out your order this time, just as long as they do it the next time. If you excuse them, you are not doing them a favor. You should show your children that once you say something, they must carry it out whether or not you remember it. If you say it once, you can say it a hundred times. If your word counts for one thing, your word should count for a hundred things. You should not nullify your own words. Show them from their youth that words are hallowed whether they are a promise or an order. For example, if you tell your child to sweep his room every morning, you must first consider whether or not it is within his ability to do it. If he does not do it today, you must make sure that he does it the next day. If he does not do it the next day, you must make sure that he does it the third day. You must uphold your order this year, and you must uphold it next year. You have to show your children that your words are not uttered lightly and that once they are uttered, they have to be carried out. If they find that your words do not count, your words will become ineffective. Hence, every word out of your mouth must be practical and principled.

3. Correcting Exaggerated Words

Sometimes you exaggerate your words. You must find an opportunity to tell your children that you exaggerated your words on that particular occasion. Your words must be accurate. Sometimes you see only two cows but you say that there are three, or you see five birds but say that there are eight. You must correct yourself immediately. In speaking to your children, you must learn to always correct yourself. You should learn to say, “What I just said was not that accurate. There are two cows, not three.” You must show them that words should be sanctified. Everything that happens in the family should be for the building up of Christian character. You must sanctify your words. When your children speak, they should also sanctify

their words and be accurate with them. When you say something wrong, you must make a point to admit your mistake. In this manner you will train your children to sanctify their words. Many parents say five when they mean three or three when they mean two. They speak loosely and do not set up good patterns at home. As a result, their children never realize that words are sacred.

All these problems occur because there is a lack of discipline from the Lord. We should experience the Lord's discipline and lead our children to the Lord's discipline. At least we should show them that words are sacred. Every promise should be realized and every order should be carried out. Every word has to be accurate. If we do this, our children will receive proper training.

G. Nurturing Children in the Discipline and Admonition of the Lord

Seventh, you must nurture your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). The discipline of the Lord is telling a person how he should behave himself. You must consider your children as Christians, not Gentiles. The Lord's discipline tells a person how he should behave as a Christian. The Lord intends that all of our children become Christians. He has no intention that any of them be a Gentile or an unsaved person. You should plan on all of them becoming not just Christians, but good Christians. You should tell them what a proper Christian is by teaching them the discipline of the Lord.

Here we must briefly cover a number of points.

1. Helping Children to Have Proper Aspirations

The biggest thing about a child is his aspirations. Every child has an aspiration when he is young. If the government allowed every child to print his business card, I think many children would print "President," "Chairman," or "Queen." Parents must help their children to have proper aspirations. If you love the world, your children will probably want to be the president, a millionaire, or a great academic. How you live affects the aspirations of your child. Parents must learn to channel the ambitions of their children in the proper direction. They should aspire to be a lover of the Lord. They should not aspire to love the world. You should cultivate such an ambition within them while they are young. Show them that it is an

honorable thing to die for the Lord, that it is a precious thing to be a martyr for the Lord. You have to be an example to them, and you have to tell them your ambitions. Tell them what you want to be if you are given the opportunity. Tell them what kind of Christian you want to be. In this way, you will channel their ambitions in the proper direction. Their goals will change, and they will know what is noble and what is precious.

2. Not Encouraging the Pride of Children

Children have another problem: They are not only ambitious and aspiring but also proud of themselves. They may boast about their own cleverness, skill, or eloquence. A child can find many things to boast about. He may think that he is a very special person. Parents should not discourage them, but neither should they cultivate their pride. Many parents cultivate their children's pride and encourage them to go after vainglory by heaping praises upon them in front of other people. We should tell them, "There are many children who are like you in this world." Do not try to encourage their pride. We should enlighten children according to the discipline and admonition of the Lord. They should be able to think, to speak, and to learn all the skills. But you have to tell them that there are many who are like them in this world. Do not destroy their self-esteem, but do not allow them to become proud. You do not need to hurt their self-esteem, but you must point out their pride to them. Many young people leave home only to find out that they have to spend ten or twenty years in the world in order to learn how to do things properly. By then it is too late. Many young people have a wild temper at home. They are so proud that they cannot work properly. We do not want our children to become disheartened, but neither do we want them to be proud or to think that they are somebody.

3. Teaching Children to Accept Defeat and to Learn Humility

A Christian needs to know how to appreciate others. It is easy to be victorious, but it is hard to accept defeat. We can find champions who are humble, but it is rare to find losers who are not bitter. This is not a Christian attitude. Those who are good in some areas should learn to be humble and not boastful. At the same time, when a person is defeated he should learn to accept his defeat. Children are very competitive. It is all

right for them to be competitive; they want to win at ball games, track meets, and in their school work. You have to show them that it is right for them to study well at school, but they have to learn to be humble. Encourage them to be humble. Tell them that there are many other students who may be better than they are. When they are defeated, you need to teach them to accept their defeat with grace. A child's problem often has to do with these attitudes. After a game the winner is proud, while the loser will complain that the judge was not fair or that he made the wrong judgment because the sun was glaring in his face. You should help them to develop a humble character. They should be under Christian admonition and should develop Christian character. They can win, and when they lose they can also appreciate others. Admitting defeat is a virtue. The Chinese are greatly lacking in this virtue. Most Chinese blame others when they are defeated instead of conceding with grace. You must nurture your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

Many children say that their teacher plays favorites when others do well on tests. When they do not do well themselves, they say their teacher does not like them. Here we see the need for humility. Christians must have the virtue of accepting defeat. If others are good, we have to say promptly that they are good. We also have to accept defeat and concede that others are smarter, more hard working, or better than us. It is a Christian virtue to accept defeat. When we win, we should not look down upon everyone else. This attitude is unworthy of a Christian. When others are better than us, we have to appreciate them. Others may jump higher or be stronger than us. We should train our children to acknowledge achievement in others, while they are still living at home with us. This training will help them understand themselves when they grow up as Christians. We should know ourselves and appreciate those who are better than us. If our children are this way, it will be easy for them to experience spiritual things.

4. Teaching Children to Choose

I hope that we will pay attention to this matter. In many aspects we have to teach our children according to the discipline of the Lord. From their youth, we should give them a chance to make their own choices. We should not make every choice for them until they reach the age of eighteen or twenty. If we do, it will be impossible for them to make any decisions when they grow up. We have to always give them the opportunity to make decisions. Give them the chance to choose what they like and what they do

not like. We have to show them whether their choices are right. Give them the chance to choose and then show them the right choice. Let them see it for themselves. Some like to wear short dresses. Some prefer one kind of color, while others prefer another kind of color. Let them make the choices by themselves.

Some people do not give their children the opportunity to make choices. As a result, when their children reach their twenties and marry someone, they do not know how to be the head. You can tell them that the husband is the head of the wife, but they will not know how to be the head. You must not allow them to wait until they are married to find out that they do not know how to be the head. If at all possible, give your children plenty of opportunity to make decisions. When they grow up, they will then know what to do. They will know what is wrong and what is right. Give a child opportunities to make choices from the time he is young. I will say a word to all those who have children: “Give them a chance to choose.” Otherwise, many Chinese children will be damaged when they grow up. The damage is often manifested when the children are between the ages of eighteen and twenty. They act in irresponsible ways at this age because they have never been called upon to make any choices. We must teach our children according to the discipline of the Lord. We must teach our children to make choices rather than making all the choices for them. We have to let our children know whether they have made the right choices.

5. Teaching Children to Manage Things

We must also teach our children to manage things. We must give them the opportunity to take care of their personal belongings, to manage their own shoes, socks, and other affairs. Give them a little instruction and then let them try to manage things by themselves. Let them know how things should be handled from their youth. Some children have a bad start because their fathers love them blindly and do not know how to train them. As Christians, we have to train our children to manage their things properly.

I believe if the Lord is gracious to us, we will gain half of our increase from among our own children and the other half from the “sea” (i.e., the world). If all the increase is from the sea and none is from among our own children, we will not have a strong church. Paul’s generation could be saved directly from the world, but the generation after Paul, men like Timothy, came in through their families. We cannot expect our increase to always

come from the world. We have to expect the second generation, men like Timothy, to come from our own families. God's gospel does save men from the world, but we also need to bring in men like Timothy. Before the church will be rich, there must be grandmothers like Lois and mothers like Eunice who raise, edify, and nurture their children in the discipline of the Lord. If there are no such people, the church will never be rich. We must give our children the opportunity to manage things from their youth. We must give them the chance to learn to arrange things by themselves. Hold family meetings frequently and allow the children to make decisions. If we have to rearrange the furniture, involve them in its rearrangement. If we have to rearrange the cupboard, involve them in its rearrangement. Teach them to manage things. Whether we have daughters or sons, we have to teach them to manage things. Then they will become a good husband or a good wife in the future.

