

# Message 1

## A Holy Marriage for God's Purpose

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18, 23-24; Matt. 19:4-6; Heb. 13:4; Eccl. 9:9; Prov. 5:18; Mal. 2:14-15; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a; Eph. 5:18-33; Col. 3:16-19

### **I. Married life is the foundation of the family life, and the family life is the basis of our daily life, and our daily life is the basis of the church life; this shows the crucial importance of our married life—Heb. 13:4:**

- A. Marriage is a very important factor in the church life; whether a church is sound and healthy or loses its element and essence is very much dependent upon the marriage life; we should not consider the matter of marriage to be a light thing; we must hold it in honor—v. 4; cf. 1 Thes. 4:3-8.
- B. Paul's burden in Ephesians 5 was to cover both married life and the church life at the same time; Paul did not separate married life from the church life; rather, he blended the two together, for he knew that married life is actually part of the church life—vv. 22-33.

### **II. Marriage is ordained by God and is important to God—Gen. 2:18; Matt. 19:4-5:**

- A. When God created man, He saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so He determined to make a helper for man as his counterpart; this shows that marriage is according to God's divine and holy ordination—Gen. 2:18:
  - 1. Immediately after God created man, He charged man to be “fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,” that is, to fill the earth with human beings—1:28.
  - 2. This indicates that we need to be married properly according to God's purpose and for God's purpose; God's purpose in marriage is to use us to maintain the existence of mankind on earth—vv. 27-28.
  - 3. Man should enjoy God's provision for his living and the marriage life for man's existence and multiplication to replenish the earth that it may be possible for God to save some men in order to produce the church—the Body of Christ—which will issue in the New Jerusalem as God's eternal enlargement and expression according to God's eternal economy—Eccl. 9:7-9, and note 7<sup>1</sup>; Prov. 5:18; Mal. 2:14-15, and note 15<sup>1</sup>; Eph. 1:22-23; Rev. 21:2, 10.
- B. God's enemy has a desire to destroy the accomplishment of God's goal, which depends upon human marriage—1 Tim. 4:1-3:
  - 1. Attacks on this divine matter of God's ordination come from enemies who have an intention to destroy God's goal by causing people to marry loosely or by forbidding them to marry—vv. 1-3; Luke 17:26-27.
  - 2. We should be aware that an ideology not to marry comes from demons, God's enemies.
- C. Marriage is a symbol of the union between Christ and the church—Gen. 2:18, 21-24; Eph. 5:22-32:
  - 1. Adam typifies God in Christ as the real, universal Husband, who is seeking a wife for Himself; Adam's need for a wife typifies and portrays God's need, in His economy, to have a wife as His counterpart, His complement (lit. , his parallel)—Rom. 5:14; cf. Isa. 54:5; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 21:9.
  - 2. God desires to have both Adam, typifying Christ, and Eve, typifying the church; His purpose is to “let them have dominion” (Gen. 1:26); it is to have a victorious Christ plus a victorious church; God wants Christ and the church to have dominion—Rom. 5:17; 16:20; Eph. 1:22-23.

### **III. We need to live the life of a God-man in our married life—Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a; Eph. 5:18-33; Col. 3:16-19:**

- A. We need to have a God-man living in our married life in order to have a God-man living in the church; if a husband and a wife are not vital at home in their married life, they have no way to be vital in the meeting; we need to live Christ at home with our husband or wife and with our children.
- B. Because we are short of the God-man living, we need a real revival to be God-men who live a life of always denying ourselves and being crucified to live Christ for the expression of God—Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a.
- C. In order to have the God-man living, we need to live and walk according to the mingled spirit—1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4:
  - 1. A very important area in which to walk according to our spirit is our married life.
  - 2. If we can live according to our spirit in our married life, a great many difficulties will disappear.

### **IV. Isaac's marriage was not common nor merely for his human living; it was for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose—Gen. 21:12; 24:1-4:**

- A. God's eternal purpose is to express Himself in a corporate way; in order to have this corporate expression, God must have a people; this people is the seed of Abraham—1:26; 12:1-3; 15:5; 21:12.
- B. Isaac's marriage was not simply that a single man might have a happy, comfortable life; without marriage, Isaac could not have brought forth the seed; if this single man was to have the seed for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, he had to get married—24:1-4.
- C. "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, 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 point of Genesis 24"—*Life-Study of Genesis*, msg. 60, pp. 791-792.

### **V. We need to be deeply impressed with the best marriage in the Bible—the model marriage of Boaz and Ruth—Matt. 1:5, 16; Ruth 4:13-22:**

- A. The marriage of Boaz and Ruth may be considered the best marriage recorded in the Bible.
- B. The particular striking point in the marriage of Boaz and Ruth is not anything concerning their living or career but something concerning an excellent matter, that is, to be one part of the lineage to bring Jesus Christ into humanity—Matt. 1:5.
- C. Through their participating in the lineage to bring forth Christ, God could accomplish His eternal economy by having an organic Body for Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the center of the new heaven and new earth to be God's divine expansion in humanity for His eternal expression in His divine glory—v. 16; Eph. 4:15-16; Rev. 21:1-2, 9-10.

## Excerpts from the Ministry:

### MARRIAGE

#### Marriage Being Ordained by God

**“Jehovah God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart”** (Gen. 2:18).

When God created man, He saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so He determined to make a helper for man as his counterpart. This shows that marriage is according to God’s divine and holy ordination. Marriage was ordained by God when God first created man. Marriage did not come in after the fall of man, nor is it based on the lusts of man. Marriage was ordained by God for man in creation, and it is a primary matter in our human living. In our living, only creation is higher than marriage, and all other matters are headed up by marriage. The origin of man was through creation; the continuation of man is through marriage. In the beginning God created man, but the continuation and propagation of man is through marriage. Therefore, marriage is important to God, and He ordains that man marry.

God ordained man to have a helper as his counterpart because it was not good for the man to be alone. Being alone is not good for several reasons. It is not good in regard to reaching God’s goal, and even more, it is not good in regard to man himself. Both physically and emotionally, in human living and human affairs, it is not good for man to be alone. Therefore, God determined to make a helper as a counterpart for man.

**“He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh’”** (Matt. 19:4-5).

In the beginning God not only ordained that man have a helper as his counterpart in marriage, He also created them male and female and ordained that the two should be one flesh. Man has an inward need for marriage, which comes from God’s creation. God created this need in human nature. The Bible reveals that God’s goal in the universe is with man. In order for God to accomplish His goal in the universe, He must gain man, and in order to gain man, He must ensure that the man He created for His purpose continues and propagates through marriage. Therefore, God not only ordained marriage; He also created a need for marriage within man.

God’s creation of man was very special. He created man so that a male and a female would need each other in order to be a complete person by becoming one flesh. According to the teaching of the Bible, neither a female nor a male is a complete person. In order to be complete, a male and a female must join together as one. Just as two halves of a watermelon are needed in order to be a complete watermelon, only a man and a wife are a complete person from God’s point of view. A brother once invited a couple over for dinner, but the husband came without his wife. The brother mentioned to his guest that only half of a person came. According to the Bible and God’s original ordination, I felt that this word was correct. God wants male and female to become one flesh; therefore, He wants man to marry. Marriage is God’s original ordination.

The Scripture quoted by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 19:5 was in response to a question concerning divorce. In His word the Lord acknowledged God’s original ordination concerning marriage. Furthermore, the Lord indicated that man should honor God’s original ordination concerning marriage. In the New Testament the Lord’s consideration of the importance of human marriage matched God’s consideration in creation.

#### Marriage Being a Symbol of the Union between Christ and the Church

**“I betrothed you to one husband...as a pure virgin to Christ”** (2 Cor. 11:2).

The marriage of a man and a woman is a symbol of the joining of Christ and the church. The apostle considers Christ as the Husband and the believers as His betrothed. Furthermore, he betrothed us as a pure virgin to Christ. Therefore, whenever we see a marriage, we should be reminded of our relationship to Christ and of Christ's relationship to us.

