

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SISTERS

Message One

The Need for Serving Sisters with a Serving Spirit in the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Rom. 16:1, 3, 12-13

- I. In order for God to fulfill His purpose and to accomplish His economy, there is a great need for the function of the sisters in the church life – John 12:1-9:**
- A. We need to see the position of the sisters in the record of the New Testament:
 - 1. To bring forth Christ – Matt. 1:21.
 - 2. To love the Lord – John 12:3.
 - 3. To minister to the Lord with material things – Luke 8:3.
 - 4. Seeing and experiencing the death of Christ – John 20:1-2, 11, 13.
 - 5. Making Christ sweet and enjoyable to others – John 12:3.
 - 6. Knowing and experiencing the pneumatic Christ in resurrection – John 20:11-18.
 - 7. Praying – Acts 1:14; 12:12.
 - 8. Serving in the church – Rom. 16:1, 3, 12, 13.
 - 9. Needing to exercise to think the same thing in the Lord – Phil. 4:2-3.
 - B. Romans 16 is a chapter on the practical church life; from this chapter we can see that the practical church life depends very much on the sisters.
 - C. Phoebe, who was both a deaconess and a patroness, represents the serving spirit in the practical church life:
 - 1. A deaconess is a serving one, one who serves.
 - 2. A patroness, which is a word of dignity, denotes one who helps, sustains, and supplies.
 - 3. In a sense, the church is a hospital, needing many sisters to be nurses to care for the sick ones.
 - 4. The Holy Spirit is the Patron (Gk. *Parakletos*) and the serving sisters are patronesses.
 - D. Every local church needs a group of serving sisters who are like Phoebe.
 - E. In the church in Shanghai, which was the largest church in China at the time of Watchman Nee, the serving sisters rendered ninety percent of the building up of the church.
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. In the miniature of the church life in John 12, Mary and Martha both served in different ways while Lazarus testified.
 - 3. The second vital aspect implied in Paul's recommendation of Phoebe is that her service was in the church and for the church.
 - F. The second sister mentioned in Romans 16 is Prisca, or Priscilla:
 - 1. She was mentioned before Aquila, implying that she may have been stronger in the church life than her husband, and may have taken the lead to take care of the church.
 - 2. When they were in Ephesus, the church met in their home, and when they were in Rome, the church met in their home.

3. Paul said that these two risked their own necks not only for him, but also for the churches.
 4. In a family, if the wife does not take the lead to have the practical church life, the husband would always be frustrated.
 5. In matters such as teaching, making decisions, and giving directions, the sisters should not take the lead, but in serving the church, the sisters may take the lead.
 6. In every family, if the wife takes the lead to have the church life, then it is easy for the whole family to be in the church life.
- G. In Romans 16:6 and 12, Paul says that Mary was laboring for the apostles and that Persis labored very much; this labor is serving.
- H. We must come up to the standard of Romans 16; there is a shortage of the serving spirit among the sisters.

II. The sisters must learn to speak words that minister life to others rather than idle words or gossip – 1 Tim. 5:13; Matt. 12:36:

- A. If all the sisters would be burdened with the serving spirit, they would not have the time, the strength, the energy, or the heart to talk about anything that does not minister life to others.
- B. In order to be a proper serving one, you must learn not to talk, not to talk at all, but rather to pray.
- C. We all must learn to not only walk according to the mingled spirit (Rom. 8:4), but also to talk according to the mingled spirit.

III. A major service of the sisters in the church life is prayer:

- A. The older sisters should be burdened to intercede for the younger sisters without them even knowing about it.
- B. This kind of intercessory prayer is a real service to the church.
- C. The brothers, especially the elders and coworkers, very much need the prayer of the sisters:
 1. When Peter was imprisoned in Acts 12, there was a prayer meeting in Mary's home to pray for Peter.
 2. When you see a need in the church life, do not talk about it; rather, bear the burden to pray.
 3. The best way to serve is to pray.