What is our situation today? Girls should be cared for by their mothers. But many mothers do not take care of them, and the burden is turned over to the church. Boys should be cared for by their fathers. But many fathers do not take care of them, and the burden is also passed on to the church. As a consequence, as men are saved and brought into the church, the business burden of the church doubles. This is because those who are parents do not live properly as Christian parents. After the church preaches the gospel and saves men, it has to deal with all kinds of family problems associated with these men. But if parents are responsible for the proper nurturing of their children, and if the children are brought up in the church, the church will be relieved of half of its burdens. In Shanghai I have often felt that the workers should not be handling the many affairs that they handle; those affairs should be handled by the parents. The parents do not teach their children well, and these children drift into the world. As a result, we have to rescue them back from the world and pick up the burden of teaching them ourselves. This creates much work for the church.

II. LEADING THE CHILDREN TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

Eighth, we must lead them to the knowledge of the Lord. A family altar is indeed necessary. In the Old Testament the tabernacle was linked to the altar. In other words the family is linked to service and consecration to God. No family can go on without prayer and the reading of the Word. This is especially true with families that have children.

A. Meetings That Are on the Level of the Children

Some families fail in their prayer and Bible-reading time because their family meetings are too long and too deep. The children do not understand what is going on. They do not know why you are asking them to sit there. I do not like it when families invite us to their homes to speak about deep doctrines and then force their children to sit with them. Some home meetings go on for one or two hours about difficult doctrines. This is indeed a great suffering for the children. Yet many parents have no feeling about this. The children sit there, but they do not understand. For example, if the topic is on the book of Revelation, how can they understand it? The home meetings must suit the children. These family meetings are not designed for you; your meeting is in the meeting hall. Do not impose your standard on your family. What you do in the family must suit the taste of your children and must be on their own level.

1. Encouraging and Attracting

Another problem with some home meetings is that there is little love in them. It is neither the father's attraction nor the mother's attraction that draws the children to these meetings; it is the whip that keeps them there. They do not want to join. But they come because there is the threat of the whip. If you take away the whip, they will not come. This will never work. You must think of some ways to attract them and encourage them. Do not punish them. Never beat your children for not attending your family worship hour. If you beat them once, you may create a problem in them for the rest of their lives. Parents must attract their children to the family worship hour. Do not force them to come. This will only result in terrible consequences.

2. Meeting Once in the Morning and Once in the Evening

We suggest having two home meetings a day, one in the morning and one in the evening. The father should lead the morning time and the mother should lead the evening time. Get up a little earlier. The parents must not remain in bed after the children have taken their breakfast and gone to school. If you have children at home, you have to wake up earlier. Have a little time together before the children go to school. Your meeting should be

short, living, and never long. Perhaps ten minutes is enough. Fifteen minutes is the longest it should be. Never exceed fifteen minutes and do not be shorter than five minutes. Ask everyone of them to read a verse. The father should take the lead to pick out a few phrases and speak about them. If the children can memorize something, ask them to memorize. Do not quote a whole verse. Ask them to remember the meaning of a sentence. At the end of the meeting the father or the mother should offer a prayer for God's blessing. Do not offer lofty or deep prayers. Pray about things that children can understand. Do not be long. Be simple. Then send them to school.

Every time you sit down for your meal, you should thank the Lord for it. Whether it is breakfast, lunch, or dinner, you should be sincere in your thanksgiving. Help your children to give thanks. The evening meeting should be a little longer, and the mother should lead it. It is not necessary to read the Bible at night, but the family needs to pray together. In particular, the mother has to gather the children together and talk to them. While the father is sitting next to her, the mother should encourage the children to speak up. Ask them whether they had any problems that day. Ask whether they fought with one another and whether anything was bothering them. If a mother cannot make her children speak up, something must be wrong. It is a failure of the mother to allow a barrier to exist between herself and her children. The mother must be at fault if the children are afraid to speak to her. They should be free to speak up. The mother must learn to bring out the things that are in her children's hearts. If they do not want to speak up that day, ask them the next day. Guide the children. Let them pray a little and teach them to say a few words. This meeting must be living. Ask them to confess their sins, but do not force them. There must not be any pretense. Everything must be done in a very natural way. Let them take some initiative themselves. If they have something to confess, let them confess. If they have nothing to confess, do not force them. There must not be any pretense. The pretense found in many children is the result of pressure from strict parents. Children do not tell lies, but you can force them to tell lies. The parents should lead them to pray in a simple way one by one. Make sure that everyone prays. Finally, conclude with a prayer of your own. But do not be long. Once your prayer becomes long, children become bored. Feed them according to their capacity. Once you try to do too much, you will overburden them. Pray a few sentences with them and then let them go to sleep.

3. Paying Attention to Their Repentance

Let them know the meaning of sin. Everyone sins. You must pay attention to the matter of their repentance and then bring them to the Lord. After some time you should ask them to receive the Lord sincerely. Then bring them to the church and let them be a part of the church. In this way you will lead your children to the knowledge of God.

B. The Atmosphere in the Family Being Love

Ninth, the atmosphere in the family should be one of love. Some become psychologically abnormal or withdrawn because they do not have love at home.

The way a child grows up depends on the atmosphere in his family. If a child does not receive any loving nurturing as he grows up, he will become stubborn, individualistic, and rebellious. Many people cannot get along with others in their adult life because they did not experience love in the family as a child. They saw only quarrels, arguments, and fights in the family. Children from such families grow up abnormally. Those who come from such abnormal families surely grow up to be lonely people. They will be antagonistic toward others. Because they feel inferior in their heart, they try to boost their self-image by considering themselves better than others. All those who have an inferiority complex have a tendency to exalt themselves. This is their means of offsetting their own inferiority.

Many bad elements in society such as robbers and rebels come from families which are void of love. Their personality becomes warped, and they turn against their fellow man when they grow up. When they come to the church, they bring their problems with them. I feel that half of the work of the church can be done by good parents. But this work falls upon our shoulders today because there are few good parents. New believers should see that they should treat their children in a proper way. A family must be filled with an atmosphere of love and tenderness. There must be genuine love. Children who grow up from such families will become normal persons.

Parents must learn to be friends to their children. Never allow your children to distance themselves from you. Never make yourself unapproachable. Please remember that friendship is built upon communication; it does not come by birth. You must learn to approach your children. Be happy to help them so that they will tell you when they

encounter problems and seek your counsel when they are weak. They should not go to others when they are weak. They should be able to tell you their successes as well as their failures. You should be their good friend, the approachable and helpful one to them. They should look to you when they are weak and fellowship with you when they are successful. We have to be friends to them. When they are weak, they should be able to come to us for help. We should not be a judge on the throne but a help to them. We should be there whenever they need help, and we should be able to sit down with them and discuss problems with them. They should be able to seek counsel from us as from friends. In a family the parents must earn so much trust from their children that they become their friends. If a parent will do this, he or she will have done the right thing.

You have to learn this lesson from the time the children are young. How dear and near your children are to you depends on how you treat them the first twenty years of their lives. If they are not near to you the first twenty years of their lives, they will not be near to you when they are thirty or forty years old. They will drift further and further away from you. Many children do not like to be near their parents. They are not friends to them and there is no sweet relationship between them. They go to their parents when they have problems in a way that resembles a criminal going before a judge. You must work to such an extent that your children will come and seek your advice first when they have problems. They must feel comfortable confiding in you. If you can achieve this, you will find few problems in your family. In fact, all problems will be solved.

C. The Matter of Punishment

Tenth, there is the matter of punishment. When a child has done something wrong, he or she must be punished. It is wrong not to punish.

1. Being Afraid of Beating the Children

The most difficult thing is to punish someone. Those who are parents must be afraid of beating their children. They must consider it as serious as beating their own parents. No children should beat their own parents. One can be forgiven for beating his own parents, yet he will not be easily forgiven for beating his own children. You must learn to be afraid of beating your own children and must consider it as serious as beating your own parents.

2. Beating Being Necessary

However, beating them is sometimes necessary. Proverbs 13:24 says, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: / but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” This is Solomon’s wisdom. Parents should chastise their children with the rod. Beating is necessary.

3. Beating Justly

If you beat, however, you must beat justly. Do not lose your temper, and do not beat in anger. No one may beat their children in anger. Something is wrong with you when you are angry. Brothers and sisters, when your children do something wrong, and you beat them in your anger, you should realize that you also should be beaten. You must calm down first before God. As long as you are angry, you cannot chastise anyone.

4. Pointing Out to the Children Their Fault

Some problems must be settled by beating. But you must show the child what you are beating him for. If you need to beat him, you also need to show him his fault. You must show him his fault each time you beat him. You must tell him what his fault is. It is not enough to try to stop his fault by beating him. You have to explain to him that you are beating him because he is wrong in certain things.

5. Beating Being a Serious Thing

Every time you beat a child, you must not do it in a common way. You must show him that beating is a big thing. The whole family has to know about it. All the adults and children have to come together. The father or the mother has to carry out the beating like a surgeon performing an operation. A doctor does not cut with a knife out of anger; he cuts to remove a problem. In the same way a parent must not punish in anger; he or she must be calm. Parents must never beat their children in a state of fury. On the one hand, they must point out the fault. On the other hand, they must not be angry in any way.