**“The two shall be one flesh. This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church”** (Eph. 5:31-32).

A husband and a wife, being one flesh, are a symbol of a great mystery, Christ and the church, and of the oneness between Christ and the church. Whenever we consider a husband and wife being one flesh, we should see the mystery of the oneness of Christ and the church.

**“A husband is head of the wife as also Christ is Head of the church...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. 5:23-25).

A husband, as the head of the wife, is a symbol of Christ as the Head of the church. Therefore, a wife being subject to her husband is a symbol of the church being subject to Christ, and a husband loving his wife is a symbol of Christ loving the church. Every proper relationship between husband and wife is a manifestation of the story of Christ and the church. Therefore, as husbands and wives, we should be careful to be proper husbands and wives in order to properly manifest the relationship between Christ and the church. (*CWWL, 1932-1949*, vol. 3, “Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures,” ch. 33, pp. 603-614)

### **HOLDING MARRIAGE IN HONOR**

Verse 4 says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and the bed undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” Apparently this is unrelated to the church life. However, marriage is a very important factor in the church life. Whether a church is sound and healthy or loses its element and essence is very much dependent upon the marriage life. Do not consider the matter of marriage to be a light thing. We must hold it in honor. This means that we must possess our body, our vessel, in sanctification and honor (1 Thes. 4:3-4), that “no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter” (1 Thes. 4:6). In the church life, the brothers and sisters must contact one another in a holy way. This means that we honor our marriage and others' marriage. To honor marriage means to possess our body in sanctification and honor and to flee fornication. (*Life-Study of Hebrews*, msg. 55, p. 613)

### **WALKING ACCORDING TO SPIRIT**

Romans 8:4 is a verse that is parallel to Colossians 2:8 in the sense that it tells us to walk according to spirit. To walk according to spirit is to walk according to Christ. If you walk daily according to spirit, you will automatically walk according to Christ. If you walk in this way, you will do certain things or refrain from doing things, not because you are conforming to the practice of the local churches, but because you are walking according to Christ...

We need to apply the matter of walking according to spirit in every aspect of our daily living. For example, the brothers who live together need to apply this to their conversation with one another. One brother may be accustomed to speaking according to his mind, whereas another brother may talk according to his emotion. Both brothers must learn to talk according to the spirit. When they rise up early in the morning, they should exercise to talk not from the mind or from the emotion, but from the spirit. The brothers should pray, “Lord, grant me the grace to speak from my spirit.” However, instead of doing this, the brothers may live according to the tradition of men and the elements of the world. Although they may not quarrel with each other, they may live according to their humanity which has been refined by the church life and not live according to Christ.

A very important area in which to walk according to our spirit is our married life. It is difficult for husbands to remain in the spirit with their wives. It is easy for them to be either in the mind, the

emotion, or the will. One of the most difficult things for a brother to do is to turn to his spirit in the presence of his wife. But we brothers need to learn to walk according to spirit in relating to our wives. If a brother's wife treats him well, he may be happy. But if she is not pleasant to him, he may be offended. Instead of turning to the spirit, he may choose to stay in his emotion. But whether our wives are kind or unkind, we need to stay in our spirit. If your wife rebukes you, stay in the spirit. If she speaks well of you, stay in the spirit. If you stay in the spirit, you will walk according to Christ in your married life.

Wives also need to learn to be in the spirit when they are with their husbands. This is even more difficult than for a husband to be in spirit with his wife. Many sisters can be in the spirit with almost anyone except their husbands. When they are with their husbands, they are usually in the emotion, not in the spirit. We need the Lord's mercy and grace to be in the spirit with our husband or wife. We must confess that, to a large degree, our married life is not according to Christ. Let us look to the Lord that He would grant us the mercy and grace to have our married life according to the spirit. This is basic and crucial for the church life. The married life is the foundation of the family life, the family life is the basis of our daily life, and our daily life is the basis of the church life. This shows the crucial importance of our married life. If we can live according to our spirit in our married life, a great many difficulties will disappear. (*Life-Study of Colossians*, msg. 54, pp. 475-477)

### **LIVING THE LIFE OF A GOD-MAN IN OUR MARRIED LIFE AND IN THE CHURCH LIFE**

Let us now consider the situation in the recovery. We all are believers. We believe in the Lord Jesus. We have repented and come back to the Lord, and we have been saved, even dynamically saved. Yet in our daily life we may not have the living of a God-man.

We have pointed out that for the children of Israel to keep the law was to live God and express God. However, they did not keep the law, and therefore they did not live God and express God. The situation is the same with us today. For the most part, we do not express God in our daily living.

We need to have a God-man living in our married life. If a married brother would live the life of a God-man in his married life, he would surely be a good husband, for he would be a real God-man in loving his wife. Likewise, if a married sister would live the life of a God-man in her married life, she would be a good wife, submitting herself to her husband.

We also need to have a God-man living in the church life, especially in relation to what we call the vital groups. How can we have a vital group if we ourselves are not vital? This is impossible. Suppose at dinner a brother and his wife are not happy with each other. They even exchange words and argue for quite a long time. Suddenly they remember that later that evening they must attend a meeting of their vital group. But how could this couple be vital in the meeting? Because they are not vital at home in their married life, they have no way to be vital in the meeting.

### **OUR NEED FOR A REAL REVIVAL**

Because we are short of the God-man living, we need a real revival. The children of Israel had only an outward law, but today we have something much stronger and much higher than the law. We have the all-inclusive, life-giving, compounded, consummated Spirit in us, who is the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19). We need to live Christ by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (vv. 20-21a).

We have such a Spirit within us, but what do we live and how do we live? Do we live Christ? In the church meetings we may live Christ, but do we live Christ at home with our husband or wife and with our children? We need a real revival to be God-men who live a life of always denying ourselves and being crucified to live Christ for the expression of God. (*Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chronicles*, msg. 11, pp. 76-77)

### **THE BEST MARRIAGE**

The Bible unveils to us that God created man in His own image in His highest intention to carry out His eternal economy. Right after God created man, God ordained the marriage of man. According to the divine revelation in the Bible, the human marriage ordained by God is not merely for man to live and to carry out some career but for man to be one with God so that God can have a way to carry out His eternal economy through man.

The highest intention of God in creating man and ordaining man's marriage is that He desires to be one with man, even by becoming man, that man could be made like Him in His divine life and nature but not in His divine Godhead. Four thousand years after the history of mankind began, God came out of eternity into time to be incarnated, to become a man in the flesh, and this man was Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God. Jesus Christ is both God and man, a God-man who produced many believers through His death and resurrection to be His organic Body, the church. All this was done through man's marriage.

The best marriage as recorded in the Bible is the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. The particular striking point in the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, as the Bible records, is not anything concerning their living or anything concerning their career but something concerning an excellent matter, that is, to be one part of the lineage to bring Jesus Christ into humanity so that God could accomplish His eternal economy by having an organic Body for Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the center of the new heaven and new earth to be God's divine expansion in humanity for His eternal expression in His divine glory. (*CWWL, 1994-1997*, vol. 1, "The Best Marriage," p. 489)

### **References and Further Reading:**

1. Life-Study of Colossians, msg. 54.
2. Life-Study of Hebrews, msg. 55.
3. The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 49, "Messages for Building Up New Believers (2)," ch. 30
4. Life-Study of Ephesians, msg. 53.
5. The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1932-1949, vol. 3, "Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, Volume 3," ch. 33.
6. Life-Study of Matthew, msg. 53.
7. Life-Study of Deuteronomy, msg. 23.
8. Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chronicles, msgs. 8, 11.
9. The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 1, "Miscellaneous Fellowship," ch. 3.
10. Life-Study of Genesis, msg. 60.
11. Life-Study of Ruth, msgs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8.
12. The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997, vol. 1, "The Best Marriage."

