

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

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LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 1

The Importance of the Sisters in the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; 11:2-16; Matt. 1:16, 18;
John 12:3; 20:1, 11-18; Luke 8:2-3; Acts 12:12

- I. In Christ, who is the Head of the Body, there is no difference between male and female, but in the Body there is a difference between male and female, that is, between the brothers and the sisters—Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; 11:2-16:**
- A. First Corinthians 11 speaks definitely concerning the difference between man and woman, especially in the matter of headship—11:2-16.
 - B. This indicates that in the church the difference between the brothers and the sisters still exists; in Christ this difference does not exist, but in the church, in the Body, the difference between male and female remains.
 - C. We should not think that because the difference between male and female still exists in the Body, the standing of the sisters is not important; if this is our thought we are wrong.
- II. If we read the entire New Testament, we will realize that in the church life, from a certain perspective, the standing and function of the sisters are more important than those of the brothers:**
- A. The three main steps taken by the Lord Jesus were His incarnation, His crucifixion, and His resurrection; related to each of these three steps, a sister was involved:
 - 1. The Lord was incarnated through Mary His mother—Matt. 1:16, 18.
 - 2. Just before His crucifixion Mary, the sister of Martha, anointed the Lord's feet for His burial—John 12:3.
 - 3. After His resurrection the first one who saw the Lord Jesus was Mary the Magdalene—20:1, 11-18.
 - 4. The sisters need to realize that they are the ones to bring the Lord's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to people.
 - B. According to Luke 8:2-3, while the Lord Jesus was on earth, it was not a group of brothers who ministered material things to the Lord and His disciples, but a group of sisters.
 - C. In Acts 12:12, after Peter was released from prison, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, where a number of saints were praying; the prayer meeting held in the sister's home ministered much life to the church in that kind of situation.
 - D. In Romans 16 Paul mentions the names of a number of sisters in his greetings to the saints—Rom. 16:1-3, 6, 12-13.
 - E. If we read all the New Testament Epistles until the end of the book of Revelation, we will realize that the standing and function of the sisters can be more important than those of the brothers:
 - 1. We can liken the brothers to the bones of the physical body, and the sisters, to the blood.
 - 2. To have a strong physical body, we need the bones as a frame, and we need the blood to support the life of the body; to our body the blood is more important than the bones.
 - F. If the Body is to be strong, healthy, and sound, the sisters must be right:
 - 1. Just as it is serious when there is a problem with our blood, whenever there is something wrong among the sisters, there is a serious disease in the Body.

2. Thus, whether a local church is strong or weak, healthy or sick, depends mainly on the sisters:
 - a. Regardless of how fine the brothers are, if the sisters are a problem, the church will be troubled; on the other hand, if there are no problems among the sisters, there will be no problems in the church; the sisters are the factors of calm and peace, and they can also be factors of trouble and turmoil—Rom. 16:1-2; Phil. 4:2-3.
 - b. Whether or not the church goes on depends more on the sisters than on the brothers; as long as the sisters are in a healthy spiritual condition, the church will go on very well.
 3. This is why we have the burden to point out that the sisters' standing and function in the church are of tremendous importance.
- G. The Lord is the source of all things, including us human beings, but in a practical, human way mothers are the source of mankind; without mothers, mankind would not be able to continue (1 Cor. 11:12); in the same way, the sisters are the root, the source, of the church:
1. Just as without mothers, mankind would be terminated, the continuation of the church, the corporate new man in God's eternal purpose (Eph. 2:15-16), depends very much on the sisters:
 - a. Human society and families depend more on the mother than on the father; in one sense, we need a good mother more than we need a good father.
 - b. A good father can do much good for his children, but what he does is not so practical and subjective.
 - c. The real, secret, practical, and subjective help comes not from the father's side but from the mother's; if some children lose their father yet still have a good mother, they will still be able to be good children, but if they lose their mother, they lose their source of proper help.
 2. Although the man occupies the higher position, in a secret, actual, practical, and subjective way the real situation of the family depends more on the female side; in the church it is the same.
 3. The sisters are a crucial factor in the church life—Rom. 16:1-4, 6, 12-13.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE STANDING, POSITION, AND FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH

Galatians 3:28 says, "There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In this verse we can identify three contrasting pairs: Jew and Greek, slave and free man, and male and female. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 there are two contrasting pairs: Jews and Greeks and slaves and free. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ there cannot be Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, male and female, whereas 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that in the church, in the Body, there is no distinction between Jews and Greeks and between slaves and free. This verse does not mention males and females. Based on these two verses we can see that in Christ, who is the Head of the Body, there is no difference between male and female, but in the Body there is a difference between male and female, that is, between the brothers and the sisters. First Corinthians 11 speaks definitely concerning the difference between man and woman, especially in the matter of headship (vv. 2-16). This indicates that in the church the difference between the brothers and the sisters still exists. In Christ this difference does not exist, but in the church, in the Body, the difference between male and female remains.

THE STANDING OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH

My reason for pointing this out is to say that the sisters have an important standing in the church. We should not think that because the difference between male and female still exists in the Body, the standing of the sisters is not important. If this is our thought we are wrong. If we read the entire New Testament, we will realize that in the church life, from a certain perspective the standing and function of the sisters are more important than those of the brothers.

The three main steps taken by the Lord Jesus were His incarnation, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. Related to each of these three steps, a sister was involved, and all three sisters were named Mary. The Lord was incarnated through Mary His mother (Matt. 1:16, 18). Just before His crucifixion Mary, the sister of Martha, anointed the Lord's feet for His burial (John 12:3). After His resurrection the first one who saw the Lord Jesus was Mary the Magdalene (20:1, 11-18). Therefore, three sisters were very involved with the three major steps of the Lord.

It is clear that for the Lord's incarnation, a sister needed to be involved, but before His death, why was it not a brother who poured the ointment upon the Lord's body? And at His resurrection, why was it not Peter or John or some other brother who was the first to see the Lord? This is very meaningful. The sisters need to realize that they are the ones to bring the Lord's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to people.