How should you do it? I have a suggestion. By the time you have a cane in your hand, the child must have committed some very serious wrong. While you are holding the cane in your hand, you should ask the child’s brother to fetch a pail of warm water and his sister to fetch a towel. Then you have to

show the child what he has done wrong. You have to tell him that anyone who has done something so serious must be punished severely. He should not flee from his mistakes. Fleeing from punishment is wrong as well. A person must be bold to receive punishment if he is bold to commit sin. Tell him that he has done something wrong and that you have no choice but to punish him. The beating is for him to realize his wrong. You may beat him two times or you may beat him three times. Perhaps the child's hand will bruise and bleed from the beating. You should then ask his brother to soak the bruised hand in the warm water to relieve the blood circulation. Afterward you should wipe the child's hand with the towel. You have to do this ceremoniously. Show them that there is only love in the family; there is no hatred. I believe this is the right way to punish.

Today much of the punishment in the family is the result of anger and hatred, not love. You say that you love your children, but who will believe you? I will not. You must let them know where they are wrong. Let them know that their father is not beating them in hatred. When you beat, do it properly. After you beat them, you should take them to bed. If the offense is too serious, the mother or the father can share two of the child's stripes. You have to tell the child, "This matter is too serious. I have to beat you five times. But I am afraid that you cannot take it if I give you five stripes. So your mother will share two of them and your father will share one of them on your behalf. You yourself must still take the other two stripes." You have to show him that this is a serious and grave matter. He will remember not to sin freely for the rest of his life.

This is the Lord's discipline; it is not the discipline of your temper. It is the Lord's admonition, not the admonition of your temper. I do not stand with the temper of any parent. The temper of the parents will ruin the future of their children. The parents must learn to have true punishment for their children. But, at the same time, they must also learn to love. This is the proper way to have a Christian family.

III. GREAT CHILDREN COMING OUT OF GREAT PARENTS

Finally, I would say that many men whom God used in this world came from great parents. Beginning with Timothy, we find numerous men used by God who came from great parents. John Wesley was one of them. Another one was John Newton. There are many hymns in our hymnal written by Newton. John G. Paton was another one. He was one of the most famous missionaries in the modern world. I can think of no other father

like his father. In his old age Paton still remembered, “Every time I wanted to sin, I remembered my father, who was always praying for me.” His family was very poor. There was only one bedroom, one kitchen, and another small room. He said, “I trembled every time my father prayed and sighed in the small room. He was making petition for our souls. Even though I am so old now, I can still remember his sighing. I thank God for giving me such a father. I cannot sin, because when I sin, I transgress against my heavenly Father as well as my earthly father.” It is difficult to find a father like Paton’s father, and it is difficult to find a son as great as Paton.

I cannot tell you how many strong believers would be raised up in our second generation if all the parents of this generation would be good parents. I have always wanted to say this: The future of the church depends on the parents. When God bestows grace on the church, He needs vessels. There is the need for more Timothys to be raised up. It is true that we can save men from the world, but there is a greater need for raising up people from among Christian families.

(Taken from the Collected Works of Watchman Nee, set 3, volume 49, chapter 33)

SECTION VI:
SISTERS' SERVING

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE FIVE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD— CARING FOR GOD’S INTEREST

I. THE STATUTE OF JUDGMENT FOR THE WOMEN’S INHERITING OF THE LAND

In Numbers 27:1-11 we have the statute of judgment for the women’s inheriting of the land.

A. The Request of the Daughters of Zelophehad

The daughters of Zelophehad said, “Why should the name of our father be taken away from his family, because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father’s brothers” (v. 4). According to God’s ordination, only males had the right of inheritance. Here, however, the daughters of Zelophehad requested an inheritance. As we will see, God honored their request.

1. Of One of the Families of Manasseh the Son of Joseph

Verses 1 through 4 speak of the request of the daughters of Zelophehad. They were of one of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph. This is a type related to life and the fellowship of life. The fact that the daughters of Zelophehad were of one of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph indicates that they were in the life and the fellowship of life of the proper origin.

In the Bible, inheritance is determined according to genealogy. A genealogy is a matter of life, and this life is related to tribes, houses, and families. The basic concept in the typology in Numbers 27 is concerned with life. Everything related to us in Christ involves the life which we have received in Him.

Life has its source, and life is received by us in a certain way, through a particular channel. The way we receive the divine life is very important. As believers in Christ, we all have received the divine life, but there is a

difference in the means or the channel through which we have received this life. The means of receiving the divine life involves the matter of our spiritual family.

According to the type in Numbers, which is concerned with both the source of life and the means of receiving life, who we are and what we will be depend on our family. It matters a great deal through whom we were saved and received the Lord Jesus, for the Christian life with its activities depends on the source of life and the channel of life. This is the reason we are told, in the type, that the numbering of the people was carried out according to the houses of their fathers. This is a basic requirement. Anyone who did not have a house, even though he was a genuine Israelite, did not have a genealogy and was not qualified to be numbered. In order to be numbered, an Israelite had to have a strong standing related to the source of life and the channel of life. The principle is the same with us today. We must have a strong standing in the source of life, and we must have a proper channel for the receiving of the divine life. This channel is the means by which we came into existence in the divine life.

2. Being Females

The request in 27:4 was made by five females. The females signify the weaker ones. In the sight of God, we all are females. This means that in ourselves we all are the weaker ones, even the weakest ones. Only Christ is the strong One.

Spiritually speaking, in the entire universe there is only one male—God embodied in Christ. Christ, therefore, is the unique Husband. All the believers, including the brothers, are females. In God's creation I am a male, but in God's new creation I am a female. The five daughters of Zelophehad typify us, and their request is for us all.

3. Having the Desire to Possess Their Father's Inheritance

The daughters of Zelophehad had the desire to possess their father's inheritance. In typology, this signifies having regard for the inheritance—grace—given by God; it signifies the desire to inherit God's grace, to inherit Christ as the grace given to us by God. We all need to learn to make this kind of request. The desire to possess Christ as our enjoyment is marvelous, and it is pleasing to God.

Apparently the daughters of Zelophehad were requesting something for themselves. (God is not pleased with a request that is for ourselves.) Actually, they were requesting something for the sake of their father, who had daughters but no sons (v. 4a). In the law there was a statute which said that if a married man died without a male heir, his inheritance with his wife was to go to his brother, who, with the wife, was to beget a son for the first brother. A son born of the first brother's wife through the second brother was to bear the name not of the second brother but of the first, so that the name of the first brother would remain among the people of God. In this way there would be a descendant for the remembrance of the first brother. The concern of the daughters of Zelophehad was that their father's name would be taken away from his family and that his inheritance would go to someone outside his family. They wanted their father's inheritance to go to someone born for him that his name may be remembered among his tribe. Their request, therefore, was not for themselves but for their father. Making a request based on life, they wanted the name of their father to be remembered.

This kind of request is pleasing to God. He does not want any of His children to be without a descendant. Rather, He wants His children to remain in the history of His people. If one of His people does not have a descendant, He likes to find a way to provide a descendant for him so that he will be remembered in the history of His people.

B. God's Statute of Judgment

When Moses brought the case of the five daughters of Zelophehad before Jehovah (v. 5), He said to him, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak rightly; you shall surely give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them" (v. 7). The Lord seemed to be saying, "Their request is right. It is pleasing to Me. I do not like to see one of My people dying without having a remembrance in the history of My people. The request of the five daughters is according to My desire."

The five daughters were given an inheritance among their father's brothers. There was, however, a binding term. This term, or condition, was that the daughters were not to marry outside their tribe (36:2-3, 6-7).

We may apply the type in 27:1-11 to our situation as believers today. In Christ we have the right to inherit the divine things. We need to request our rightful inheritance, and God will approve this request. However, there is a

condition that we must fulfill: we must not marry outside our “tribe.” Our tribe today is Christ and the church.

(Life-study of Numbers, Msg. 38)

II. A FURTHER STATUTE CONCERNING THE FEMALES AMONG ISRAEL INHERITING THE GOOD LAND

The heads of the fathers’ houses of the families of the sons of Joseph requested the same kind of land for their tribe. These heads of the fathers’ houses were making a counterclaim, saying that if the daughters of Zelophehad married outside their tribe, the inheritance given to them might be given to another tribe. In such a case, their own tribe would have lost land.

Here we see a difference between the view of the sisters and the view of the brothers. Often the sisters are finer than the brothers in their concept and opinion; however, the sisters may be shortsighted. The daughters of Zelophehad were very fine in their concept, considering their father’s house, but they were shortsighted, not considering the tribe as a whole. The heads of the fathers’ houses had a view concerning the whole tribe and therefore requested the same kind of land for their tribe. They asked Moses to seek God for a way not only to provide an inheritance for the daughters of Zelophehad but also to keep the land in their tribe.