## Message 2

### A Godly Family for the Church Life

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15-16; Gen. 5:22, 25-29; 6:8, 11-14; 7:1;  
Matt. 16:18; Rom. 16:3-5; Philem. 1-2

#### I. **Godliness is a living that expresses the divine reality, an expression of God in all His riches—1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 6, 11; Titus 1:1; 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:3, 6-7; 3:11:**

- A. Godliness refers not only to piety but also to the living of God in the church, that is, to God as life lived out in the church—1 Tim. 3:15-16.
- B. The living of the church as the new man should be exactly the same as the living of Jesus; it should be a life according to the reality that is in Jesus—Eph. 4:17-24:
  - 1. The *reality is in Jesus* refers to the actual condition of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels; in the godly life of Jesus there is truth, reality—v. 21, and note 1.
  - 2. Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for God; God was in His living, and He was one with God—John 14:9-10; 16:32b; 5:30; 6:57; 10:30.
  - 3. We, the believers, who are regenerated with Christ as our life and are taught in Him, learn from Him as the reality is in Jesus—3:3, 5-6; Col. 3:4; Eph. 4:20-21.

#### II. **Noah's life and work was one that changed the age; Noah came from a godly family and learned from his forefathers all the godly things—Gen. 5:22, 25-29; 6:8:**

- A. Noah inherited the spiritual blessings from his forefathers to maintain and extend God's way of redemption and life:
  - 1. Noah found grace in the eyes of God (v. 8); born into a godly family (cf. Gen. 5:4-29), he inherited the spiritual blessings from his forefathers and took God's way of redemption and life, including Adam's way of salvation (3:20-21), Abel's way of offering (4:4), Enosh's way of calling (v. 26), all the fathers' way of living and begetting (5:3-28), Enoch's way of walking with God (vv. 22, 24); moreover, by faith he became a righteous man in God's eyes and a perfect man who walked with God in that generation (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:9).
  - 2. Therefore, he maintained and extended God's way of life so that God could carry out His plan on the corrupted earth according to His desire.
- B. The ark built by Noah eventually not only saved him from God's judgment but also saved his family from that evil generation—vv. 11-14; 7:1; Matt. 24:37-39:
  - 1. This is a type of Christ's salvation that not only delivers us out of eternal perdition but also saves us from the corrupted generation—Acts 2:40; cf. Gal. 1:4.
  - 2. Whoever is saved will by no means perish; however, we need the further and higher salvation that saves us from the corrupted generation; this salvation is the corporate Christ whom we are building—Gen. 6:11-14; 7:1; Acts 2:40-42; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:16.

#### III. **Among us in the Lord's recovery the most important unit is the church; after the church, the most important unit is the family—1 Tim. 3:15-16; Titus 1:5-9; 2:3-5:**

- A. Next to the church, the family is the most important unit in society; without a proper family life, there would be no way to have a healthy society or country; a nation is constituted of families as the basic factors.

- B. We fully realize that without a proper family life it is difficult to have an orderly church life; we also realize that without a proper church life it is difficult to have a normal and proper family life; we are here for the church and also for the family.

**IV. Apart from the book of Proverbs, the Old Testament does not seem to give us much teaching concerning parenting, but there are some good examples—Exo. 12:3-7; Deut. 6:7-9, 20-21; 11:18-21; Psa. 78:5-7; Joel 1:3:**

- A. Adam and Eve were saved, and they passed on the word of salvation to the following generation; we also must share these things with our own children, telling them the sad story of man's fall and proclaiming to them the good news of God's salvation—Gen. 3:21; 4:4.
- B. "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice"; since Abel had such faith, exercised this faith, and offered a sacrifice to God in accordance with this faith, he must have heard the preaching of the glad tidings from his parents—Heb. 11:4.
- C. In the preparation of Moses, God prepared godly parents who infused him with godly thoughts after his birth; through the infusing of his parents, Moses had the godly thought and concept that he needed to rescue the children of Israel—Exo. 2:7-9; Heb. 11:24-25.
- D. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, those who were qualified and ready to take possession of the good land were younger ones, the second generation—Num. 14:29-31, 38; Deut. 1:35-36:
  - 1. The second generation did not pass through as much as the first generation did, but they received the benefit of what the first generation experienced—11:2-7; Josh. 1:1-3.
  - 2. The principle is the same with us in the Lord's recovery today; what the older ones have experienced is being passed on to the younger ones and will be very effective in building them up and preparing them to fight with God and for God—2 Tim. 2:2.

**V. The New Testament gives examples of households, which clearly show us that the unit of God's salvation and service is the household:**

- A. In the New Testament we see many sweet households, such as the household of Caesar (Phil. 4:22), the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:22-24), the household of Lydia (16:13-15), the household of the jailer (vv. 29-34), and the household of Crispus (18:8).
- B. In addition, there were houses in which the meetings were held, such as Aquila and Prisca's house (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19) and the house of Philemon (Philem. 1-2).

**VI. From the beginning of the Lord's recovery in China, Brother Nee pointed out that the church needs to be built up with the household as a unit:**

- A. "I would like to say emphatically that the family life of our next generation has much to do with the church life of our next generation...The church life of the next generation will be strong only if you take care of this matter well. If our next generation has terrible families, the church will suffer many drawbacks...In the coming days may God bestow His grace to the church so that many young families will be raised up in which both the husband and the wife serve the Lord and walk in His way together in one accord. How beautiful such a picture will be!"—*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 49, p. 497.
- B. "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"—p. 518.

**VII. The church life is the purpose of the Christian life, and it is a great reality in the universe; hence, our family life should be brought into the church life—**

### **Matt. 16:16-19; Philem. 1-2:**

- A. We need to realize that in the sight of God, nothing compares with the church; thus, apart from the church life, our family life is vanity; only when our family life is brought into the church life will it be reality—Matt. 13:45-46; Acts 20:28; Eccl. 1:2:
- B. While we need to bear the responsibility of taking care of our family, we need to see that the church is a treasure in God’s heart—1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 12; Titus 2:4-5; Matt. 13:45-46.

### **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

#### **THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS— GOD MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH**

According to the context [in 1 Timothy 3], godliness here [1 Timothy 3:16a: “And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness”] refers not only to piety but also to the living of God in the church, i.e., to God as life lived out in the church. This is the great mystery confessed universally by believers in Christ. (*Holy Bible Recovery Version*, 1 Tim. 3:16, footnote 2)

According to unconfirmed historical accounts, these six lines of poetry [in 1 Timothy 3:16] made up a song that the saints in the early church loved to sing. *He* refers to Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from *the mystery of godliness* to *He* implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living also is the manifestation of God in the flesh. (*Holy Bible Recovery Version*, 1 Tim. 3:16, footnote 3)

[“Taken up in glory” in 1 Timothy 3:16] refers to Christ’s ascension into glory (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11; 2:33; Phil. 2:9). According to the sequence of historical events, Christ’s ascension preceded His being preached among the nations. However, it is listed here as the last step in Christ’s being the manifestation of God in the flesh. This must indicate that the church too is taken up in glory. Hence, it implies that not only Christ Himself as the Head but also the church as the Body are the manifestation of God in the flesh. When a church is well taken care of according to the instructions given in the first two chapters [of 1 Timothy]...the church will function as the house and household of the living God for His move on the earth, and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world. Then the church becomes the continuation of Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh! (*Holy Bible Recovery Version*, 1 Tim. 3:16, footnote 9)

#### **NOAH**

Genesis 6:9 tells us that Noah walked with God. Undoubtedly, Noah inherited all the spiritual blessings from his forefathers, such as Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, etc. and he followed his great grandfather, Enoch, to walk with God in a crooked, perverse, and adulterous generation. I do believe that he was much influenced by hearing of his great grandfather Enoch's godly walk. Noah stood for a strong continuation of the line of life and, with much development, he carried it on further...