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Message Two

The Need for Spiritual Mothers in the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Titus 2:4; Rom. 16:13; 2 Tim. 1:5

- I. We need many spiritual mothers in the church life – Rom. 16:13; Titus 2:4:**
- A. Originally, John was not Mary's son, and Mary was not John's mother, but because of the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, a life transfer took place – John 19:26:
 - 1. According to the flesh, John was Mary's nephew, and Mary was John's aunt.
 - 2. But according to the spirit, the nephew became a son and the aunt became a real spiritual mother.
 - B. The mother of Rufus became a mother to the apostle Paul – Rom. 16:13.
 - C. Many sisters could each take care of two or three spiritual children.
 - D. Often times children will not listen to their parents but they are willing to listen to someone other than their parents.
 - E. Taking care of others in this way will cause you to grow in life and make you mature in life:
 - 1. For this, we must experience the cross to cross out our natural life.
 - 2. Our natural love and fleshly emotion may become a snare.
 - F. Caring for others as a spiritual mother is a protection and a support to the sisters:
 - 1. Without some spiritual children to be a limitation, protection, and support, a sister could easily fall away.
 - 2. The children will keep the mothers from making mistakes.
- II. In the church life we should have the real and practical family relationship in which we take care of each other's children.**
- A. If we do not do this, our second generation will realize that our brotherhood and sisterhood is not genuine.
 - B. By being a spiritual mother you will be exposed how you love yourself, how selfish you are and how you care only for yourself.
 - C. These things would not be exposed until you care for some spiritual children.
 - D. Seventy percent of the practical building up of the church depends on the sisters.
 - E. We all must pray that the Lord will have mercy upon the church that all the sisters will be Phobes and spiritual mothers to others.

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Message Three

The Life Useful to God for the Fulfillment of His Purpose (1)

Scripture Reading: Exo. 2:1-8; Acts 7:21

- I. In Exodus chapter two, God prepared a savior to deliver His people from Egypt through the female life:**
- A. In chapter one of Exodus Pharaoh held the children of Israel in slavery and also sought to kill all the baby boys born to Hebrew mothers.
 - B. The male life signifies the life for the fulfillment of God's purpose and the female life signifies the life for man's pleasure.
 - C. In times of crisis, God uses the female life for the fulfillment of His purpose; He uses the female life to maintain the male life for His purpose.
 - D. God sovereignly used Pharaoh's own daughter to preserve the most important male born to the children of Israel in Egypt – Exo. 2:2; cf. Phil. 4:22.
 - E. All the believers in Christ, both brothers and sisters, should be females in the eyes of God, those with a dependent life, a life utterly dependent on God.
- II. Several females were used by God in this chapter; the first being Moses' mother, a daughter of Levi, who hid him among the reeds – 2:1:**
- A. Although Numbers 26 tells us the name of Moses' mother (Jochebed –vv. 58-59), Exodus 2 does not, because the emphasis is not on the person, but on the female life.
 - B. The second female was Miriam, the sister of Moses, who suggested to Pharaoh's daughter that his mother be asked to nurse him – 2:3-4, 7-8.
 - C. Then the female slave of Pharaoh's daughter was sent by her to fetch the ark.
 - D. Acts 7:21 says, Pharaoh's daughter took him up and nurtured him as her own son.
 - E. During certain critical times, the only life that can be used by God is the female life that stands with God and is dependent upon Him:
 - 1. We are living in such a critical time, a time when the female life is urgently needed.
 - 2. Anyone who presumes to be a male will become a "Pharaoh;" the male life that is independent of God is not useful.
- III. In Exodus chapter two God used a number of females to accomplish His purpose of preparing a savior:**
- A. The mother of Moses gave birth to him and nursed him.
 - B. The sister of Moses watched over him when he was in the ark and served as a connecting link between Pharaoh's daughter and Moses' mother.
 - C. The female slave of Pharaoh's daughter fetched the ark.

- D. Pharaoh's daughter raised Moses as her own son; she was also probably the one through whom Moses learned "all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22).
- E. Today we also need all the functions of the female life: the conceiving, bearing, and nursing function; the function of watching, recommending, and establishing the proper connections; the function of helping and serving; and the function of raising, teaching, and training.
- F. Through these four kinds of female life, Moses was born, raised, and trained for God's purpose.
- G. For the carrying out of His economy today, the Lord needs these four kinds of female life.

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Message Four

The Life Useful to God for the Fulfillment of His Purpose (2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:10; Isa. 54:5; Hosea 2:9