(Life-study of Numbers, Msg. 48)

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

HANNAH—STAYING IN THE LINE OF LIFE AND COOPERATING WITH GOD'S MOVE

I. HIS GOD-WORSHIPPING PARENTS

Humanly speaking, Samuel's origin was his God-worshipping parents (vv. 1-8).

A. Remaining in the Line of Life Ordained by God for His Eternal Purpose

In the midst of the chaos of the degraded Israel, Elkanah and Hannah remained in the line of life ordained by God for His eternal purpose. The line of life is a line to bring forth Christ for the enjoyment of God's people that on earth God may have His kingdom, which is the Body of Christ, the very organism of the Triune God.

Elkanah and Hannah remained in this line of life not merely for God's eternal salvation but for His eternal purpose. God's salvation is mainly for our benefit, whereas God's purpose is related to the fulfilling of God's desire. We need to ask ourselves whether we are here for our profit or for God's purpose. Today on this earth everyone is concerned for his own profit. Even the majority of Christians do not care for God's purpose. I can testify of Brother Watchman Nee that he was a man altogether for God's purpose. I would like to follow his pattern. In the Lord's recovery, we are for God's purpose, remaining in the line of life ordained by God for His eternal purpose, which is to gain the Body, the organism of the Triune God, that He may have a full expression in a corporate way.

B. In Cooperation with the Move of God on Earth for the Accomplishment of God's Economy

This couple was in cooperation with the move of God on earth for the accomplishment of God's economy. Elkanah and Hannah were not the only ones moving; they were moved by the moving One, by the unique, divine Mover, who was moving secretly behind the scene. Under God's sovereign

dealing, Hannah was suppressed in her soul with a burden in her spirit to pour out before Jehovah. This was God's move. Because of God's moving in her, Hannah could not have peace until she prayed for a son. God, the sovereign One, kept moving her and motivating her so that she had to pray, even though Eli, the one taking care of the service in God's house, did not understand her. In her prayer Hannah cooperated with the move of God.

God could motivate Hannah as a person who was one with Him in the line of life. As long as He can gain such a person, He has a way on earth. I hope that at least some of us will be today's Hannahs and say, "Lord, if You have anything on Your heart to accomplish for Your purpose, I am here. I am remaining in the line of life for the carrying out of Your economy." If you do this, I have the full assurance that you will be the ones whom God will move. He will come to you and motivate you. God needs many Hannahs, persons who can bring forth some Samuels to turn the age.

II. ESPECIALLY HIS GOD-SEEKING MOTHER WITH HER PRAYER

The origin of Samuel was especially his God-seeking mother with her prayer (vv. 9-18). Her prayer was an echo of the heart's desire of God. Her prayer was a human cooperation with the divine move for the carrying out of God's eternal economy.

We should no longer pray old prayers in a formal way. Instead, we need to pray something that is an echo of what is on God's heart. This means that what we say in our prayer is exactly what God wants to speak. Such a prayer is the speaking out of God's heart. Hannah's prayer was like this. God wanted a Samuel, yet He needed Hannah's cooperation to pray to Him, saying, "Lord, I need a son." This prayer was very human, yet it was a cooperation with the divine move for God's economy.

III. THE MOVING GOD WITH HIS ANSWER TO THE PRAYER OF SAMUEL'S MOTHER

A. According to God's Desire and Intention for His Move among His Elect

In a very particular way, the origin of Samuel was the moving God with His answer to the prayer of Samuel's mother (vv. 19-20). After such a prayer as Hannah prayed, it was easy for God to do something, because

man's cooperation had become a base on which He could move. The moving God answered the prayer of Samuel's mother according to His desire and intention for His move among His elect.

B. In Keeping with the Principle That God Needs Man's Cooperation

God's move in response to Hannah's prayer was in keeping with the principle that God needs man's cooperation with His move in His economy. This is the principle of incarnation.

C. To Produce a Nazarite Who Was Absolute for the Fulfilling of His Desire

God's move with His answer to Hannah's prayer was to produce a Nazarite who was absolute for the fulfilling of His desire. A Nazarite is one who is consecrated to God absolutely. A Nazarite could never cut his hair or drink wine. In the Bible, long hair signifies the headship, the authority. A Nazarite's keeping his hair long was a sign that just as a female takes her husband as her head, he takes God as the Head, considering God his Husband. Thus, a Nazarite is one who submits himself to God, taking God as the Head, the authority. This is why Hannah prayed that if the Lord would give her a boy, no razor would come upon his head (v. 11). In the Bible, to drink wine is to enjoy the worldly pleasures. A Nazarite not only submits to God as the authority but also has no interest in the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. Even before he was born, Samuel was consecrated by his mother to be such a person. This is a great thing, for it was Samuel who brought in a new age.

The New Testament age was brought in by another Nazarite—John the Baptist. The Lord Jesus was a Nazarite, as were Peter and Paul. Actually, everyone who remains in the line of life is a Nazarite. If we would be today's Nazarites, we must take God as our Head and Husband, submitting to Him, and have no interest in worldly pleasures.

(Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel, Msg. 2)

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

BEING ONE IN COORDINATION—

THINKING THE SAME THING

I. THINKING THE SAME THING

In verse Philippians 4:2 Paul continues, “I beseech Euodias, and I beseech Syntyche, to think the same thing in the Lord.” This verse indicates that these two sisters were dissenting from one another. They were not of the same mind. Hence, there was the exhortation to strive together with one soul for the gospel (1:27), to be joined in soul, thinking the one thing (2:2), and to have the same mind to pursue after Christ (3:14-15).

According to 4:3, these were very good sisters who had been helpful to Paul. Paul says of them that they “contended with me in the gospel, with both Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” The Greek word rendered “contended” is an athletic term; it means to labor with, to strive together for, to wrestle in company with, as a team of athletes. These sisters were a help to Paul and the other workers, contending with them in the gospel. However, even these sisters needed help to be one by thinking the same thing in the Lord. To think the same thing is related to pursuing Christ in order to gain Him and enjoy Him in full. Euodias and Syntyche were not pursuing Christ to the uttermost. Any who are tempted to be dissenting should heed Paul’s word to these sisters to think the same thing.

II. GENUINE YOKEFELLOW

In 4:3 Paul uses the term yokefellow. In ancient times farmers used two oxen to pull a plow. The term yokefellow thus refers to being yoked together with another to bear a common burden. In writing to the Philippians, Paul was seeking a genuine yokefellow, one who would bear the same burden as he, under the same yoke. If we do not seek Christ to the uttermost, we have not yet been yoked. Rather, we are still quite free in our thinking. If we have truly been yoked, we shall think the same thing as Paul. Those who had not been yoked together with Paul would not have been able to help him with Euodias and Syntyche. Paul was burdened to help these sisters to think the

same thing—to pursue after Christ that they might gain Him and experience Him. But because Paul was in a Roman prison far away from Philippi, he needed someone there in Philippi to be yoked together with him to bear this burden. Paul expected that among the saints in Philippi there would be at least one who was the same as he was in pursuing Christ. Because Paul had been yoked, he had no freedom in his thought or concept. His mind had been yoked to think the one thing.

At any cost and by any means, Paul wanted to pursue Christ to the uttermost. This was his mind. Hence, his mentality had been absolutely yoked by Christ. Apart from Christ, he had no liberty to think anything. His mind had been fully yoked by Christ, in Christ, and with Christ. As he was writing to the Philippians, he was looking for at least one saint who could work together with him to help the two dissenting sisters to think the same thing. This was a very practical word with which to conclude this Epistle.

In speaking of a “genuine yokefellow,” it seems as if Paul was saying, “I have written you this Epistle, but I don’t have the assurance that this letter will do the full job. I need someone among you who is genuinely yoked under the same mind to seek Christ. Such a one will be able to help these sisters to think the same thing. Anyone who wants to help them must first be yoked under the same mind as I have.” To have “this mind” and “to think the same thing” is to be a genuine yokefellow.

Today there is also the need for a genuine yokefellow. The Lord’s ministry is hated and rejected by many. You may accept this ministry and even love it, but to love the ministry is one thing, and to be yoked under the mind to pursue Christ is another. We all need to be yoked by having “this mind.”

Considering Paul’s word about a genuine yokefellow should remind us not to read the Bible in a superficial way and not to take things for granted. Paul’s expression “genuine yokefellow” may seem insignificant; actually it is extremely important, for it is related to his charge to the Philippian believers to have this mind, to think the same thing, even to think the one thing. After issuing this charge, he mentions two sisters who were dissenting. Then he goes on to urge someone to labor together with him as a genuine yokefellow to assist Euodias and Syntyche to think the same thing, to turn from their dissension and set their minds on the pursuing of Christ.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF REJOICING IN THE LORD

In 4:4 Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” Whether or not the believers were dissenting, they all had to rejoice. Those who would not rejoice were wrong, but those who could rejoice were right. I do not believe, however, that dissenting ones can rejoice very much. According to Paul’s word here, we should rejoice in the Lord always. This rejoicing affords us the strength for the oneness spoken of in verses 2 and 3. In order for Euodias and Syntyche to think the same thing, it was necessary for them to learn to rejoice. Rejoicing in the Lord is also the secret of having the excellent characteristics listed in verses 5 through 9. If we would have the virtues found in these verses, we need to rejoice in the Lord. To rejoice in the Lord is a very important matter.