Genesis 6:8 says, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Finding grace in the eyes of the Lord is not a small thing. What does “finding grace” mean? Notice that this verse does not say that God was gracious to Noah, or that the Lord granted grace to Noah. No, it says that Noah found grace. Remember that Genesis is a book filled with spiritual seeds. Here, in 6:8, we have the first mention of grace in the Bible. Noah was able to be what he was because he found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Hebrews 4:16 tells us to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need. When I was young, nearly every day in my prayers I would say, “Lord, I am coming to the throne of grace. At Your throne of grace I find grace for my timely need. Lord, I need Your grace every minute. I not only need Your grace every year, every week, every day, and every

hour, but every minute. Without Your grace, I simply cannot bear anything.” Today I still need the Lord’s grace every minute. Perhaps in a few minutes my folks will give me a difficult time, or else one of the brothers will come to bother me. Perhaps I will receive a phone call from a sister. So, I keep on telling the Lord, “Lord, I need Your grace every minute. I know that You are gracious and that You have grace ready for me. Lord, since grace needs my cooperation, I kneel before the throne of grace to find grace to meet my need.” Many times we simply cannot stand our situation and we cannot face what is happening to us. However, there is a place called the throne of grace. Come boldly to the throne of grace that you may find mercy and grace for your time of need.

Do you believe that, by himself, Noah was able to find grace in the eyes of the Lord? I do not believe that he did this by himself. The flood came 1,656 years after Adam was made. Adam lived for nine hundred thirty years. This leaves seven hundred twenty-six years from the year Adam died to the year the deluge came. When Adam was six hundred twenty-two years of age, Enoch was born and he lived as a contemporary of Adam for three hundred and eight years. After Adam died, Enoch still lived another fifty-seven years before he was taken by God. Sixty-nine years later Noah was born. So, Noah was born only one hundred twenty-six years after Adam’s death. When Enoch was sixty-five, he begat Methuselah and then lived for another three hundred years before he was taken away. Methuselah lived for nine hundred sixty-nine years, dying in Noah’s six hundredth year, the year the deluge came. Undoubtedly, Enoch learned the things of God from his forefathers, perhaps even learning directly from Adam. The fact that Enoch named his son “Methuselah,” which means “when he is dead, it shall be sent,” proves that he taught his son concerning God. Methuselah must have taught his son, Lamech, and Lamech his son, Noah. Noah came from a godly family and learned from his forefathers all the godly things. Thus, he came to realize his need for grace. His generation was corrupt and filled with violence. The human race had become flesh. Noah lived in a crooked, perverse, and evil generation. Nevertheless, his parents and grandparents taught him the things of God, and he realized that he needed God’s grace. (*Life-Study of Genesis*, msg. 28, pp. 374-376)

Noah was born into the human race that was corrupt to the uttermost, and he lived among that race. At that time, men abused their fallen bodies and became flesh. They were full of lusts (Gen. 6:3a, 5). As a result, the fallen angels joined themselves to man through illegal marriage, so that the human race was no longer pure but became a mixture of the human nature with fallen spirits (Gen. 6:2, 4). That was the most evil thing in the eyes of God, and He could not tolerate it.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of God (Gen. 6:8). Born into a godly family (cf. Gen. 5:4-29), he inherited the spiritual blessings from his forefathers and took God’s way of redemption and life, including Adam’s way of salvation, Abel’s way of offering, Enosh’s way of calling, and Enoch’s way of walking with God. Moreover, by faith he became a righteous man in God’s eyes and a perfect man who walked with God in that generation (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:9). Therefore, he maintained and extended God’s way of life so that God could carry out His plan on the corrupted earth according to His desire. (*Truth Lessons*, Level Two, vol. 2, ch. 17, p. 44)

The ark saved the whole family of Noah from the pounding and drowning of the flood. This is a type of the salvation of Christ that saves God’s elect from God’s punishment. In the days of Noah, people were befuddled by eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage; they did not know that judgment was coming, until the flood came and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-27). Likewise, people today are befuddled by the necessities of this life and do not know that God’s judgment will come upon them by the Lord’s appearing. Just as Noah was saved by the ark that was built by his work, so we must also work out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12) that at the Lord’s coming we may be saved from God’s punishment and not suffer the plagues that the world will suffer.

The ark built by Noah eventually not only saved him from God’s judgment but also saved his family of eight from that evil generation. This is a type of Christ’s salvation that not only delivers us out of eternal perdition but also saves us from the corrupted generation. Whoever is saved will by no means perish. However, we need the further and higher salvation that saves us from the corrupted

generation. This salvation is the corporate Christ whom we are building. We need not only to preach the individual Christ but also to build the corporate Christ, the church. This Christ may be considered today's ark. Through this Christ as salvation thousands of people have been saved not only from God's judgment but also from the crooked and perverted generation...

The ark saved Noah and his whole family from the evil generation and ushered them into a new age that they might live an altogether new life for God and before God. In like manner, Christ's salvation also saves God's chosen people from the corrupted generation and ushers them into a renewed age, into the new realm of resurrection. Noah and his household passed through the flood waters by being in the ark. After the flood, the ark rested on the mountain of Ararat. Their passing through the flood was a type of baptism; the ark's resting upon the mountains was a type of Christ's resurrection; and the living of Noah's family of eight after the flood was a type of the church life. Through baptism we buried the old community and the old society, and in resurrection we have entered into another community, another society, which is the church life. (*Truth Lessons*, Level Three, vol. 1, ch. 4, pp. 42-44)

### **THE FOCUS OF THE CHANGE IN SYSTEM— THE HOUSEHOLD**

The focus of the change in system is the household. In the New Testament we see many sweet households, such as the household of Caesar (Phil. 4:22), the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:22-24), the household of Lydia, a seller of purple-dyed goods (16:13-15), and the household of the jailer whose name is unknown (vv. 29-34). There was also the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16) and the household of Crispus (Acts 18:8). In addition, there were houses in which the meetings were held, such as Aquila and Prisca's house (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), the house of Nymphas (Col. 4:15), and the house of Philemon (Philem. 1-2). These examples clearly show us that the unit of God's salvation and service is the household.

Even in the Old Testament, in the two great types of salvation, the household is the unit of salvation. The first is the type of the flood, in which the eight members of the house of Noah entered into the ark and were thus saved from God's judgment on the world (Gen. 7:1; Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5). The second is the type of the passover, in which each Israelite household took a lamb, killed it, put the blood on the doorposts and the lintel of the house, and ate the flesh of the lamb. It was not a lamb for each person but a lamb for each household as a unit (Exo. 12:3-8). In the past we have ignored these clear truths of the Bible; we were influenced by Christianity and were distracted and carried away.

From the beginning of the Lord's recovery in China, Brother Nee pointed out that the church needs to be built up with the household as a unit. I received this matter from him and brought the practice to Taiwan. In addition, I introduced the practice of the "groups." However, in 1984 when I returned to Taiwan, these two practices were almost non-existent. We were under the influence of the nations and were following their customs (2 Kings 17:33) to walk in the way of the denominations in Christianity by copying their practice of big meetings, in which one man speaks while all the rest listen. This practice brings forth the "clergy" and the "laity," which prevents the functioning of the saints. Seeing this, I want to bring out a specific way for our practice at this crucial time. (*CWWL*, 1986, vol. 3, "The Furtherance of the New Way for the Lord's Recovery," ch. 1, pp. 488-489)

### **BRINGING OUR FAMILY LIFE INTO THE CHURCH LIFE**

The church life is the purpose of the Christian life, and it is a great reality in the universe. Hence, our family life should be brought into the church life. We should help all the members of our family to be not only saved but also brought into the church life. This is a matter of spiritual warfare.

We need to realize that in the sight of God, nothing compares with the church. Thus, apart from the church life, our family life is vanity. Only when our family life is brought into the church life will it be reality. While we need to bear the responsibility of taking care of our family, we need to see that the

church is a treasure in God's heart.

In order for the saints in the church life to meet the Lord's requirements, they need to realize that in the sight of God, the genuine church life is the kingdom of God. Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Because the context here deals with the church life in the present age, this verse is a strong proof that, in a practical sense, the proper church life is the kingdom of God.