Furthermore, according to Luke 8:2-3, while the Lord Jesus was on earth, it was not a group of brothers who ministered material things to the Lord and His disciples, but a group of sisters. In Acts 12:12, after Peter was released from prison, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, where a number of saints were praying. The prayer meeting held in the sister's home ministered much life to the church in that kind of situation.

In Romans 16 Paul mentions the names of a number of sisters in his greetings to the saints. If we read all the New Testament Epistles until the end of the book of Revelation, we will realize that the standing and function of the sisters can be more important than those of the brothers. Of course, this does not mean that the brothers are useless. We can liken the brothers to the bones of the physical body, and the sisters, to the blood. To have a strong physical body, we need the bones as a frame, and we need the blood to support the life of the body. To our body the blood is more important than the bones.

Based on my experience in the church life, I have learned that problems among the sisters are more serious than problems among the brothers. If there are some problems among the brothers but no problems among the sisters, that situation is not so serious. In a local church I am most afraid of problems among the sisters. Just as it is serious when there is a problem with our blood, whenever there is something wrong among the sisters, there is a serious disease in the Body. If the Body is to be strong, healthy, and sound, the sisters must be right. Thus, whether a local church is strong or weak, healthy or sick, depends mainly on the sisters. This is why I have the burden to point out that the sisters' standing and function in the church are of tremendous importance. (*CWWL*, 1968, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," msg. 14, pp. 81-83)

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

It is very clear that the brothers and the sisters are of two categories. The Lord is the source of all things, including us human beings, but in a practical, human way mothers are the source of mankind (1 Cor. 11:12). Without mothers, mankind would not be able to continue. In the same way, the sisters are the root, the source, of the church. Just as without mothers, mankind would be terminated, the continuation of the church, the corporate new man in God's eternal purpose (Eph. 2:15-16), depends very much on the sisters. Human society and families depend more on the mother than on the father. In one sense we need a good mother more than we need a good father. A good father can do much good for his children, but what he does is not so practical and subjective. The real, secret, practical, and subjective help comes not from the father's side but from the mother's. If some children lose their father yet still have a good mother, they will still be able to be good children, but if they lose their

mother, they lose their source of proper help.

Although man occupies the higher position, in a secret, actual, practical, and subjective way the real situation of the family depends more on the female side. In the church it is the same. Regardless of how fine the brothers are, if the sisters are a problem, the church will be troubled. On the other hand, if there are no problems among the sisters, there will be no problems in the church. The sisters are the factors of calm and peace, and they can also be factors of trouble and turmoil.

The younger sisters do not trouble the church as much as the older sisters do. A teenage sister may be a little naughty, but this kind of naughtiness will not cause much trouble to the church. However, the older a sister becomes, the more she may be a problem to the church. The troubles in the church often come from the older, more experienced ones. This is a practical fact.

I say this not to belittle anyone. We respect all the mothers. Humanly, they are the source of mankind, and in the Bible they are admired and uplifted as the mothers of the children of God, the Lord's people, the saints (Rom. 16:13). Whether or not the church goes on depends more on the sisters than on the brothers. As long as the sisters are in a healthy spiritual condition, the church will go on very well. However, if the sisters are not healthy, there will be problems in the church no matter how strong the brothers are. The sisters are a crucial factor in the church life. (CWWL, 1975-1976, vol. 1, "The Crucial Function of the Sisters in the Church Life," pp. 129- 130)

Study Questions:

1. Explain the difference between the consideration of male and female in Christ in contrast to in the Body, the church?
2. From what perspective is the standing and function of the sisters in the church life more important than that of the brothers?
3. Using the illustration of blood in the body and motherhood in the family, explain how the function of the sisters is a crucial factor in the church life.

References and Further Reading:

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968*, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," msg. 14.
2. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, vol. 1, "The Crucial Function of the Sisters in the Church Life."

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 2

The Importance of the Sisters in The Accomplishment of God's Economy

Scripture Reading: Gen. 3:1-6; 3:15; Luke 1:35; Matt. 26:6-8; John 19:25; 20:1, 16-17;
Luke 8:1-3; John 11:1, 5; Acts 1:13-14; 12:12; Rom. 16:1-3, 6, 12-13; Phil. 4:2-3a

I. In God's administration of His economy, a very important position is assigned to the women:

- A. After man was created, what happened to man was very much related to the woman:
 - 1. The subtle serpent, the enemy of God, came in through the woman—Gen. 3:1-6.
 - 2. Therefore, God chose to defeat the enemy also through woman—through the same channel by which he came—v. 15.
 - 3. Thus, the fall occurred through the woman, and the deliverance was promised also through the woman; this shows us the importance of the sisters' position in the Bible.
- B. By this we can see that whether or not God can have His way today in His purpose depends very much upon what the sisters will do.
- C. If the women, or the sisters, will function properly, God will have a success; otherwise, there will surely be a failure or a loss.

II. The mention of six Marys in the New Testament is very meaningful; this simply means that to fulfill God's purpose and accomplish His economy, there is a great need for the sisters; in a sense, the sisters are more important for the accomplishment of God's economy than the brothers:

- A. Do you realize that there are at least six Marys mentioned in the New Testament?
 - 1. The first Mary is the mother of the Lord Jesus; the story of the life of the Lord Jesus begins with this woman—Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:34-35.
 - 2. The second Mary is the sister of Lazarus; she loved the Lord Jesus and followed Him, ministering to Him—John 12:2-3.
 - 3. The third Mary is Mary the Magdalene, out from whom seven demons were cast out (Luke 8:2); while the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, she, with a few sisters, were standing there with Him; then on the morning of the resurrection, she went to the tomb—20:1, 11, 14-18.
 - 4. The fourth Mary, the wife of Clopas, with the other sisters, saw the death of Christ—19:25.
 - 5. The fifth Mary was the mother of John Mark; after Peter was released from prison, he went to Mary's home, where many saints were gathered together praying—Acts 12:12.
 - 6. The sixth Mary is in Romans 16:6; here Paul says to greet the Mary who labored much for the church; she was laboring over so many in the church life.
- B. One Mary gave birth to the Lord Jesus; the first position of the sisters is related to the birth of the Lord; the purpose of the Lord's birth is to bring the Lord into the human race:
 - 1. All the sisters must realize that their position in the church is to bring forth Christ to people; whatever you do must bring forth Christ.
 - 2. You have to pray that the Spirit will come upon you and that the power of the Most High will overshadow you so that you can bring forth Christ—Luke 1:35.
 - 3. If you are serving in a service group, you must bring forth Christ; if you visit the saints or have fellowship with the sisters, you must bring forth Christ to them.