(Life-study of Philippians, Msg. 26)

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE SERVING SISTERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Scripture Reading: Rom. 16:1-2, 3-4, 6, 12b

The divine word in God's revelation is always very economical. In every case, not one word is wasted. Every page, every line, even every word in this holy Book is valuable and necessary. Based on this principle, we must consider Romans 16 just as important as Romans 6. We all value Romans 6 highly, and we know what is revealed there. But very few of you are clear about Romans 16. Romans 16 is not a short chapter, but a chapter with twenty-seven verses.

There are no doctrines covered in Romans 16—no justification, no redemption, no reconciliation, no sanctification, no glorification, no -ation of any kind. But this chapter is full of names, with name after name. Tonight we want to pick up five names from this chapter with a purpose.

PHOEBE AND PRISCA

The number one name is Phoebe, which is the best name among all the female names. The second name is Prisca, the Greek spelling for Priscilla, a dear name. I do love these two names. The first one was given by me to my first daughter, because I did know this name was a good name. The second name, Priscilla, was given to my wife. The name not only means the name; the reality of the name is the person.

The third name is a brother's name, Aquila, the husband of Prisca, Priscilla. According to the principle in the Bible, the husband's name always comes before the wife's name. But in this case, altogether against the divine principle, the wife's name comes first, and then the husband's. It seems to break the principle.

When this couple is first mentioned in Acts 18, Aquila is named first, and then Priscilla. When I was young, when I came to Romans, I questioned which one was the husband. I even thought there must be a mistake in some manuscript. However, there is a definite reason for this arrangement in the Word.

MARY AND PERSIS

The fourth name is a very familiar name, Mary. There are at least six Marys in the New Testament, and the Mary in Romans 16 is the sixth one. Mary is the New Testament form of the Old Testament name Miriam.

The first Mary is the mother of the Lord Jesus. Another is Mary the Magdalene. She had been possessed by seven demons, and those demons were cast out by the Lord Jesus. She was released, and from that time she became a real seeker of the Lord, one who loved Him very much. Yet another Mary is the mother of John Mark in Acts 12.

Here are four Marys: the Mary in Romans 16, the mother of Jesus, Mary the Magdalene, and the mother of John Mark in Acts 12. In addition to these, there are another two Marys.

The six Marys cover the Christian life and the church life as well, starting from the incarnation of Christ and consummating in the practical church life. The incarnation of Christ started with the first Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Mary in Romans 16 is the consummation of the practical church life. From the first Mary to the last Mary, all of the Christian life and the church life is fully covered.

Mary is the fourth name we want to pick up, and the fifth is Persis, in verse 12. Probably none of you has ever paid attention to this name, and many do not know that Persis is a female name. A sister by the name of Persis was greeted purposely by the Apostle Paul in Romans 16.

In this chapter there are a number of names in addition to these five that we have picked up. Because not one word is wasted in the holy Bible, we must consider these names in the greetings of the Apostle Paul as something very practical.

A CRUCIAL CHAPTER

We need to consider Romans 16 as important as Romans 6, even as important as Romans 8, and as important as Romans 12. Romans 6 is one chapter of the book of Romans, Romans 8 is another chapter, and Romans 12 is another. But we must not forget that Romans has the sixteenth chapter. If you know Romans 6, you must know Romans 16. If you know Romans 8, you must know Romans 16. If you know Romans 12, you must know Romans 16. It seems that the Romans of even many seeking Christians does not have sixteen chapters. Their Romans contains only fourteen chapters, perhaps with some fragments of chapters fifteen and sixteen.

We all need to be impressed that Romans has sixteen chapters. We all have to pick up chapter sixteen of Romans. Without adequate experience, it is very hard to get into Romans 16 to see what is covered there, what it reveals to us. In this matter Romans 16 is like Romans 8. You need experience to get into Romans 8 and to understand it. Even more, without experience, it is impossible for you to understand Romans 16.

THE PRACTICAL CHURCH LIFE

Most Christian readers would consider that Romans 16 is merely a chapter of greetings. Apparently this is the case. But I would say strongly that this is not the case. Actually and practically, this chapter is much more than a list of greetings.

The book of Romans is a full and complete sketch of the Christian life and the church life. No other book is so complete as the book of Romans in these two matters. It is not so much in detail, but it is complete. It is a sketch, an outline, in full, of the Christian life and the church life.

It is somewhat easy to understand that Romans 6 and Romans 8 reveal the Christian life, and that Romans 12 reveals the church life. However, it is not so easy to see what is revealed in Romans 16. As the last chapter of this book, Romans 16 reveals the practical church life.

The practical church life is not revealed even in Romans 15. The main point in chapter fifteen is the communication between the churches, the fellowship in the Body between the churches. You could not see the practical church life in any of the first fifteen chapters of Romans. The term church or churches is not used in those chapters at all. But in this one chapter, chapter sixteen, church or churches is used five times. The practical church life is here in this chapter.

We must not consider Romans 16 merely a chapter of greetings. It is a chapter of the practical church life. From this chapter we can see that the proper church life, first of all, depends on the sisters.

Before Paul greeted the saints, he recommended a particular sister to them in a very meaningful way. We may expect such a recommendation to come at the end, but Paul made this recommendation of a sister the number one item. Moreover, after this recommendation, the first ones that Paul greeted were a couple, but he mentioned the wife's name first.

Then he greeted Mary, a sister, and two more sisters we didn't cover, and Persis, another sister.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul put his recommendation and his greetings in this way with the purpose of showing that the sisters occupy the first place in the practical church life.

THE SERVING SPIRIT

Now we need to get into the details related to these four sisters and one brother.

If you read carefully, you could see that all the things related to these four sisters include all the aspects of the practical church life. First, Phoebe is a serving one, a deaconess. Deaconess is the feminine form of deacon, which is the Anglicized form of the Greek word for serving one. Therefore, Phoebe represents the serving spirit in the practical church life.

In the practical church life, the first thing is not doctrine, but serving. The one recommended is not a pastor, not a lady-minister, but a deaconess, a serving one, one who serves. The holy Word is economical, but Paul uses two long verses to recommend this dear sister, to indicate in what way she serves. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deaconess of the church which is at Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and stand by her in whatever she may have need of you; for she has been a patroness of many and of myself as well" (Rom. 16:1-2). First Paul calls her a deaconess, then a patroness, which is a word of dignity, denoting one who helps, sustains, and supplies, and which indicates the high esteem with which she was regarded.

Perhaps the best nurse in an American hospital could give you a part of the picture of the service of a Roman patroness. In Paul's time, a patroness was one who was always with you, alongside of you, taking care of you, supplying all your need, bearing all your burdens, and solving all your problems, meeting all your need. Paul charged the saints in Rome to take care of Phoebe because she had been serving many in this way. Her service meant that she would provide whatever you needed. Whether your need was great or small, right away she would simply give you whatever you needed. The service of the best nurse may be a picture of one-third of the service of such a patroness.

What we need is the training of so many sisters to be church nurses. In a sense, the church is a hospital, a haven to care for so many sick ones. We need to bring the sick ones in and take care of them. The brothers are doctors, and the sisters and some of the brothers have to be nurses.

If you sisters do love the Lord and do mean business to be for the church in the Lord's recovery, you have to consider yourselves as serving ones, as those giving nursing care, just as the nurses in a hospital. Yet this nursing care is just one-third of the service of a Roman patroness.

The word for the Holy Spirit translated Comforter is the Greek word Parakletos. It is hard for any translator to find the best English equivalent for this word. The best suggestion is the word for the Roman patron. The Holy Spirit is the Patron, and all the serving sisters are patronesses. Moreover, 1 John 2:1 says that the Lord Jesus today with the Father is our Patron there. In this verse the word parakletos is usually translated advocate, but the best English translation would be patron, one called alongside you to take care of everything you need. A Roman patron takes care of your cases, your legal cases, legal causes, and also takes care of your business need.

A GROUP OF SERVING SISTERS

The thought in Paul's recommendation of this sister is in this line. In every local church there is the need of a group of serving sisters like this sister, a group of serving sisters taking care of the saints. I have seen the practicality of such a service among the sisters in the church in Shanghai, which was the largest church in China. That church was ninety percent built up with the serving sisters. Brother Nee's ministry was there, but his ministry rendered only one-tenth of the building up in that church.