- I. God's intention is to have His people build His dwelling place on earth and to be formed into an army to fight for God's interests on earth:**
- A. To be useful to God is related to building up His dwelling place and fighting for His interests on earth.
 - B. The life useful to God in these matters is the female life, the life dependent on God.
 - C. This is directly related to the heading up of all things in Christ – Eph. 1:10.
- II. Christ is the unique male in the universe and He is also the unique Husband; He is the only head and only He has an independent life – Isa. 54:5; Hosea 2:9:**
- A. As females, the married sisters should not usurp the headship, nor should they live in an independent way.
 - B. With respect to the Lord, the married brothers also should not usurp His headship or live independently from Him.
 - C. There is a universal headship in God's economy:
 - 1. God is the Head of Christ – 1 Cor. 11:3.
 - 2. Christ, under the headship of God, is the head of every man.
 - 3. Man, under the headship of Christ, is the head of the woman.
 - 4. The four Gospels reveal that Christ was always under the headship of God – John 5:19, 30.
 - D. Man, typifying Christ, signifies the independent life.
 - E. Woman, typifying man, signifies the dependent life.
 - F. Every 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:
 - 1. Man's independence of God is rebellion.
 - 2. If a woman lives an independent life, she becomes a real “male;” today a great many women have become “males.”
 - G. To live an independent life is to live by the tree of knowledge, but to live a dependent life is to live by the tree of life – John 15:5:
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. We can never “graduate” from eating, drinking and breathing – John 6:57.
- III. At the age of forty, Moses lived an independent “male” life; acting independently of God he exercised his natural strength to smite an Egyptian:**

- A. Moses was then set aside by God for forty years so that he could be trained to live a dependent, “female” life.
 - B. From the age of eighty until the age of one hundred twenty, Moses lived a female life:
 - 1. When he confronted Pharaoh, he was a “female” depending on God.
 - 2. Only once, when he struck the rock the second time, was he independent of God – Num. 20:7-13.
 - 3. Because Moses acted as a male on that occasion, he offended the Lord and was denied the privilege of entering into the good land.
 - C. Moses did not consider himself as the leader of Israel; when the children of Israel rebelled against him, he considered it rebellion against God, not against himself:
 - 1. Moses simply went to the Lord and presented the problems to Him.
 - 2. In this way, he honored the Lord as the head, as the unique male, and he lived a female life, a life of dependence on God.
 - D. It is the female life that is useful to God in spiritual warfare, in fighting for the kingdom of God on earth:
 - 1. If you are living an independent male life, you are useless as far as spiritual warfare is concerned.
 - 2. Whenever God’s people live a female life, He is able to accomplish His purpose through them.
- IV. In the Lord’s economy and in His move today in His recovery, we all must be watchful with fear and trembling not to act independently of God; may we all see that God can only use us if we are “females” depending on Him at all times and for all things.**

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Message Five

The Testimonies of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee

I. Watchman Nee:

Shepherded in the gospel by Miss Groves:

“About this time I met a Western missionary, Miss Groves (Margaret Barber’s coworker), who asked me how many persons I had brought to the Lord in the year following my salvation. I bowed my head, hoping to forestall further questioning, and shamefully admitted in a low voice, that, although I had preached the gospel to my schoolmates, they did not listen, and when they did listen, they would not believe. My attitude was that, since they would not heed the gospel, they would have to bear the consequences. She spoke to me frankly, “You are unable to lead people to the Lord because there is something between God and you. It may be some hidden sins not yet completely dealt with, or something for which you are indebted to someone.” I admitted that such things existed, and she asked if I were willing to settle them immediately. I answered that I was willing.

She also asked how I went about bearing testimony. I replied that I pulled people in at random and began to speak, regardless of whether they were listening or not. She said, “This is not right. You must speak to God first, before you speak to people. You should pray to God, make a list of your schoolmates’ names, and ask God which of them you should pray for. Pray for them daily, mentioning them by name. Then when God affords the opportunity, you should bear testimony to them.”

After that conversation, I immediately began to deal with my sins by making restitution, paying debts, being reconciled with my schoolmates, and confessing offenses to others. I also entered in my notebook the names of about seventy schoolmates and began praying for them daily, mentioning their names individually before God. Sometimes I prayed for them once every hour, praying silently, even in class. When opportunity arose, I would bear testimony to them and try to persuade them to believe in the Lord Jesus. My schoolmates often said jokingly, “Mr. Preacher is coming. Let us listen to his preaching.” The fact was that they had no intention to listen.

I called on Ms. Groves again and said to her, “I have fully carried out your instructions. Why is it not effective? She replied, “Do not be disappointed. Keep praying until some are saved.” By the Lord’s grace, I continued to pray daily. When opportunity arose, I bore testimony and preached the gospel. Thank the Lord, after several months, all but one of the seventy persons whose names were in my notebook were saved.