- C. According to the Gospels, the Marys were the ones who loved the Lord and followed Him; they ministered to the Lord out of their possessions; this is the sisters' position—Luke 8:1-3:
 - 1. Your position is first to bring forth Christ to people and then to love the Lord Jesus.
 - 2. We have to realize that the sisters represent the loving ones; you need to love the Lord Jesus, to follow Him, and to minister to Him.
- D. Among so many Marys, some stood by the cross watching and observing the Lord Jesus when He was being crucified—John 19:25:
 - 1. They saw the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus; all the sisters have to see such a portrait of the crucified Lord Jesus.
 - 2. In other words, the sisters have to take a position that experiences the death of Christ— cf. Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:11-12.
- E. Furthermore, you need to do something that makes the burial of the Lord Jesus so sweet; it must be that whenever you mention the name of the Lord Jesus, people can sense something so sweet—Mark 16:1.
- F. Moreover, the sisters must discover something of the resurrection and be first to know the Lord's ascension—John 20:11-18:
 - 1. Mary saw the empty tomb and went to tell Peter; she did not teach Peter, but she did pass on the revelation.
 - 2. In the church we do not need the sisters to teach, but we do need the sisters to see the revelation and to discover some of the things related to the Lord's resurrection life.
- G. In Acts there were no sisters taking the lead in the church, but they were praying:
 - 1. When the twelve were praying for ten days before the time of Pentecost, the sisters also were there—Acts 1:14.
 - 2. In Acts 12 the prayer meeting was even in a sister's home—12:12.
 - 3. All the sisters in the church have to learn to pray; if you see a problem, do not talk about it and do not gossip about it—pray.
 - 4. If you expect your local church to be strong, you must be praying sisters.
- H. Romans 16 mentions so many laboring and ministering sisters, the first of whom is Phoebe; Phoebe was a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea; we need many sisters who will minister in the churches, serving to such an extent they are called deaconesses—Rom. 16:1, 3, 6.
- I. By putting all these verses together, we can see that there is no hint that a position was assigned to the sisters to take the lead, to do a great work, or to teach; there was no such position assigned to the sisters.
- J. Rather, the sisters should bring the Lord Jesus to people by the principle of incarnation, love Him, follow Him, minister to Him, experience His death, make Him so sweet and lovely to all the people, see His resurrected life, know the ascension, and then in the church always bear the burden of prayer and labor.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE SIX MARYS

In God's administration of His economy, a very important position is assigned to the women. After man was created, what happened to man was very much related to the woman. By this we can see that whether or not God can have His way today in His purpose depends very much upon what the sisters will do. If the women, or the sisters, will function properly, God will have a success; otherwise, there will surely be a failure or a loss. After the fall of man, God came in, not to do something through the man but to do something through the woman. The subtle serpent, the enemy of God, came in through the woman. Therefore, God chose to defeat the enemy also through woman—through the same channel by which he came. In Genesis 3 the serpent came in through the woman, and in the same

chapter God promised that this woman would bring forth a seed who would bruise the head of the serpent (v. 15). Thus, the fall occurred through the woman, and the deliverance was promised also through the woman. This shows us the importance of the sisters' position in the Bible.

The first account in the New Testament concerning a direct relationship with the Lord is related to a woman—Mary. The story of the life of the Lord Jesus begins with this woman. Of course, we know that this is the fulfillment of the promise given in Genesis 3:15. In Genesis God promised that the woman would bring forth a seed who would destroy the damaging serpent. This promise is fulfilled at the very beginning of the New Testament.

Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus is not the only Mary mentioned in the New Testament. Do you realize that there are at least six Marys mentioned in the New Testament? The first Mary is the mother of the Lord Jesus, and the second Mary is the sister of Lazarus. The third Mary is Mary the Magdalene, out from whom seven demons were cast out. While the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, a few sisters were standing there with Him. Besides Mary the Lord's mother, there were two other Marys. One was Mary the Magdalene, and the Gospel of John tells us that the other Mary was the wife of Clopas (19:25). This fourth Mary, with the other sisters, saw the death of Christ. On the morning of the resurrection, Mary the Magdalene went to the tomb. The Gospel of John mentions only that Mary the Magdalene went there, but the other Gospels tell us that there was another Mary (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). This other Mary was the first Mary, the Lord's mother (Matt. 13:55). The fifth Mary was the mother of John Mark. In Acts 12:12, after Peter was released from prison, he went to Mary's home, where many saints were gathered together praying. The sixth Mary is in Romans 16:6. Here Paul says to greet the Mary who labored much for the church.

These six Marys are very meaningful. One Mary gave birth to the Lord Jesus; another loved the Lord Jesus and followed Him, ministering to Him; two other Marys saw the Lord's death and prepared something for His burial, to anoint His body. They saw the resurrection and also received the vision of the ascension of Christ. Another Mary was related to the church, praying all the time. Finally, a Mary was laboring over so many in the church life. In the New Testament there are not so many Peters or Johns, but there are so many Marys. This simply means that to fulfill God's purpose and accomplish His economy, there is a great need for the sisters. In a sense, the sisters are more important for the accomplishment of God's economy than the brothers.