There were a good number, not just one or two, not even only ten or twenty, but a good number of sisters there in Shanghai serving the saints, serving the apostles, the servants of the Lord. Their service was more than that of a nurse. The church in Shanghai was raised up in 1926. From the time Brother Nee began to minister in 1927 until he was married seven years later, in 1934, for the most part he was taken care of by those loving sisters, most of them older than Brother Nee. The church there was built up very much by the serving sisters. Most of the practical things there were taken care of by the sisters.

When I first went to Shanghai in 1933, every Saturday the sisters did the cleaning of the hall and the cleaning of all the chairs. Very few men were free on Saturdays. The few brothers who were there were the full-time co-workers. Most of the brothers had to work six or seven days a week, so nearly all of the cleaning work was under the hand of the sisters.

Other places in China had a similar situation. But there were places that would have been much better if there had been a group of serving sisters. In some places the lack of the building of the church was mainly due to the shortage of the serving sisters. For this reason, we are burdened to have some training for the sisters so that there could be a group of serving sisters raised up for the building up of a strong church.

The first picture of the church life in miniature was a family of three persons, one brother and two sisters, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, in John 12. In that little picture Lazarus was there resurrected from the dead as a testimony to the life. But there was the need of Martha serving. Don't consider that Martha was so bad. Martha was really good. The church needs a group of Marthas serving. Even Mary was serving there, in a different way. Lazarus was the only one who didn't serve. He was just sitting there as a living testimony, resurrected from the dead. This picture shows that the serving is not with the brothers, but with the sisters.

In Paul's recommendation, the first practical aspect of the church life is unconsciously covered. Implied in this recommendation is the serving spirit of the sisters. First of all, the sisters have to be trained as church nurses.

IN THE CHURCH AND FOR THE CHURCH

The second vital aspect implied in Paul's recommendation of the sister in Romans 16:1, Phoebe, is that she was a sister more than one hundred percent related to the church. She was a sister in the church. She was recommended as one serving in the church, serving for the church, and serving the church directly. She served so many dear ones not in any other sphere but in the church. She was a sister one hundred percent in the church.

As long as you sisters are serving in the church, there is value to the Lord. Anything you do in the church has meaning. Whatever you do outside the church doesn't mean much. In my Christian life, I have seen many good sisters loving others, taking care of others, but all outside the church. Eventually what they did became pitiful because it was done outside the church. What the Lord wants is the serving in the church, serving for the church, and serving the church directly. This is a major point.

The sister in Romans 16:1, Phoebe, was a serving one, a serving nurse, a church nurse, a serving patroness, and she was one hundred percent in the church. Paul's recommendation is very good.

PRISCA AND AQUILA

The second sister in Romans 16 is Prisca, or Priscilla. I do believe she was much stronger in the church life than her husband, and in a sense she did take the lead to take care of the church. Wherever they went, she and her husband took care of the church in the way of having the church meeting in their home. When they were in Ephesus, the church met in their home. When they were in Rome, also the church met in their home.

Paul said that these two risked their own necks not only for him, but also for the churches. Therefore, the Apostle Paul was grateful to them, and the churches were grateful also.

In a family, if the wife does not take the lead to have the practical church life, the husband would always be frustrated. The best way and the highest way for a family to take the church life is for the wife to take the lead. In any other matter the wife should not take the lead. But in the matter of taking the way of the practical church life for the family, the wives may take the lead. I don't mean in matters such as teaching, making decisions, and giving direction, but in serving the church, the sisters may take the lead.

THE FAMILY WHOLLY FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

In every family, if the wife takes the lead to have the church life, it could be so easy to bring the whole family into the church life. But if the wife would not take the lead in this matter, if the husband takes the lead for the church life, it may be hard for the family to be wholly for the church life. The frustrations would always come from the source of the wife who would not take the lead for the church life.

The brothers must forgive me for encouraging all the sisters to be bold to take the lead in relation to the practical church life, to let all the Aquilas follow the Priscas in this one matter. It may even seem that the sisters are breaking the principle of the headship, but they should not allow legality or religion to hold them back from taking the lead in this one matter. In every local church there is the need of a group of sisters to be so bold to take the lead for the practical church life. Someday the Lord will show us all that this is exactly what is on His heart.

SISTERS TAKING THE LEAD TO RISK THEIR NECKS FOR THE CHURCH

Only in one unique thing are the sisters allowed to take the lead. Romans 16 does have such a revelation that the sisters may take the lead to risk their necks for the church. For this reason Aquila is behind Prisca. The Lord would not allow the sisters to take the lead in any other matter—not for their spirituality, not for their spiritual taste, not for anything else. To do so is the real breaking of the principle, and the sisters should not do that. But among thousands of things, in this one unique matter, the sisters may take the lead for the practical church life. The sisters have to be so bold only for the church life, not for their own spirituality. Spirituality does not mean that much. The only thing that is so meaningful is the church life. There is no need for you to ask the Lord to excuse you or to forgive you for taking the lead in relation to the church life, for the Lord would encourage you to do this. He would be so pleased for a sister to take the lead in this matter, because in this age there are so few families who would be for the church life in a practical way. The Lord would be so happy for any wife to take the lead for her family to have the church life.

The sisters need to be encouraged to take the lead in their families for the church life—not for teaching, not for spirituality, not even for gospel preaching. If the sisters would not do this, they could not be up to the standard, they are not qualified before the Lord. Even here in the church, for the church life the sisters have to take the lead, to be the Priscas.

LABORING IN THE CHURCH LIFE

In verses 6 and 12 Paul says that Mary has been laboring for the apostles, and that Persis has labored very much. This laboring is serving.

We have pointed out all the things related to the sisters in the practical church life: serving, laboring, and taking the lead for the church life.

If these matters are put into practice among us, right away we could see that our situation does not match the revelation in Romans 16. There is a shortage of the serving spirit among the sisters. If you would give me the freedom to speak a frank and honest word without offending you, I would have to point out this shortage. Among the sisters there is more talking than serving. There is no need for you to talk about doctrines, but there is a real need for you to serve people.

WORDS THAT SERVE LIFE TO OTHERS

There are two different ways to talk with people regarding the truths or doctrines. One way is just to talk in a doctrinal way, but the other way is to serve people with certain truths because you realize that that one needs a particular truth for the growth in life. Such talk, even though it may seem to be talk about doctrines, is talk in a serving way, talk in the way of serving others according to their need in life. My talk with you should serve you something.

NO IDLE WORDS

Many times the sisters would talk about certain doctrines, but in the eyes of the Lord their talk would actually be considered gossip because there was no serving in it. None of those talking needed those matters for their growth in life, so their talk became gossip. Paul did use this word in 1 Timothy 5:13, where he said, “They also learn to be idle, going around from house to house; and not only idle, but also gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.” Busybodies are meddlers, interfering in the affairs of others. The things which should not be spoken may be good things, good doctrines, even very heavenly and spiritual, but there is no need for the talk about them.

If all the sisters would be so much burdened with the serving spirit, not one of them would have the time, the strength, the energy, the attention, or the heart to talk about anything that does not serve something of life to others. The sisters should be fully occupied with the serving spirit.

In a hospital the good nurses are not good talkers. All their time and their energy are fully occupied with serving. Only the idle ones like to talk. May the Lord train all of the sisters to be the proper church nurses.

If you sisters mean business to be serving ones in the church, first of all you have to learn not to talk, not to talk at all. Many of the sisters would consider gossip just as idle words, but would not include the vain talking of doctrine. But I would tell you strongly that the vain talk concerning doctrine is also gossip. Your talking should be the serving of something to others that they need for their growth in life. Because you realize that certain ones need this point, you serve it to them for their growth. If they do not need that point and yet you talk with them about it, your talk is also an idle talk. Whether or not your talk is idle talk is not determined by the subject of your talking, but by whether what you are talking about is needed by the other one. If it is not needed, whatever you say is an idle word. The Bible calls this kind of word an idle word (Matt. 12:36) because you are idle,

you have nothing to do, you have no serving to occupy you. Therefore you have the energy, you have even the heart, and you have the time to speak those idle things.

Serving includes both the material things and the spiritual things. The sisters have to serve the younger ones the spiritual life. They have to serve all the dear ones the spiritual growth.

If the church is going to grow and to be built up, first of all the sisters have to learn not to talk. This is a big lesson. In other words, the sisters have to learn what to talk about, and what not to talk about. There are many good things that the sisters do not need to talk about. There is simply no need for talk about them.

In these days we have covered so much from Romans 8 that we have to walk according to the spirit. I am more than sure that so many talks among the saints are not according to the spirit. I don't mean only the talking about shopping and weddings, but the idle talking about doctrine. Brothers and sisters alike all must learn to be restricted first not in our mind, but in our mouth. We should not think that to walk according to spirit only means to use our two feet. To walk according to the spirit means first to use our two lips. We have to learn to talk according to the spirit.

SERVING BY PRAYING

To serve others with something also includes the matter of praying for others. A sister may realize that there are four younger sisters who need someone to serve them by praying for them, without talking to them, without letting them know she is praying for them. She simply needs to serve them with her prayer, with her intercession, even interceding for them desperately. That prayer is also a kind of serving.