Although many Christians appreciate the Lord's charge in Matthew 6:33 to seek first the Father's kingdom and His righteousness, few realize that the kingdom of God in this age is the church life. This is confirmed by the Lord's word in Matthew 16:18-19, which says, "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens." In these verses kingdom of the heavens is used interchangeably with church, indicating that the genuine church is the kingdom of the heavens in this age. For this reason Matthew 18:17 reveals that the believers are to obey the church. If a brother sins, we first need to deal with him in love (v. 15), then by two or three witnesses (v. 16), and finally through the church with authority. Verse 17 says, "If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector." If a believer refuses to hear the church, he will lose the fellowship of the church. The Gospel of Matthew, a book on the kingdom, reveals that the church life is the practical kingdom of God on earth in the present age. If we are sincere with the Lord about seeking first the kingdom of God, we must be in the church life. Apart from the church life we cannot be in the kingdom of God in a practical way.

Furthermore, the church meetings are crucial because the church life is practically expressed by the church meetings. Without the church meetings, the church is something ethereal; it cannot be manifested in a practical way. The church meetings constitute the practical church life. Thus, we should not come to the church meetings empty-handed. Rather, we should come with a portion of Christ and offer it to God and share it with others by functioning in the meetings. (CWWL, 1982, vol. 1, "Miscellaneous Messages in Anaheim," ch. 7, pp. 29-30)

### **References and Further Reading:**

1. *Life-Study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 6.
2. *Holy Bible Recovery Version*, 1 Timothy 3:16 and notes; Ephesians 4:21 and note 1.
3. *Life-Study of Titus*, msg. 5.
4. *Life-study of Genesis*, msg. 28.
5. *Truth Lessons*, Level 2, vol. 2, ch. 17.
6. *Truth Lessons*, Level 3, vol. 1, ch. 4.
7. *Raising Up the Next Generation for the Church Life*, ch. 6.
8. *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 49, "Messages for Building Up New Believers (2)," chs. 20, 23, 31.
9. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1986, vol. 2, "Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 1," chs. 5, 12.
10. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1986, vol. 3, "The Furtherance of the New Way for the Lord's Recovery," ch. 1.
11. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1982, vol. 2, "Miscellaneous Messages in Anaheim," ch. 7.

## LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

### Lesson 17

#### **The Function of the Sisters in the Church Life (1) Preserving and Maintaining Life and “Conceiving” and “Giving Birth” to Everything in the Church Life**

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rev. 2:4; 1 Pet. 3:1, 4; Luke 2:36-37; Col. 4:6

#### **I. We need to see the importance of the sisters’ function in the church life:**

- A. God uses physical things as shadows of spiritual things; a human family is a shadow, a picture, of the church life; in the church the brothers can be compared to the husband and father in a family, and the sisters can be compared to the wife and mother—Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15.
- B. In order to have a proper family life, the mother is more important than the father; the principle is the same regarding the church life; in this sense, we may say that the sisters are more important than the brothers in the church life—cf. John 12:1-3.
- C. In a family the responsibility is mainly on the side of the wife; in order to have a proper family life with a proper home life, the wife must bear the majority of the responsibility—Prov. 31:10-31.
- D. In order to have a proper church life, the sisters must bear a particular responsibility and carry out a particular function—John 12:1-3; Rom. 16:1-2, 6, 12-13.

#### **II. The main function of the sisters both in the church and in the family is to preserve and maintain life—Rom. 16:1-2:**

- A. In a family it is the wife, not primarily the husband, who maintains life; if a father is not at home, the children are not affected as much as when the mother is away from home—Prov. 31:10-31.
- B. The condition of a church depends on the sisters; when the sisters are healthy, living, and going on, the church is healthy, living, and going on—Phil. 4:2-3; 2:1-4, 12-16.

#### **III. The sisters need to bear responsibility and “give birth” to everything in the church life—Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:26-35:**

- A. In a family the husband cannot conceive and give birth to anything; only the wife can bear a child; this is an illustration of the situation in the church life.
- B. No matter what the church endeavors to work out, if the sisters do not bear the responsibility, it is very difficult to bring forth anything; the brothers may initiate something and may make many decisions, but whether or not anything can be “conceived” and worked out depends more on the sisters:
  - 1. If the sisters are silent and dormant in relation to anything in the church life, that thing will not have a good outcome.
  - 2. All the things of life related to the local church must be “conceived” and brought forth by the sisters.
- C. How can the sisters conceive and give birth to something in the church life?
  - 1. First, the sisters need to love the Lord with the first love—Rev. 2:4; Mark 12:30:
    - a. All the problems we have with the Lord are due to a lack of love toward Him; as long as we have the best love, the first love, toward the Lord, all the problems are gone—Eph. 6:24; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 2:4.

- b. The sisters especially need to have the best love toward the Lord—Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:3; 20:1-18.
- 2. Second, the sisters need to be broken—John 11:20-22, 24, 27-28, 32, 39; Phil. 4:2-3; Matt. 16:24-26; cf. *Hymns* #622, #279, #280, #415, #482:
  - a. Based on the pattern in family life, in order for the sisters to give birth to anything in the church life, the sisters need to sacrifice; this means that they need to be broken—cf. *Hymns* #377.
  - b. In the church life, first the sisters need the best love toward the Lord; then they need brokenness, which includes submission, sacrifice, suffering, giving up many things, never craving something for themselves, never vindicating themselves, and never saying anything for themselves; the sisters need to be ready to lose themselves for the church—Rev. 12:11b; cf. Phil. 2:1-11:
    - 1) The Bible tells us that the sisters are put in a position of submission, a position of sacrifice, and a position of humility—1 Cor. 11:3-16; Eph. 5:22; 1 Pet. 3:1, 4.
    - 2) The real meaning of humility is to be broken; no one can be truly humble if he is not broken—1 Pet. 5:6; cf. Matt. 26:33-35, 69-75; John 21:15-17.
  - c. If the sisters quarrel among themselves, this is proof that they are not willing to be broken—Phil. 2:2-3.
  - d. Even if we have been treated wrongly, if we are willing to be wronged, this shows that we are broken; this means that we are under the working of the cross—Matt. 5:38-39; Luke 6:27-29; Rom. 12:19-21; 1 Pet. 2:21-24; Luke 9:23.
  - e. If the sisters are willing to be broken, this will be the greatest help to the birth of things in the church—cf. John 12:24.
- 3. Third, the sisters need to pray for the church:
  - a. The sisters must be praying persons—Luke 2:36-37; Acts 12:12.
  - b. In order to give birth to the things in the church, the sisters need to pray for the whole church in a detailed way.
- 4. Fourth, the sisters need to “season” the church life by adding “salt”:
  - a. The function of the sisters in the church can be compared to adding salt to food to season it and improve the flavor—cf. Col. 4:6:
    - 1) In the church life the brothers are sometimes rough and not careful in making decisions.
    - 2) Many times the sisters need to add something to make up the brothers’ lack; what the sisters add can be compared to salt added to improve the flavor of food.
    - 3) The sisters are needed to add salt to all that the brothers say and do in the church; if the sisters add the proper amount of salt, whatever the brothers say and do will be wonderful in the church.
  - b. In the church, people of many different dispositions are brought together by the Lord; with such a mixture of people coming together to practice the church life, a great deal of salt is needed—Mark 9:50.
  - c. The brothers do not have the position to provide the necessary salt; this portion belongs to the sisters.
  - d. Whether the church will be corrupted or purified, purged, and cleansed depends on the sisters—cf. Gen. 19:26; Matt. 5:13.

## **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SISTERS' FUNCTION IN THE CHURCH LIFE**

In the Bible the church is likened to a home. The church is the household, the family, of God, and this household is the house of God. The two terms household and house are both used in the New Testament in reference to the church. Ephesians 2:19 tells us that the church is the household of God, whereas 1 Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the house of the living God.

Many times God uses physical things as shadows of spiritual things. A human family is a shadow, a picture of the church life. The situation in a family is a shadow of the situation in God's household. In the church the brothers can be compared to the husband and father in a family, and the sisters can be compared to the wife and mother.

In a family the responsibility is mainly on the side of the wife. In order to have a proper family life with a proper home life, the wife must bear the majority of the responsibility. If parents want their children to behave properly and only the father takes the responsibility to instruct the children, the result will not be satisfactory. But if the mother bears the responsibility to instruct the children in how they should behave, even if the father is not adequate in doing his part, the result may still be good.