The little family at Bethany spoken of in John 12:1-9 is a type of the church. That family was composed of one brother and two sisters. This means that it consisted of one-third brothers and two-thirds sisters. A strong, normal, proper church should have one-third brothers and two-thirds sisters. In the church life we need more sisters.

We need to see the position of the sisters in the record of the New Testament. The first position of the sisters is related to the birth of the Lord. What is the purpose of the Lord's birth? It is to bring the Lord into the human race. All the sisters must realize that their position in the church is to bring forth Christ to people. Whatever you do must bring forth Christ. You have to pray that the Spirit will come upon you and that the power of the Most High will overshadow you so that you can bring forth Christ. If you are serving in a service group, you must bring forth Christ. If you visit the saints or have fellowship with the sisters, you must bring forth Christ to them. It is not just a matter of working for the Lord; it is a matter of bringing forth Christ.

According to the Gospels, the Marys were the ones who loved the Lord and followed Him. They ministered to the Lord out of their possessions. Sisters, this is your position. Your position is first to bring forth Christ to people and then to love the Lord Jesus. Can you tell the Lord that you love Him more than your family and your children? We have to realize that the sisters represent the loving ones. You need to love the Lord Jesus, to follow Him, and to minister to Him. One day when I was reading Luke 8:3, I was happy when I saw that among those ministering sisters, one was the wife of a high officer of Herod. Surely she had a high position and many material things. Yet she did not love other things; she loved the Lord. She not only loved the Lord but also followed Him and ministered what she

had to the Lord and to the disciples. No matter what your position is, you have to follow the Lord, love the Lord, and minister something that you have to the Lord.

The New Testament also shows us that among so many Marys, some stood by the cross watching and observing the Lord Jesus when He was being crucified. They saw the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. All the sisters have to see such a portrait of the crucified Lord Jesus. In other words, the sisters have to take a position that experiences the death of Christ.

Furthermore, you need to do something that makes the burial of the Lord Jesus so sweet. It must be that whenever you mention the name of the Lord Jesus, people can sense something so sweet. If you do not have such a love, although you may mention His name in the same way, there will be no sweetness. There is a big difference. In the New Testament there is no position assigned to the sisters for taking the lead or doing a big work or being a great speaker. Rather, the position that has been assigned to the sisters is to love Him, to follow Him, to minister to Him, to experience His death, and to make Him so sweet to everyone. He was the rejected One, the condemned One, the crucified One, yet to you He is the lovable One. Your portion is to experience the death of the Lord Jesus and to make the rejected Jesus so sweet to everyone.

Moreover, the sisters must discover something of the resurrection and be first to know the Lord's ascension (John 20:11-18). The Lord's resurrection was not discovered first by Peter but by Mary. The brothers received the revelation from a sister. Mary saw the empty tomb and went to tell Peter. She did not teach Peter, but she did pass on the revelation. In the church we do not need the sisters to teach, but we do need the sisters to see the revelation and to discover some of the things related to the Lord's resurrection life.

I am hoping that in the coming days many sisters could stand up in the meetings, testifying, "Hallelujah! This morning I saw the empty tomb! I saw something new of the resurrected Christ!" This would not be a kind of teaching but a heavenly report. I would love to hear such a report. To me the best meeting is not a kind of teaching meeting but a meeting full of divine reports. I would love to hear such a sweet and divine report out of the mouths of all the sisters. The same report out of the mouths of the brothers would not be so sweet. But such a report concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus out of the mouths of the little sisters would be sweet to everyone. The sisters saw the resurrection first.

After the four Gospels we come to the stage of the church. In Acts there were no sisters taking the lead in the church, but they were praying. When the twelve were praying for ten days before the time of Pentecost, the sisters also were there. In Acts 12 the prayer meeting was even in a sister's home. It does not say that Peter went to Andrew's home where so many were praying but that he went to Mary's home. All the sisters in the church have to learn to pray. If you see a problem, do not talk about it and do not gossip about it—pray. If Peter is thrown into prison, do not talk—pray! You have to be so involved in the prayer and so burdened in the prayer that even after your prayer has been answered, you would continue to pray. If you expect your local church to be strong, you must be praying sisters. You must not be gossiping and talking sisters but praying sisters. We need the sisters to pray. Whenever you see that the church needs something, whenever you see some shortcomings, whenever you see something lacking in the church, do not spread any rumors—pray. Stop the rumors by praying; even kill the rumors by praying. You must pray and pray and pray until Peter comes back. Pray to such an extent that even after the prayers are answered, you are still praying. This is so healthy. I do know that many of you pray, but I hope that more of you will learn to pray, and that those who pray already will pray more.

Romans 16 mentions so many laboring and ministering sisters, the first of whom is Phoebe. We need many Phoebes in the church. Phoebe was a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea. We need many sisters who will minister in the churches, serving to such an extent they are called deaconesses.

In verse 3 we read, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." In principle, the Bible usually mentions the man before the woman, but here is an exception. Paul does not say, "Greet Aquila and Prisca" but, "Greet Prisca and Aquila." It must be because Prisca was a very special sister.

Verse 12 says, “Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa...Greet Persis...who has labored much in the Lord.” In verse 13 there is the mother of Rufus. Rufus’s mother was also the mother of the apostle Paul. Do you know what this means? This means that the mother of Rufus was always taking care of the apostle Paul as her own son. She was continually nourishing, cherishing, and caring for this single brother, the apostle Paul. She was actually the mother of Rufus, yet Paul said she was also his mother because she took care of him.

By putting all these verses together, we can see that there is no hint that a position was assigned to the sisters to take the lead, to do a great work, or to teach. There was no such position assigned to the sisters. Rather, the sisters should bring the Lord Jesus to people by the principle of incarnation, love Him, follow Him, minister to Him, experience His death, make Him so sweet and lovely to all the people, see His resurrected life, know the ascension, and then in the church always bear the burden of prayer and labor. (*CWWL, 1973-1974, vol. 2, “The Six Marys,” pp. 243-249*)

Study Questions:

1. What is the significance and experiential application of the first Mary, the mother of Jesus?
2. What is the significance and experiential application of the women who stood by the Lord at the cross?
3. According to the picture in Acts 12, how can the sisters make the church in their locality strong?