In Shanghai the elderly sisters served in this way. They prayed very much not only for the young sisters but also for so many brothers. For example, a number of times one of the brothers stood up in the meeting and said something which he should not have said. Those serving sisters did not talk, but they picked up the burden to go home and pray for that brother, to serve that brother with their prayer. After a certain period of time, that brother testified how the Lord had turned him. The prayer of the sisters was a serving of the brother that gave the Lord a way to do something.

Those serving sisters also realized that a number of the younger ones needed to be served by their prayers for their marriages. In some cases, all

of them were working together praying for one brother's marriage. That is the serving.

A number of times the sisters invited some for whom they were praying to dinner. During the mealtime there would be no idle word, no gossiping, no vain talks about certain points, and no vain talking about the church affairs, but there would be a serving that would cause these younger ones to be edified. Today there is too much vain talk about the church affairs, but not much serving. All the vain talk about so many points, all the vain talk about others, is just gossip in the eyes of God, and it wastes your time. The sisters must be the serving ones and must learn to serve.

In order to serve, first you have to stop talking. You have to learn what not to talk about, or to be simple, learn not to talk. Yet you need to fellowship one with another with a serving spirit. If you do have such a serving spirit with such a burden, day and night you will be more than occupied. So many brothers need your serving. They need you to pray for them. So many sisters need your serving. And the elders need your serving. The work, the ministry, needs your serving.

If the sisters mean business with the Lord, they have many things to do in the way of serving. Such a fellowship would surely cause something to rise up within all of you to be the serving ones. You have to labor, you have to serve, and you have to be the good patronesses. And all of this must be done in the church and for the church.

Out of such a fellowship I do believe the Lord would burden all of the sisters, and that He would open your eyes to see how many things need to be taken care of by your serving.

The best way to serve is to pray. In the home of the Mary in Acts 12 there was a prayer meeting to pray for Peter, who was imprisoned. The Scripture does not mention the other homes of the prayer. The prayer meeting in Mary's home was a serving.

When you sisters see a need in the church life, you must not talk, but bear the burden to pray. When you see that there is a need for a real broken life, you must not talk. You have to bear the burden with four or five, eight or ten, coming together to pray to serve this purpose. Pray for the real broken life.

When you see that a brother becomes a problem to the church, or that a sister has some problem in her life, don't talk. Pick up the burden to pray with two or three others to serve this purpose. If you would be like this,

many of you would be today's Phoebe. Then the church will have the best serving.

We all have to learn to serve the church and serve the saints like the sister Phoebe that Paul recommended in Romans 16. This should be the burden of the sisters, and they do have the position to serve in this way. What the sisters can do if they pick up this burden and are faithful to the Lord in it is something that the brothers cannot do. The need is so great with the sisters. May the Holy Spirit interpret these words to us.

(The Serving Sisters in the Church Life)

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE LOVING MOTHERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Romans 16 is a chapter fully on the practical church life. This chapter uses the term church or churches five times, and this term is used absolutely not in a doctrinal way. The first time chapter sixteen uses the term church, it is in the way of a local church, the church in Cenchrea. Few other chapters in the Epistles use the terms church or churches so many times.

In addition, no other chapter in the Epistles uses the term sister more than once. The term brother is used often in the New Testament, but the term sister is used less often. Nowhere else do you find the phrase, “our sister.” Paul began this chapter by saying, “I commend to you our sister.” In the following verses he greeted a number of brothers, but he did not say “our brother.” Only in recommending Phoebe did he say “our sister.”

HIS MOTHER AND MINE

There is another unusual concept in this chapter on the practical church life in verse 13, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” The emphasis in Romans 16 is on the sisters, not the brothers, and there is mention of a mother, but no mention of a father. Neither the sister nor the mother is the one in the flesh. “I recommend to you our sister,” not a sister in the flesh. The mother is the mother of Rufus in the flesh, but she was also Paul’s mother. Surely she was not Paul’s mother in the flesh. We do not have a verse to tell us the names of Paul’s mother and father in the flesh. The mother in verse 13 is a mother in the flesh in relation to Rufus, but more important, she is a mother not in the flesh in relation to Paul.

The New Testament tells us that Paul had at least two sons, one named Timothy and the second named Titus, but these were not his sons in the flesh. Paul uses a very intimate expression to call them sons, “Timothy, my own son,” and “Titus, mine own son” (1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). However, the New Testament tells us very little about the direct flesh relatives of the apostles. We cannot find a verse to tell us how many sons and daughters Peter had. But Peter did tell us that he had a son named Mark, “My son Mark.” Surely Mark was not Peter’s son in the flesh. The Bible tells us that Mark’s mother was named Mary, but it does not tell us the name of his

father in the flesh. Peter was Mark's father, not his father in the flesh but his father in the spirit, his father in the common faith.

Not one word in the Bible is wasted. According to the record in John 19, when the Lord Jesus was in His crucifixion, suffering there, quite close to the end of His crucifixion, He looked at His mother in the flesh. At that time altogether four sisters were standing by the cross, watching how the Lord was being crucified. Mary was there, and her sister, and another two sisters also named Mary. Mary's sister was the mother of James and John, so that James and John were the cousins of Jesus. Near the end of His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus looked at His mother in the flesh, and in a sense it was as if He said to her, "Mother, don't behold Me, but behold your son." At the same time He said to His cousin John, "Behold, your mother" (John 19:25-27). This account is not merely a story, and there is a reason that it is recorded only in the Gospel of John, not in the other three Gospels.

Each of the Gospels has records of certain things in a meaningful way. For example, Luke is a book on salvation, and it gives us a special record of the two thieves who were crucified with the Lord Jesus, one who made a mocking over the Lord, and the other who rebuked the mocker and called on the Lord. The Lord told him that on that day he and the Lord will be in Paradise (Luke 23:39-43). This record in Luke is not merely a story. The Lord's word to the thief on the cross indicates salvation, and Luke is a book on salvation. This record is not in John, for John is not a book on salvation. Luke's record is not in John, and John's record is not repeated in Luke.

A LIFE TRANSFER

The Gospel of John is a book on life, not on the natural life, but on the transferred and transformed life. To fulfill his purpose, John gives us a record to show how the life of the believers of Christ could be transferred by the cross of Jesus and by His resurrection. If you look at the cross of Jesus, you will be transferred. The word of the Lord Jesus to John and to His mother was a word to show us that His life-imparting, life-releasing death transfers people's lives.

Originally, John was not Mary's son, and Mary was not John's mother. But because of the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary, the mother of Jesus, became the mother of John. John, who was the son of Mary's sister, became Mary's son. This is not a story of adoption, and it doesn't mean that the Lord Jesus

was like a judge to carry out the adoption as they all stood by the cross. This was not an adoption, but a transfer. According to the life in the flesh, John was Mary's nephew, and Mary was John's aunt. But by looking at the cross, they received another life. Another life came into them. In this second life, the nephew becomes a real son, and the aunt becomes a real mother.

The New Testament does not tell us the names of any sons of Peter or Paul according to the flesh. But it does tell us about Mark and Timothy and Titus. The New Testament as a record in the spirit does not tell us about the relationships of the family in the way of the flesh. It gives us a record of our family in the spirit. We have a habit of calling one another brother and sister in the church, but this may be just a religious term unless we have a genuine realization that we are brothers and sisters sharing the same life. If you were to recommend your sister in the flesh to someone, surely there would be a realization deep within you that this one has a special relationship to you. Unless you have a similar realization when you recommend a sister in the Lord, for you to call her your sister is just to use a religious term.

Although we speak of one another as our brothers and sisters so many times in the church life, I have never heard the saints speaking of their sons in the church, their sons in the spirit. This word may seem like a hard word and even an offending word, but we need a strong word to penetrate into us. I do hope the day will come that so many of the saints will have sons according to the spiritual record. We should not call one another brothers and sisters in a meaningless way.

Paul says, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe," and, "Greet Rufus, ... his mother and mine." Paul speaks of his mother. The New Testament tells us that Paul had a mother, and that he had two sons. His mother was Rufus' mother, and his two sons were Timothy and Titus. But none of these was something in the flesh.

MOTHERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

To have the practical church life to the uttermost, in the local church there should be some real sisters and some real mothers. In an earlier message it was my burden to share with you that you need to be a serving sister, but now I am burdened to share with you that you need to be a mother. As long as there is a shortage of sisters like Phoebe among us, the church life is not practical. Yet the serving of that sister is at the beginning

of Romans 16, in the first verse. When the church life in practicality reaches a peak, in every church there should be some real mothers.

Earlier I suggested that the sisters needed to be trained to be serving ones just as nurses are trained in the hospitals to care for the sick ones, but now I have to say that there has never been a training school on the whole earth to train mothers to be mothers. I have never heard of one person receiving training to know how to be a mother before she became a mother. The only way anyone could become a mother is by delivering a child. Then the child forces her to train herself.