Based on my experience I have learned that in order to have a proper church life, the sisters must bear a particular responsibility and carry out a particular function. The brothers cannot replace the sisters' function. In a family the husband cannot conceive and give birth to anything. Only the wife can bear a child. This is an illustration of the situation in the church life. In order to have a proper family life, the mother is more important than the father. The principle is the same regarding the church life. In this sense, we may say that the sisters are more important than the brothers in the church life.

No matter what the church endeavors to work out, if the sisters do not bear the responsibility, it is very difficult to bring forth anything. The brothers may initiate something and may make many decisions, but whether or not anything can be "conceived" and worked out depends more on the sisters. If the sisters are silent and dormant in relation to anything in the church life, that thing will not have a good outcome. In the matter of gospel outreach, it seems that the responsibility should be mainly on the brothers' side, but if the sisters do not pick up this responsibility, it is difficult for the church to bring forth, or give birth to, the outreach of the gospel. In order to give birth to the outreach of the gospel, the sisters must bear the responsibility. Even with the ministry of the word, although it is the brothers who minister, if the sisters do not pick up the burden and bear the responsibility to pray for the ministry, it is very difficult to give a proper birth to the ministry. However, if the sisters bear the responsibility in the spirit to stand with the ministering one and pray against any kind of attack from the enemy, this will give a rich birth to the ministry. Therefore, all the things of life related to the local church must be "conceived" and brought forth by the sisters.

In the Gospels the gathering in a home in Bethany was a miniature of the church life (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). While the Lord Jesus was on earth, Bethany was His resting place (Matt. 21:17). In the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, one of the homes in Bethany, the responsibility was borne mainly by the sisters. In that home there were two sisters and one brother. This illustrates the principle that in order to have a strong church life, there should be more sisters than brothers.

Let me give a testimony based on our past history. In the beginning of the church life in China, the raising up of the local churches was very much helped by the sisters. In the churches there were always more sisters than brothers. Furthermore, in the early days the financial help to the churches came mainly from the sisters. In those days we were very poor because we took the narrow way. We gave up the denominational way related to finances, and we lived by faith, trusting in the Lord for everything. The churches had more sisters than brothers, and most of the brothers did not have high-paying jobs. Nevertheless, from 1926 through 1936, both in Shanghai and in northern China, the Lord supplied the church, the work, and the co-workers mainly through the sisters who were nurses. These sisters were excellent in their profession and most of them were single. They were very strong in life. This illustrates the important position that the sisters occupy in the church life.

The sisters need to continually receive a burden from the Lord, bear responsibility, and “give birth” to everything in the church life. No matter what the brothers decide regarding the church, if the sisters do not enter into and bear the responsibility for that thing, it will be impossible to give birth to it.

### **THE SISTERS NEEDING TO LOVE THE LORD WITH THE FIRST LOVE**

How can the sisters conceive and give birth to something in the church life? First, the sisters need to love the Lord more than anything else. The Lord is more lovable than the world, our self, our family, our future, and anything that we possess ([Matt.]10:37). He is more lovable than all things. According to Revelation 2:4, the degradation of the church was due to its leaving of the first love toward the Lord. The word first in Greek can also be translated “best.” We need to have the first love, the best love, toward the Lord. The sisters need to pray, “Lord, grant me to love You with the first love, the best love.”

When the Lord Jesus met Peter after His resurrection, He did not rebuke him. However, the Lord asked Peter three times if he loved Him (John 21:15-17) because Peter had denied the Lord three times (13:38; 18:12-27). All the problems we have with the Lord are due to a lack of love toward Him. As long as we have the best love, the first love, toward the Lord, all the problems are gone. The sisters especially need to have the best love toward the Lord.

### **THE SISTERS NEEDING TO BE BROKEN**

Second, based on the pattern in the family life, in order for the sisters to give birth to anything in the church life, the sisters need to sacrifice. This means that they need to be broken. The matter of being broken includes being submissive, suffering, and giving up many things. In the church life, first the sisters need the best love toward the Lord. Then they need brokenness, which includes submission, sacrifice, suffering, giving up many things, never craving something for themselves, never vindicating themselves, and never saying anything for themselves. The sisters need to be willing to lose themselves for the church. If the sisters are not ready to sacrifice, to suffer loss, to submit, and to be broken, they can never conceive anything in the church.

The Bible tells us that the sisters are put in a position of submission, a position of sacrifice, and a position of humility (1 Cor. 11:3-16; Eph. 5:22; 1 Pet. 3:1, 4). The real meaning of humility is to be broken. No one can be truly humble if he is not broken. In order for the sisters to conceive and give birth to something in the church, they must be willing by the Lord’s love to be broken. In their home with their husband and even with their children, the sisters need to be broken. Our spouse and our children are a test to our brokenness.

If the sisters quarrel among themselves, this is proof that they are not willing to be broken. Even if we have been treated wrongly, if we are willing to be wronged, this shows that we are broken. This means that we are under the working of the cross. If a sister is wronged by another sister and does not murmur or complain, this is a sign that she is willing to be broken. The brothers and the sisters all need to be willing to be broken. If we are such persons, it will be impossible for us to be offended. If the sisters become offended in anything, that will damage their function to conceive and give birth to something in the church life. The sisters should never excuse themselves. They should not blame or criticize the responsible brothers for their decisions. It may be true that the responsible brothers made a wrong decision, but if the sisters are willing to be broken, they will not say a word. Instead, they will bear the burden, go to the Lord, and pray, calling on the highest authority. They should let the Lord hear their voice concerning the situation, but no one else should hear anything from the sisters' mouth. If the sisters are willing to be broken, this will be the greatest help to the birth of things in the church. If the sisters are unwilling to be broken, nothing will be conceived and brought forth in the church. We have spoken much about life in the spirit, but the matter of brokenness is life in practicality, life in reality. If the sisters are willing to be broken, their spirit will be very strong, living, and rich.

### **THE SISTERS NEEDING TO PRAY FOR THE CHURCH**

Third, the sisters must be praying persons (Luke 2:36-37; Acts 12:12). They need to pray for all the matters related to the church. Sister Ruth Lee was the oldest among the co-workers in mainland China. In the early days she prayed in all the church meetings. Apparently, the meetings were under the direction of the brothers, but actually the meetings were carried on through her prayers. She told us that several times while the ministering brothers were speaking, at a certain point she realized that there was a crisis in the message. She realized that it was difficult for the speaking brothers to get through. Right away she prayed, "Lord, help the brothers to pass through this crisis." She testified that many times after only a minute the Lord answered her prayer. She told us that sometimes in the meetings, the brothers who did not live in the spirit had the desire to speak something. Immediately, she prayed, asking the Lord to exercise His authority over the meeting and especially over the troubling brothers. She testified that many times the Lord quickly answered her prayer. Many of the sisters in Shanghai learned from her. She helped many sisters to practice the same kind of prayer.

After I arrived in Shanghai in 1933, I was very impressed with the fact that in the meetings I rarely heard the sisters say anything. They did not speak, but they prayed very much. When the opportunity came for the saints to pray in the meetings, the sisters' prayers were weighty and living. In order to give birth to the things in the church, the sisters need to pray for the whole church in a detailed way. The church carries out a work among the children, the junior high and high school students, and the college students. It also conducts a new believers' meeting. In addition, there is a general church meeting on the Lord's Day morning, and there are also meetings in the evening during the week. The sisters need to bear the burden and pray much for all these matters. The brothers have their responsibility and their portion. The sisters' portion is to pray.

### **THE SISTERS NEEDING TO "SEASON" THE CHURCH LIFE BY ADDING "SALT"**

Fourth, the function of the sisters in the church can be compared to adding salt to food to season it and improve the flavor (cf. Col. 4:6). Let us illustrate this function in the following

way. In a family the father may instruct the children concerning their behavior. However, the father maybe rough and not careful in giving the children instruction. Thus, after the father's instruction, the mother may need to come in to make up the lack. She may realize that her husband was not careful, but she should not speak to the children about their father's shortage. If she does, she will damage the situation. If she is wise, she will confirm what the father said, but she will add something to make up the father's lack. This kind of instruction will be effective. If only the mother instructs the children in their behavior, her instruction will not work out as well as when the father and she both give the instruction.