References and Further Reading:

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1973-1974, vol. 2, “The Six Marys.”*

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 3

The Revelation of the Bible Concerning Male and Female in God's Economy

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4b; 1 Cor. 11:3-15; Gal. 3:26-28; 4:6; 2 Cor. 11:2

I. “And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”; “He who created them from the beginning made them male and female”—Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4b.

- A. In God's creation there is a distinction between male and female:¹
1. God's creation of men and women is different, and God's purpose for men and women is also different—Gen. 2:7, 21-22:²
 - a. The man was created by God, and the woman was built by God; God's building work is finer than His creating work—vv. 21-22.³
 - b. Man, as the one created by God, is rougher than the female, who was built by God; the female is much finer, because she was built by God.
 - c. Man is man and woman is woman; no matter how much people argue, they cannot make women into men, and no matter how the fashion changes, they cannot make men into women—cf. Deut. 22:5.⁴
 2. Since God's creation and purpose for men and women are different, the nature and function of men and women are different; no one can deny this or overthrow this fact:⁵
 - a. In the Bible the romance between male and female is used to illustrate God's divine romance—Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16:8; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2:⁶
 - 1) The wife is the object of the husband's love—Eph. 5:25; cf. Deut. 24:5.
 - 2) God's love needs an object; the church became and still is the object of God's love—vv. 2, 25.
 - b. God has an arrangement in which He wants two groups, men and women, to portray how He and Christ are the head and how humans should obey—vv. 22-24:⁷
 - 1) God wants men to take the role of Himself and Christ, and He wants women to take the role of the submitting humans—1 Cor. 4:9; 11:10.
 - 2) We should not bring the thought of the equality of men and women into this matter; this is not a question of whether men and women are equal; rather, it is a question of the function of men and women before God.
 - 3) Before the Lord men and women are both redeemed creatures without the slightest difference, but when we come before people, we must differentiate between men and women to portray the role of the head and the role of those who submit—Rom. 3:21-24; 1 Cor. 11:3-15; 1 Tim. 2:11-14.
 - 4) This is similar to actors who are ordinary people off the stage but who play very particular characters in different roles on stage; when they are on stage, there is a sense that they are different in function, but there is no thought of inequality.
 - 5) May God show the sisters that their submission can cause people to sense the authority and glory of God and Christ!
- B. Today, we are still in the old creation;⁸ there is still the distinction between males and

females in the church—1 Cor. 11:3-15, 14:33b-38; 1 Tim. 2:11-14.⁹

1. On the one hand, in Christ there are no differences between males and females (Gal. 3:28); on the other hand, although we are the new man, in the church life the differences between males and females are still present (1 Tim. 2:11-14).¹⁰
2. We have a spirit, but we also have the flesh; hence, we must keep the dividing line between males and females in our community and also in our church life—Rom. 13:14.¹¹
 - a. The sisters should not forget that they are females when they contact people; they are not free to speak carelessly; otherwise, their contacting people will bring them many problems.
 - b. It is wrong to speak with a person of the opposite sex when we are alone in a room; we must have a third person present there; this is not only a virtue but also a great protection.
3. While we live on this earth and in our flesh, in no way can you believe that the boundary between men and women can be abolished; there is no such thing.¹²

II. “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...There cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ”—Gal. 3:26-28:

- A. Before the Lord and in Christ there is no distinction between male and female—v. 28.¹³
 1. In the world the male occupies one role and the female occupies another role; in church administration the male also has his place and the female her place; within the family the husband has his place and the wife has her place—1 Tim. 2:12; Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 3:18-19.
 2. However, in Christ and in the new man, both the man and the woman have the same stand; there is no distinction between them—Gal. 3:28.
 3. In Christ, the man does not occupy a special place, nor does woman, because Christ is all and in all; in this respect a man is no different from a woman:
 - a. The sisters’ place in some areas of service is different from that of the brothers; but this pertains only to the matter of authority—1 Tim. 2:12.
 - b. Today, in Christ, there is no difference between the two.
- B. According to life, all the believers are males; however, according to love, we all are females.¹⁴
 1. According to life, all the believers, including the sisters, are sons of God and brothers of Christ—Gal. 3:26, 4:6-7; John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11-12; Rev. 21:7.
 - a. As a help to the sisters, we need to point out that in God’s household there are no daughters; God has only sons, not daughters—Gal. 3:26.¹⁵
 - b. In the flesh you are a female, but you have received the life of God’s Son; therefore, even the sisters are sons—1 John 5:12.¹⁶
 2. On the other hand, as to the relationship between us and Christ, we all are females; even the brothers are females:¹⁷
 - a. We all are virgins betrothed to Christ; we are the bride of Christ and the wife of the Lamb—2 Cor. 11:2; John 3:29a; Rev. 21:2, 9; cf. S. S. 1:3b; 4:8-9.
 - b. The relationship between the Bride and the Bridegroom is a matter of love, not a matter of life; according to love, we all are females.¹⁸
 - c. We are living sons of the living God, whereas we are the loving Bride of our dear Bridegroom.
- C. How wonderful that the church is both a man (Eph. 2:15, 4:24; Col. 3:10) and, at the same time, a bride (Eph. 5:23-27)!¹⁹

Excerpts from the Ministry:

GOD'S ORDER IN CREATION

The arrangement of God's will for men and women is different. In the order of God's creation, there is a difference between men and women. First, He created the man, and then He created the woman. Furthermore, the woman is out of the man and for the man; the man is not out of the woman or for the woman. Although men are born through women, they are only "through" the woman, not "out from" the woman as the woman is "out from" the man. God's creation of men and women is different, and God's purpose for men and women is also different. According to His creation, the woman is out from the man, but the man is not out from the woman; according to His purpose, the woman is for the man, but the man is not for the woman. "Therefore the woman ought to have a sign of submission to authority on her head" (v. 10). She should have something covering her head.