Many parents try to train their children. Eventually they have to give up because the training is not practical. It is like something in a dream. For a young lady, the most practical training to be a mother is one little child. Yesterday she did not know how to be a mother, but today a child was delivered, and tomorrow morning she will begin to be trained. Before very long, she will graduate from this training.

There are a number of good, basic principles that have been missed among the believers for generations. If it were the practice for each one of the new believers to have someone care for them in a particular way as their real spiritual parents, so many of the new ones could be helped in their spiritual life and in the church life.

In his training in 1948 Brother Nee told the saints, especially the sisters, that they should be a mother to another young saint. Many sisters could each take care of two or three children in the spirit.

For the most part, children do not like to respect the word of their own parents, especially when they become teen-agers. But if I would take your children as my children, they would respect my word. If my children have some problems, they would not open themselves to me. But if you would take them as your children, they would open up their whole being to you. Although they would not take anything that I would say to them, they would receive whatever you would say. There are many problems with the parents and the teen-agers. Very few teen-agers would be submissive and obedient. Yet even the troublesome ones would be happy to listen to someone other than their own parents.

LOOKING AT THE CROSS TO GET TRANSFERRED IN LIFE

We all need a second birth, and we all need a second mother. If you sisters would pick up the burden by looking at the cross, getting yourself

transferred in life, and take some young ones of junior high school age to be your children, within five years there will be a revival in the church. The best way is to have a life transfer by looking at the cross. You need to bring a young one to the cross to look at the crucified Jesus. He will say, "Look at your mother. This is your mother." And He will say to you, "Look at your son. This is your son," or, "This is your daughter."

All the sisters of all ages need to be a mother to someone else. Taking care of a child will cause you to grow and to be mature. In the natural life, the best way for the young ones to mature is for them to have two children. Even more, to pick up some younger ones as your children in the spirit will cause you to grow.

However, to take care of some in this way is a big test. If your natural life has not been crossed out, has never had a transfer, this practice will become a snare. You will fall into the natural love and be trapped by the fleshly emotion. Such a practice will work only by a life transfer through the cross.

In the church life we need the real sisters and the real brothers, and especially we need the real mothers. All of the sisters need to be encouraged to take care of some children in the spirit. This is not a matter that can be assigned to the sisters, but there is the need for you to pick up the burden.

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT

Without some children in the spirit, it could be so easy for the sisters to fall away. No matter how young you are, one or two children in the spirit will be your protection and your support in many ways. Caring for these children will bring about a big change in you. A young lady who has no children would be too free. She would have no bondage and no limitation, but also no protection and no support. Two children would be a protection, a guard, and a limitation to the mother, but they would also keep her from being defeated. Without children, it is so easy for the sisters to make mistakes, but if there are two or three children there all the time, the children keep the mothers from making mistakes.

There is need for all the sisters to be sisters in reality. Our sister Phoebe in Romans 16:1 was a real sister. She was serving, she was caring for others as a nurse, she was a patroness taking care of all the needs of others. But to be such a sister in the church life is still not up to the top. In the church we need to have mothers. Even the servants of the Lord need to have mothers. The Apostle Paul needed a mother. The mother of Rufus was his mother.

Without a sister as a mother to take care of them, all those who bear the burden for the Lord's service would be sorrowful.

Many sisters need to become the real mothers in the church life. The best way to deal with the ladies who are so talkative is to give them twelve children. The more children they have, the more they don't like to talk and they have to be practical. They realize talk is too much theory. Their talk becomes a plea for help. They have just finished nine and still have three little ones to bathe. They have no mind, no energy, no strength, no heart, no capacity, and no time to talk about who is getting married. The children will change the whole situation.

If you really love the Lord, you need to look at the church family, with a number of teen-agers who need spiritual mothers to care for them. You each need to pick up the burden to care for at least one as your child in the spirit. All the parents will tell you that they need your help.

THE PRACTICAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

If we call one another brothers and sisters in the church life, and yet when we come to the practical things, we don't care for each other's children, all of the second generation would realize that our brotherhood and sisterhood is not genuine. To them the brotherhood in the church life becomes something in the air. But if someone would pick up those young ones and care for them as their own child, the brotherhood in the church life becomes the real brotherhood. Both parties will get the benefit. This was Paul's concept in writing Romans 16. Otherwise, how could he write in this way, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe. Greet Rufus,...his mother and mine"? This means that all the people in that time in the church life had the life transfer through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The cross is here. On this side of the cross Mary was Mary, and John was John. These two in blood and flesh had nothing to do with one another. But on the resurrection side, John becomes Mary's son, and Mary becomes John's mother. They have a second relationship of the family, not the first. The first relationship is in the flesh, but the second is in the transferred life. This matter is in the Bible, but it has been missed by most of today's Christians.

In the New Testament it is really hard to trace the flesh family of the apostles. But it is so easy to see that among the early believers there was the second birth with the second family relationship. Among today's Christians there is talk about the second birth, but there is nearly no talk about the

second relationship. If we have the second birth, surely we have the second relationship, surely we have the second family. If we have the second family, surely there should be the family relationship. It is not enough to say that we are in a big family. We must have the family relationship with the real sisters and the real mothers.

To take care of others is not an easy thing, and it is even harder to be taken care of by others after we are grown. Nevertheless, we all need the care of others. Their care is our real nourishment, our real protection. The older sisters should not consider that they are no longer the daughters because they have become mothers. They need to learn to be daughters also and let others take care of them.

All of us have the second birth, and we have the second family. In the second family, we all need to have the second family relationship. The family is in the relationship. If the relationship of the family is gone, there is no longer a real family. Without the family relationship, we cannot feel encouraged about the situation in the church life. Without the reality of these matters, we cannot have the practicality of the church life.

The sisters need to be trained as serving ones, and they need to learn to be the mothers. Until there are the real mothers in the church life, the church life is not practical, and it is not up to the top.

The matter of being a mother will bring in many lessons, and it will put you on the real test in every way. You will see how you love yourself more than others, how you care only for yourself. All these things will be tested out and exposed. Without this testing, you could never realize how selfish you are and how much you are in yourself. These things would not be exposed until you pick up some as your children. These good children in the spirit would expose you to the uttermost.

You may talk about being broken. Many times I have said that the sisters need the husbands with some little helpers to break them, but the best ones to do the breaking are the children in the spirit. How much breaking will come if you pick up one to care for as a mother. We do need the grace to take this way. It is not adequate to be a brother or a sister in a general way. All the sisters need to be serving sisters, and whether or not we have children, we all need to be the mothers. This is the best way to receive the blessing, the growth, the spirituality, and the real enjoyment of the Lord.

When you become such a mother, everything in the church life would be practical. There would be no more vain talk. The sisters like to talk so much because they don't have children, and they don't take care of their children.

If you would pick up a child and take care of that child, right away you will become very practical. No one else can help you so much to stay away from your natural disposition. Such a child will take you from the earth to the third heaven.

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRACTICAL CHURCH LIFE

This message is not doctrinal, but it is more than practical. Just this little word, “Greet Rufus, his mother and mine,” means a lot. “I commend our sister Phoebe.” Just this short commendation is meaningful. The church life is here, revealed in this Scripture and revealed in the mother. All of the sisters need to become the mothers.

In God’s account, the children in the flesh do not count. We need the second category of children, and we all need a mother to care for us. Our children in the spirit do count in the eyes of God.

No doubt Peter had some children in the flesh, but there is no record in the New Testament. When Peter was released from prison, he considered where he should go because he realized that there were many homes with praying groups. Eventually he went to the home of Mark’s mother. This word indicates the intimate relationship between Peter and Mark. In Peter’s Epistle, Peter tells us that Mark is his son. History tells us that Peter dictated most of the Gospel of Mark. Some expositors would call the Gospel of Mark the Gospel of Peter. A number of verses in Mark give an indication that it is Peter’s word. Because Mark was Peter’s son in the spirit, he inherited all of Peter’s riches in the spirit.

Romans 16 is a chapter on the practical church life, not in doctrine but in practicality. Until we could see the real serving sisters and so many mothers, our church life is not practical, it is not on the top.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE PRACTICAL CHURCH LIFE

If you sisters would be serving as Phoebes and loving as mothers, I can assure you that the church would be seventy percent built up right away. Seventy percent of the building of the practical church life depends on the sisters. Without such a coordination with the sisters in this way, no matter how much the brothers would labor in the church life, there would be very little result as far as the building goes. When the sisters would be serving and would be the mothers, right away the church will be built up. Through this there will be a strong connection in the spiritual building, and a

prevailing revival will spontaneously be brought in. Satan will be defeated. It will be fully proved how much depends on the sisters. Seventy percent of the practical building depends on the sisters. We all must pray that the Lord will have mercy upon the church that all the sisters will be Phoebe and will be mothers.

(The Loving Mothers in the Church Life)