In- the church life the brothers are sometimes rough and not careful in making decisions. Many times the sisters need to add something to make up the brothers' lack. What the sisters add can be compared to salt added to improve the flavor of food. After the salt has been added, the flavor is right. The sisters are needed to add salt to all that the brothers say and do in the church. If the sisters add the proper amount of salt, whatever the brothers say and do will be wonderful in the church; otherwise, it will be poor, without the proper flavor.

If the sisters learn the lesson of adding salt to everything in the church life, even if something negative happens to one of the brothers, that thing will turn out to be a great blessing not only to him but also to the whole church. Whether it becomes a blessing or not depends on what kind of salt and how much salt the sisters add. If there is a problem between two brothers in the church, and one of the brothers comes to an older sister to tell her how poor the other brother is, that is the time for the sister to add some salt to the situation. If the sister has learned the spiritual lessons, she will help the brother to know the flesh and the self and to apply the cross. This does not mean that the sister will teach the brother or give him a message. It means that the sister knows how to add salt to the situation in order to help the two brothers be one. This will give birth to some edifying factors in the church and cause the church to be built up.

In the church, people of many different dispositions are brought together by the Lord. With such a mixture of people coming together to practice the church life, a great deal of salt is needed. The brothers do not have the position to provide the necessary salt. This portion belongs to the sisters. Whether the church will be corrupted or purified, purged, and cleansed depends on the sisters.

The above four things—loving the Lord with the first love, being broken, bearing the burden to pray, and learning how to add salt—are the main factors that help the sisters to give birth to many things in the church life. I hope that the Holy Spirit will speak to the sisters concerning these matters. (*CWWL, 1968*, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," ch. 15, pp. 89-95)

### **Study Questions:**

1. What is the main function of the sisters both in the family and in the church life?
2. What does it mean for the sisters to "conceive" and "give birth" to everything in the church life?
3. What are the four means for the sisters to give birth to things in the church life?

**References and Further Reading:**

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968*, vol. 1, “Various Messages in Los Angeles,” msg. 15.
2. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, vol. 3, “Practical Points for the Sisters Concerning the Building Up of the Church.”

## LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

### Lesson 18

#### **The Function of the Sisters in the Church Life (2) Being Submissive, Praying, and Caring for the Affairs of the Church**

Scripture Reading: Eph. 5:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:3; Acts 12:12; Rom. 16:1-2; John 12:2a

#### **I. The function of being submissive—Eph. 5:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:3:**

- A. The first function of the sisters is to be submissive; this does not involve the doing of any kind of work, but it is a real function; being submissive is much greater than any kind of doing:
  - 1. If the sisters are submissive, they are doing the greatest thing in the world; this is the greatest function on the side of the sisters—1 Cor. 11:3; cf. Gen. 3:15.
  - 2. In the entire world today, in every country, in all the schools, and in all the homes, what we see is not order and submission but rebellion upon rebellion; the entire world is rebellious toward God; the world is like a stormy ocean full of the winds of rebellion—Psa. 2:1-3.
  - 3. In the church the situation should not be like this; the church is God's chosen vessel to bear a testimony to the universe that is absolutely different from the world; in the local churches as the local expressions of the Body of Christ, there should be genuine submission—Eph. 5:21-22; 1 Pet. 5:5:
    - a. In Christ the brothers and sisters are the same; in Christ there is no difference between males and females—Gal. 3:28.
    - b. However, in the church life there is a difference between the brothers and sisters because the church life is a spectacle to be seen by men—1 Cor. 4:9.
    - c. In the eyes of the Lord, the universe today is like a theater, and the church is a spectacle in this universal theater to exhibit something, to show something, to the whole creation.
    - d. In this spectacle the sisters have been put in the position of being submissive, and the brothers have been put in the position of being the head.
    - e. The function of the church is to exhibit, to display, the matter of submission to the universe—1 Cor. 11:10; cf. Eph. 3:9-10.
- B. To be submissive requires the supply of life, the enjoyment of grace, the working of the cross, and the denial of the self—Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:16-18; Matt. 16:24.
- C. We should consecrate ourselves to the Lord not to do a work for the Lord but simply to be submissive.
- D. If the sisters in a local church are submissive, the church will be strong, living, rich, and prevailing; it is much more prevailing for the sisters to be submissive than for them to do any kind of work; this is the first lesson the sisters need to learn.

#### **II. The function of prayer—Acts 12:12:**

- A. The local church very much needs the functioning of the sisters in prayer:
  - 1. History and our experience tell us clearly that the praying function is not mainly on the brothers' side but on the sisters' side—Acts 12:12.

2. The brothers should be on the front lines battling the enemy, and the sisters need to be behind the scenes to control the situation by praying, by calling on the Lord as the highest authority to come into the situation—cf. 4:23-31.
  3. Some of the members of the church need to constantly bear the responsibility of praying for the church, which includes praying for the elders and the responsible brothers—Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:15-18; 3:14-21; Col. 1:3; 4:2-4, 12; 1 Thess. 1:2; Isa. 62:1-7.
- B. When the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, it will be easy for them to take care of their second function—the function of prayer:
1. The praying function of the sisters is based on and comes out of the real submission; the praying life comes from the submissive life—1 Cor. 11:5a.
  2. If the sisters are submissive, the Holy Spirit will burden them to pray for everything related to the church; whatever they realize, know, and understand related to the brothers and sisters, to the families, and to the spiritual situation of the church, they will turn into prayer:
    - a. If the sisters criticize only a little, this criticizing spirit will kill their prayer life.
    - b. The sisters must realize that the position the Lord has given them is to be submissive; if the sisters will fulfill this responsibility, they will have the life to continually pray for the church; the spiritual eyes in their spirit will be very keen to enter into the hearts of the saints and know their situation—cf. S.S. 7:4, note 1.
    - c. Although the sisters will know the situation of the saints, including the elders, they should never say a word; rather, they should bring all the matters to the Lord and call on the Head as the highest authority.

### **III. The function of caring for the affairs of the church—Rom. 16:1-2; cf. John 12:2a:**

- A. If the sisters are submissive and carry out their function of prayer, it will be easy for them to realize what affairs of the church they need to take care of.
- B. Nearly everything related to the church needs to be taken care of by the sisters—cf. John 12:2a:
  1. In a family the wife and mother takes care of nearly everything; it is the same with the church.
  2. All the affairs of the church need to be taken care of by the sisters; the brothers are only the head, whereas the sisters can be likened to the body, which has many members and many functions.
  3. The sisters need to take care of the brothers, the sisters, the children, the elderly saints, and the young people—Rom. 16:1-2, 13:
    - a. If the elders are inadequate in fulfilling their function, the reason is not that something is wrong with them; rather, something is wrong with the sisters, because they did not take care of the elders well.
    - b. If the sisters care for the elders properly, the elders will fulfill their function.
  4. The sisters' care will issue in the genuine building up of the church.

## Excerpts from the Ministry:

### THE FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH

#### The Function of Being Submissive

In considering how the sisters should function in the church, the first lesson the sisters need to learn is to be submissive. In fact, the greatest lesson for Christians to learn is to be submissive (Eph. 5:21-22). Being submissive requires the abundance of life, for submission is the expression of life. There is a difference between submitting and being submissive. The sisters need to learn the lesson not only of submitting but also of being submissive. If the sisters can learn this lesson, the church will be strong and will be enriched. To be submissive, the sisters need to realize what their position and standing are.

The first function of the sisters is to be submissive. This does not involve the doing of any kind of work, but it is a real function. Being submissive is much greater than any kind of doing. If the sisters are submissive, they are doing the greatest thing in the world. This is the greatest function on the side of the sisters.