God's creation and purpose for men and women are completely different. Man is man and woman is woman, just as bronze is bronze and iron is iron. No matter how much people argue, they cannot make women into men, and no matter how the fashion changes, they cannot make men into women. Since God's creation and purpose for men and women are different, the nature and function of men and women are also different. No one can deny this or overthrow this fact. (*Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, msg. 19, p. 254)

THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE BROTHERS AND THE SISTERS

There is [a] boundary that needs to be strictly kept. That is the boundary between the brothers and the sisters. This is also a great boundary. There is one thing we must admit: while Christians live on earth today, the place where they have the most opportunity to contact the opposite sex is the church. Between the brothers and sisters, they meet in the meetings, in the service, in the gospel preaching, and in their witnessing work. For this reason, in their administration of the church, the elders must draw a boundary between the brothers and the sisters. This is not a boundary of separation, but a boundary of distinction. This boundary must never be removed or annulled. Whenever you annul this boundary, you will involve yourselves in immense trouble.

In Christianity there are some zealous ones with little spiritual experience who suggest: "We are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. Since we are all spiritual, we do not need to distinguish the brothers from the sisters." I want to tell the brothers and sisters that I have seen the fruit from such a concept. I have heard even more about such things. They bring untold problems to the church. In some places, it is the elders who are reaping and eating their own fruit because the elders themselves have led the church this way. Their way of administration is to cause the brothers and sisters not to have any boundary. This is altogether wrong.

While we live on this earth and in our flesh, in no way can you believe that the boundary between men and women can be abolished; there is no such thing. This is the devil's teaching. In some places, some teach that we are all spiritual, and that to talk about the boundary between male and female is to have defiled thoughts. Some almost condemn me by saying that it is because my thoughts are filthy and unclean that I am talking about the boundary between the brothers and the sisters. No. Even if thousands of people would rise up to say that my thoughts are unclean, I will still stand up to tell you that you need a boundary between the brothers and the sisters. The elders in every locality must set up a firm boundary between the brothers and the sisters; they should never remove it.

Galatians 3 says that in Christ there is no more distinction between male and female. But in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, it says that in the church we must still distinguish the boundary between male and female. There is no distinction between male and female in Christ, but there is still the distinction between male and female in the church. If in the church we make no distinction between male and female, then Paul is actually contradicting himself in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, because there he clearly says that brothers do not have to cover their heads when they pray, but that the sisters do. In addition,

the sisters should not speak in the meeting. You can see that there is still a distinction between male and female in the church.

Some have checked with me in a serious way: “Brother Lee, why does the church not come up to the standard of the age? In most social gatherings today, men and women sit together. Why do the men and women sit separately in the church meetings?” Dear brothers and sisters, you cannot deny that David loved the Lord more than you do and was more spiritual than you are. But even David could fall. How much more can we fall also? Today, we are still in the old creation, and it is still possible for us to fall. God has not removed the boundary between male and female in the church. When you and I administrate the church, we must not give the impression that we are all in the Lord and that it makes no difference whether we are brothers or sisters. This indifference is detrimental and must never be permitted. We must learn to draw a boundary here. (*The Elders’ Management of the Church*, msg. 9, pp. 149-151)

PAYING ATTENTION TO THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN MALES AND FEMALES

The first relationship in a community is the relationship between males and females. This relationship exceeds that of a parent and child. God did not first create a parent and then a child. He first created a male and then a female and only through them were descendants brought forth. The relationships within a community began with the descendants of Adam and Eve, but the first relationship was that of a male and a female. This is also a very personal relationship. A parent-child relationship is not a matter of our own choice, but the male-female relationship involves a choice. We must be clear concerning this and keep a dividing line between male and female. We should not think that we cannot be influenced to make a wrong choice because we have a regenerated spirit. Our body is fallen and is still the flesh. Romans 7 says that nothing good dwells in our flesh and that sin dwells in our flesh (vv. 17-18).

John 1:14 says that the Lord Jesus as the Word became flesh. The flesh belongs to sin, yet the Son of God became flesh. How can this be? The proper answer is in Romans 8:3, which says, “God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” This verse says that although the Lord Jesus became flesh, He was only in the likeness of the flesh of sin and did not have the sin of the flesh. This was typified by the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses for the sinful Israelites (Num. 21:9; John 3:14). The bronze serpent was in the form, the likeness, of a serpent, but it did not have the poison of the serpent. This bronze serpent bore God’s judgment for the poisoned Israelites and dealt with the serpents that poisoned them. Although Christ did not have the flesh of sin, He was crucified in the flesh. Thus, through His death on the cross God condemned sin, which was brought by Satan into man’s flesh. Only the Lord Jesus was without the flesh of sin. The Bible does not say that man is spirit. It says that man *has* a spirit (Job 32:8) and that man *is* flesh (Gen. 6:3). Since man is flesh, it is necessary to keep the differences between males and females. We should never abolish such differences.

Colossians 3:11 says, “Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” First Corinthians 12:13 says, “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.” If we read these two verses carefully, we will discover that they do not mention males or females. However, Galatians 3:28 says, “There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” On the one hand, in Christ there are no differences between males and females. On the other hand, although we are the new man, in the church life the differences between males and females are still present. We have a spirit, but we also have the flesh. Hence, we must keep the dividing line between males and females in our community and also in the church life.

SHAMEFASTNESS BEING GREATER PROTECTION

When we share and testify in the meetings, the sisters should always remember that they are females and that whatever they do should be done with modesty, that is, shamefastness. Modesty, or shamefastness, is a female virtue (1 Tim. 2:9). The Bible says that if a woman prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, she disgraces her head (1 Cor. 11:5). This does not mean that the brothers can act immodestly. Both males and females should have a proper shamefastness. The more modest we are, the higher the standard of morality we will have and the greater will be our protection. A proper person should be very modest and be limited in the places he goes, the people he knows, and the things that he says. The basic principle of the Christian life is to walk according to the Spirit. When we walk according to the Spirit, we will have no need for anyone to teach us, but His anointing will teach us concerning all things (1 John 2:27).