(Watchman Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age, Chapter 7)

Learning the lesson of submission from M.E. Barber:

In 1923 seven of us worked together as coworkers. Two of us took the lead, a coworker who was five years my senior and myself. We had a co-workers' meeting every Friday in which the other five were often forced to listen to the arguing between the leading two. We were all young then, and each had his own way of thinking. I often charged the elder co-worker with being wrong, and vice-versa. Since my temperament had not been dealt with, I frequently lost my temper. Today in 1936 I do sometimes laugh, but I seldom laughed at that time. In our controversies I admit that many times I was wrong but he was also at times in the wrong. It was easy for me to forgive my own faults but not easy to forgive others. After having a dispute on Friday, I would go to Sister Barber on Saturday and accuse the other co-worker. I would say, "I told that co-worker that he should act in a certain way, but he would not listen. You should speak to him." Sister Barber replied, "He is five years older than you; you should listen to him and obey him." I answered, "Am I to listen to him whether he is reasonable or not?" She said, "Yes! The Scriptures say that the younger should obey the elder." I replied, "I cannot possibly do this. A Christian should act according to reason." She answered, "Whether there is reason or not, you need not care. The Scriptures say that the younger should obey the elder." I was angry at heart that the Bible would say such a thing. I wanted to give vent to my indignation, but I could not.

Each time following the controversy on Friday, I would go to her to state my grievances, but she would again quote the Scriptures, demanding that I obey the elder. Sometimes I wept Friday evening after the dispute on Friday afternoon. Then I would go to Sister Barber the next day to state my grievances, hoping that she would vindicate me. But I would weep again coming home Saturday evening. I wished I had been born a few years earlier. In one controversy, I had very good arguments. I felt that when I pointed them out, she would see how my co-worker was wrong and would support me. But she said, "Whether that co-worker is wrong or not is another matter. While you are accusing your brother before me, are you like one who is bearing the cross? Are you like a lamb?" When she questioned me in this way, I felt very ashamed and could never forget it. My speech and attitude that day revealed that I was indeed not like one bearing the cross, nor like a lamb.

In such circumstances I learned to obey an elder co-worker. In that year and a half, I learned the most precious lesson in my life. My head was filled with ideas, but God wanted to see me enter spiritual reality. In that year and a half, I came to realize what it is to bear the cross. Today in 1936 we have some fifty co-workers. Had it not been for that lesson of obedience which I learned in that year and a half, I fear that I could not work together with anyone. God put me in those circumstances that I might learn to be under the restraint of the Holy Spirit. In those eighteen months I had no opportunity to put forward my proposals. I could only weep and painfully suffer. But had it not been for this, I would never have realized how difficult it was for me to be dealt with. God wanted to polish me and remove all my sharp, projecting edges. This has been a difficult thing to accomplish. How I thank and praise God, whose grace has brought me through!

Now, I must speak a word to the young co-workers. If you cannot stand the trials of the cross, you cannot become a useful instrument. It is only the spirit of a lamb that God takes delight in: the gentleness, the humility, and the peace. Your ambition, lofty purpose, and ability are all useless in the sight of God. I have been down this path and must confess my shortcomings. All that pertains to me is in the hand of God. It is not a question of right or wrong; it is a question of whether or not one is like the bearer of the cross. In the church, right and wrong have no place; all that counts is bearing the cross and accepting its breaking. This produces the overflowing of God's life and accomplishes His will.

(Watchman Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age, Chapter 3)

II. Witness Lee:

Cared for by his mother

My mother's maternal grandfather was a Southern Baptist, who in turn brought my mother into Christianity. She studied in the American Southern Baptist mission school and as a teenager was baptized into the Southern Baptist Church about 1885. I was born in 1905. She brought me in contact with her Baptist Church in Chefoo. I studied in the Southern Baptist Chinese elementary school and in the English mission college operated by the American Presbyterians in Chefoo. Though I attended the Southern Baptist services and Sunday school in my youth, I was not saved and was never baptized by them. Eventually, for about five years, I ceased attending any Christian services.

Prayed for by his sister

After my second sister experienced salvation she prayed for me and introduced me to a very fine Chinese pastor of the Chinese Independent Church. This pastor paid me a number of visits, encouraging me to attend his Sunday morning services. After a long delay on my part, on the second day of the Chinese New Year in 1925, I decided early in the morning to attend the services of that Chinese Independent Church. After about two and a half months, they baptized me into their membership by sprinkling. But it was not until a short time later that I was actually saved and turned to the Lord through the preaching of Sister Peace Wang in April of the same year.

Saved through Peace Wang

At that time I was exceedingly ambitious as a young man for my education and my future. But after I was saved under Sister Peace Wang's preaching that afternoon, while I was walking home, I stopped and prayed to God, according to Sister Wang's message, somewhat as follows: "God, I don't like being usurped by Satan as Pharaoh, through the world as Egypt; I would like to serve you and preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus through the villages as any cost for my whole life."

(Watchman Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age, Chapter 31)