First Corinthians 11:3 says, “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.” In this verse we can see the divine order. However, in the entire world today, in every country, in all the schools, and in all the homes, what we see is not order and submission but rebellion upon rebellion. The entire world is rebellious toward God. The world is like a stormy ocean full of the winds of rebellion. In the church the situation should not be like this. The church is God’s chosen vessel to bear a testimony to the universe that is absolutely different from the world. The church is sanctified, separated from the course of the world and from the current of the age. As the church we are not in the flow of the world but in the flow of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1). In the local churches as the local expressions of the Body of Christ, there should be genuine submission.

As I pointed out earlier, in Christ the brothers and the sisters are the same. In Christ there is no difference between males and females. However in the church life there is a difference between the brothers and the sisters because the church life is a spectacle to be seen by men. The Greek word for *spectacle* is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:9, which says, “God has set forth us the apostles last of all as doomed to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.” Here Paul used a metaphor, referring to the fights between criminals and wild beasts in the Roman amphitheater. In the eyes of the Lord, the universe today is like a theater, and the church is a spectacle in this universal theater to exhibit something, to show something, to the whole creation. In this spectacle the sisters have been put in the position of being submissive, and the brothers have been put in the position of being the head. The function of the church is to exhibit, to display, the matter of submission to the universe.

To be the head in a proper way and to be submissive to the head both require the riches of life. It is not easy for the brothers to function as the head, and it is also difficult for the sisters to be submissive to the brothers. The sisters need to be submissive not only outwardly but also from within their spirit, without any complaining or murmuring. If the church is to have a proper testimony in the universe, there should be no murmuring or complaining from the sisters. The sisters need to learn the lesson of being submissive. They need to have the attitude that, as sisters, they do not know what is wrong or what is right; they only know one thing—that their position in the church is to be submissive. To decide what is right and what is wrong is not their responsibility or their position. The sisters are only in the position of being submissive.

To be submissive requires the supply of life, the enjoyment of grace, the working of the cross, and the denial of the self. We should never try to be submissive by our self. We should consecrate ourselves to the Lord not to do a work for the Lord but simply to be submissive. If the sisters take care of this one matter of being submissive, the church will be strengthened, enriched, and renewed. If the sisters in a local church are submissive, the church will be strong, living, rich, and

prevailing. It is much more prevailing for the sisters to be submissive than for them to do any kind of work. This is the first lesson the sisters need to learn. This does not mean that there is no need for the sisters to fellowship with the church, but the sisters must know that their position and standing are to be submissive.

### **The Function of Prayer**

When the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, it will be easy for them to take care of their second function—the function of prayer. The local church very much needs the functioning of the sisters in prayer. The function of prayer is not mainly on the side of the brothers but on the side of the sisters. Some of the members of the church need to constantly bear the responsibility of praying for the church, which includes praying for the elders and the responsible brothers.

If the sisters are not submissive, they can never pray for the elders. Instead of praying, the sisters will criticize the elders. If the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, they will immediately have the life to pray for the elders. They will never say a word about whether the elders are right or wrong. The praying life comes from the submissive life. If we do not have the life of submission, it will be very difficult for us to have the life of prayer. There is a need for constant prayer not only for the elders but also for all the saints. If the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, they will have the life to pray for the church. If they murmur and criticize only a little, their prayer life will be cut off.

If the sisters are submissive, the Holy Spirit will burden them to pray for everything related to the church. They will never criticize anyone in the church but will always pray for them. They will always be burdened to pray for all the matters and all the persons related to the church life. Whatever they realize, know, and understand related to the brothers and sisters, to the families, and to the spiritual situation of the church, they will turn into prayer. They will never complain, murmur, or criticize; rather, they will be submissive and always burdened to pray. The praying function of the sisters is based on and comes out of the real submission. This is what the church needs from the sisters.

History and our experience tell us clearly that the praying function is not mainly on the brothers' side but on the sisters' side. In the prayer meeting in the sister's home in Acts 12, I believe that most of those who were praying were sisters. The brothers should be on the front lines battling the enemy, and the sisters need to be behind the scenes to control the situation by praying, by calling on the Lord as the highest authority to come into the situation. In carrying out the function of prayer, the sisters should not say a word to human beings but should speak to the highest authority. If the sisters criticize only a little, this criticizing spirit will kill their prayer life.

In order to function in prayer, the sisters first need to be submissive. They need to take the position and standing of being submissive. This is absolutely different from the age of the world, from the course of the world, and from the flow, the tide, of the present century. The sisters must realize that the position the Lord has given them is to be submissive. I say again that if the sisters will fulfill this responsibility, they will have the life to continually pray for the church. The spiritual eyes in their spirit will be very keen to enter into the hearts of the saints and know their situation. Although the sisters will know the situation of the saints, including the elders, they should never say a word. Rather, they should bring all the matters to the Lord and call on the Head as the highest authority. The church will receive the greatest benefit from the sisters' function.

### **The Function of Caring for the Affairs of the Church**

If the sisters are submissive and carry out their function of prayer, it will be easy for them to realize what affairs of the church they need to take care of. Nearly everything related to the church needs to be taken care of by the sisters. The sisters need to take care of the brothers, the sisters, the children, the elderly saints, and the young people. In a family the wife and mother

takes care of nearly everything. It is the same with the church. All the affairs of the church need to be taken care of by the sisters. The brothers are only the head, whereas the sisters can be likened to the body, which has many members and many functions. If the elders are inadequate in fulfilling their function, the reason is not that something is wrong with them; rather, something is wrong with the sisters, because they did not take care of the elders well. If the sisters care for the elders properly, the elders will fulfill their function. The sisters should not complain that the work among the young people is poor. The sisters need to realize that it is poor because they did not take care of the young people well. If the sisters exercise the proper care, the work among the young people will be uplifted.

In the church there may be a number of brothers and sisters who are students. In general, students are unmarried. Some of the young married sisters who are older than the students should take care of these unmarried ones. Some of the students may be spiritually weak. The young married sisters need to bring these weaker students to their home to care for them. Some of the older sisters who are mothers need to care for the single ones who are far away from their own families. They need to do something to meet their practical need. This will be a real exhibition of love and a real ministry of life to these students.

Some of the sisters also need to look after the teenagers. As a rule, teenagers like to listen to other saints but not to their parents. The sisters should take advantage of this to care for the teenagers. The teenage boys, for the most part, will not listen to their parents, but if the sisters take care of them, they will listen to whatever the sisters say to them. The teenagers in the church are the young members of the Body. Since the sisters are so much for the Body, praying constantly for the Body, they need to care for these young members. This will be a great help to the whole church, including the families.

First, the sisters need to be submissive; second, they need to fulfill their praying function. If the sisters have such a life with such a spirit, they will be able to help the teenagers. In contrast, if the sisters are constantly criticizing the elders yet still try to care for the young people, they will damage and poison the young saints. They will never minister life to them. If the church as a whole is weak and the elders are inadequate, the sisters must still keep their position of submission and fulfill their praying function. Then when the sisters take care of the teenagers, the sisters will not need to say anything. The sisters' conduct in the presence of the teenagers will minister life to them. They will be helped by the sisters' life and spiritual behavior. This will help the church very much.

The sisters also need to care for the children, and not only on the Lord's Day in the children's meeting. Some of the sisters need to be burdened to care for the children by realizing that the parents and the children in some of the families need the sisters' help. If the sisters receive this as a burden, they will know what they should do and render the proper help.

If the sisters take care of the elders, the young people, and the children, what a help they will render to the church! The sisters' care will issue in the genuine building up of the church. Moreover, the sisters will be strong in spirit, rich in life, and bold in what the Lord has done through them. Then it will be easy for the sisters to function in the general meetings of the church, even though many brothers may be present. The sisters need to increase their functioning in the church meetings, but this depends on their being submissive, fulfilling their praying function, and taking care of the things that they need to take care of in the church. (*CWWL*, 1968, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," ch. 14, "The Standing, Position, and Function of the Sisters in the Church," pp. 83-88)

**Study Questions:**

1. Why is being submissive the greatest function on the side of the sisters and greater than any kind of doing?
2. What is the relationship between the function of being submissive and the function of praying for the church?
3. What does it mean to say that the brothers are like the head but the sisters are like the body with many members and many functions?

**References and Further Reading:**

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968*, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," ch. 14.