The saints who have a heart to serve full time should learn the lesson of not being careless when contacting people and being careful concerning the setting in which they contact people. In particular, the sisters should not forget that they are females when they contact people; they are not free to speak carelessly. Otherwise, their contacting people will bring them many problems. Not only will they suffer loss but they will also cause the Lord's name to suffer shame. In human communities as well as in the church, we must remember that there is a difference between males and females. It is wrong to speak with a person of the opposite sex when we are alone in a room. We must have a third person present there. This is not only a virtue but also a great protection. (*The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones*, msg. 16, pp. 138-140)

THE ANNULING OF DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE

The fourth distinction that has been abolished in Christ is that of gender, that is, the distinction between male and female. In this world the male occupies one role and the female occupies another role. In church administration the male also has his place and the female her place. Within the family the husband has his place and the wife has her place. However, in Christ and in the new man, both the man and the woman have the same stand; there is no distinction between them.

In Christ, the man does not occupy a special place, nor does the woman, because Christ is all and in all. In this respect a man is no different from a woman. Please remember that in spiritual matters there is no distinction between male and female.

We have mentioned that the sisters' place in some areas of service is different from that of the brothers. But this pertains only to the matter of authority. Today, in Christ, there is no difference between the two. A brother is saved through the life of Christ, the life of God's Son. In the same way, a sister is saved through the life of Christ, the life of God's Son. Every case in the Bible where the Chinese version translates "sons and daughters," the original word is children. This word does not differentiate between male or female (even though its usage is masculine). I am born a child of God and grow up to be a son of God. A son is male. Yet this description fits both the brothers as well as the sisters.

In the whole New Testament, only 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 speaks of sons and daughters. "Therefore 'come out from their midst...and I will welcome you'; 'and I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me.'" After we have believed in God and are delivered and separated from the world and its polluted and unclean influence, God will receive us like a Father, and we will be His sons and His daughters. This is a matter between God and an individual; it is not a matter of what a person is in Christ. This is why it says sons and daughters. When a person suffers for God, incurs loss for His sake, and experiences hardship because of Him, God will become a Father to such a one as an individual. If you are male, God will receive you as a son. If you are female, God will receive you as a daughter. God will receive you as His sons and daughters. He is the all-sufficient Lord. He has everything. This is a matter of what a person is before God. It has nothing to do with what he or she is in Christ. In Christ, we are all God's children, and there is no distinction between male and female. This

distinction does not exist at all.

Once I asked a certain craftsman in Shanghai, who was a brother in the Lord, “Brother, how are the brothers in your place doing?” He replied, “Are you asking about the male brothers or the female brothers?” This answer could not have been put better. It is one of the truest words ever spoken. Male brothers are brothers and female brothers are also brothers; there is no distinction in Christ. What this brother said was absolutely correct; he was simply stating the biblical truth. When we come to the Lord and touch Him, we transcend all male and female distinctions. We are beyond gender. Before the Lord and in Christ, there is no distinction between male and female. (*CWWN*, vol. 48, “Messages for Building Up New Believers (1),” msg. 8, pp. 121-122)

We should not hold the concept that we cannot be an apostle like Paul. The apostles are examples of what all believers should be. Paul was not an extraordinary person, and he did not reach a state that no one else can attain. The concept that the apostles are unique is a Roman Catholic tradition. This tradition is related to the concept that Peter was the unique successor of Christ and therefore the first pope. What a devilish concept! Far from being unique, Peter is an example of one who followed the Lord. In particular, he is an example to Jewish believers in Christ. Paul is a pattern especially for Gentile believers. In 1 Timothy 1:16 he says, “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” Since Paul is our pattern, none of us should say that we cannot be like him.

Although the brothers may believe that they can be today’s apostles, the sisters may find it very difficult to believe that this also applies to them. As a help to the sisters, we need to point out that in God’s household there are no daughters. God has only sons, not daughters. Christ, the firstborn Son of God, has brothers, but He does not have sisters. This indicates that, according to life, all the believers, including the sisters, are sons of God and brothers of Christ. For this reason, in his Epistles Paul addresses the brothers, but not the brothers and sisters. The sisters, of course, are included in the term brothers.

According to life, all the believers are males. However, according to love, we all are females. Christ is our Bridegroom, and we are His Bride. The relationship between the Bride and the Bridegroom is a matter of love, not a matter of life. Love is the unique requirement of married life. Therefore, we are living sons of the living God, whereas we are the loving Bride of our dear Bridegroom. How, then, would you answer this question: Are we, the believers in Christ, males or females? The proper way to answer is to reply that according to life we are males, but according to love we are females.

Paul was made an apostle not according to love, but according to life. It was as a matter of life that he was made a pattern for all the believers, the brothers and the sisters as well. This indicates that by taking Paul as our pattern, we all, brothers and sisters, can be God’s sent ones today. Paul’s status was that of an apostle, and ours should be the same. Hence, as we study the formation of Paul’s apostleship, we are also studying the formation of our own apostleship.

All of us in the Lord’s recovery need to be sent ones. At the least, a young sister can be sent by the Lord to her parents to testify to them about the Lord Jesus. Are you ready to be sent by the Lord? We all should be prepared to be sent forth by Him. Concerning this matter of apostleship, our minds need to be renewed. (*Life-study of Galatians*, msg. 5, pp. 41-42)

Study Questions:

1. What are two specific ways we can see that the nature and function of men and women are different based upon God’s creation and purpose for male and female?
2. Why is it important to understand that even in the church the distinction between male and female is not nullified?
3. What is the significance of the fact that in Christ the distinction between male and female has been abolished?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Words of Training for the New Way*, vol. 2, msg. 7
2. *The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ to Be the Organism of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God*, msg. 3
3. *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, msg. 19
4. *The Elders' Management of the Church*, msg. 9
5. *The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones*, msg. 16
6. *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 1, msg. 8
7. *Life-Study of Galatians*, msgs. 5 and 21
8. *The Central Thought of God*, msg. 13
9. *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 42, "Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (2)," msg. 46

¹ *Words of Training for the New Way*, Vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 69.

² *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 254.

³ *The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ to be the Organism of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God*, ch. 3, p. 39.

⁴ *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 254.

⁵ *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 254.

⁶ *Elders' Training, Book 11: The Eldership and the God-Ordained Way (3)*, ch. 1, p. 9.

⁷ *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, ch. 19, pp. 251-252.

⁸ *The Elders' Management of the Church*, ch. 9, p. 151.

⁹ *The Elders' Management of the Church*, ch. 9, p. 150.

¹⁰ *The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones*, ch. 16, p. 139.

¹¹ *The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones*, ch. 16, pp. 139-140.

¹² *The Elders' Management of the Church*, ch. 9, p. 150.

¹³ *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 1, ch. 8, pp. 121-122.

¹⁴ *Life-study of Galatians*, ch. 5, p. 42.

¹⁵ *Life-study of Galatians*, ch. 5, p. 41.

¹⁶ *CWWN*, vol. 42, "Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship," ch. 46, p. 374.

¹⁷ *The Central Thought of God*, ch. 13, p. 120.

¹⁸ *Life-study of Galatians*, ch. 5, p. 42.

¹⁹ *The Completing Ministry of Paul*, ch. 5, p. 38.

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 4

The Female Life Being the Life Useful to God in His Economy

Scripture Reading: Exo. 1-2

- I. The book of Exodus reveals the kind of people God can use in His economy for the fulfillment of His purpose:¹**
- A. God's intention as seen in this book is to have a people to build Him a dwelling place on earth; thus, at the end of Exodus the tabernacle is erected to be God's dwelling place— Exo. 40:17, 33-34.
 - B. Furthermore, for the fulfillment of God's purpose, there is also the need for an army to fight for God's interests on earth; if the children of Israel were to enjoy the good land and to fulfill God's purpose of building a temple as God's testimony on earth, they had to fight to deliver the land from the usurping hand of the enemy—Num. 1:1-4; 33:52-54.
 - C. Therefore, to be useful to God is related to building up His dwelling place and to fighting for His interests on earth—cf. Eph. 4:11-16; 6:10-18.
 - D. The life useful to God in these matters is the female life:
 - 1. The underlying theme of Exodus 1-2 is that God needs a certain kind of life both to preserve His people and to prepare a savior to deliver them from bondage.
 - 2. Both the preservation of the people and the preparation of the savior were accomplished only through the female life—1:15-21; 2:1-10.
- II. God is the head of Christ; Christ, under the headship of God, is the head of every man; and man, under the headship of Christ, is the head of the woman— 1 Cor. 11:3.²**
- III. Man, typifying Christ, signifies the independent life—Rom. 5:14; John 5:26; 8:58.³**
- IV. Woman, typifying man, signifies the dependent life—1 Cor. 11:7-8; Gen. 2:7-9; Matt. 4:4; John 6:53-54, 57; 14:19b; 15:4-5; 20:22; 1 John 5:12.⁴**
- V. Man is to be a real “female” living a life dependent on God—Phil. 1:21a; Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 3:5, 4:7; 12:9-10.⁵**
- VI. Man's independence of God is rebellion—Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6; Rom. 5:19a:⁶**
- A. The moment we become independent, we become rebellious against God—1 John 3:4, 6; Col. 2:19.
 - B. Because the male life is independent and rebellious, God cannot use it for the accomplishment of His purpose.
- VII. If a woman lives an independent life she becomes a real “male”:⁷**
- A. Today a great many women have become “males.”
 - B. This is the main reason for the many separations and divorces.
- VIII. Only the real “female” life is useful to God—Exo. 1:15-21; 2:1-10:⁸**
- A. In the Bible God's people are likened to a female:⁹

1. God dealt with Israel as His spouse—Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2; Hosea 2:19.
 2. In the New Testament the believers in Christ are considered virgins—Matt. 25:1; 2 Cor. 11:2.
 3. In Ephesians 5:25 we see that Christ loves the church as His counterpart, His wife.
 4. Christ will marry the New Jerusalem as His bride in the millennium—Rev. 19:7.
 5. For eternity the New Jerusalem will be the wife of God—21:2-3, 9.
- B. Whether we are sisters or brothers, we all need to be “females” and live by the only life that is useful to God:¹⁰
1. In order to be “females” we need to depend on the Lord—cf. S.S. 6:13b; 8:5a:
 - a. The tree of life in Genesis 2 signifies dependence, and the tree of knowledge signifies independence; life always makes us dependent, whereas knowledge always makes us independent—v. 9.
 - b. God desires that we choose life instead of knowledge; this means that He wants us to choose dependence rather than independence—vv. 16-17; cf. Deut. 30:19.
 - c. No matter how long we have been with the Lord, we still must depend upon Him for life today; we cannot graduate from eating, drinking, and breathing; with life, there is no graduation—John 6:57; 7:37; 20:22; Rev. 22:1-2.¹¹
 - d. God’s strategy is to put us in a position where we must depend upon Him; this is the kind of life God can use for the fulfillment of His purpose—2 Cor. 1:8-10; 12:9-10; Gen. 32:1-31; cf. 2 Chron. 20:12-27; S.S. 6:13b; 8:5a.
 2. If we all have a healthy fear of independence, there will be no problems in the church life:¹²
 - a. All problems in the church life, in married life, and among the saints come from one source, and that source is independence—cf. Rev. 2:4.
 - b. The reason the church throughout the years has been torn down instead of built up is that the so-called builders have been too independent; they have been males instead of females—Gal. 4:29; Phil. 3:2-3; Col. 2:18-19; Jude 8, 19; 2 Pet. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:14-15; Titus 1:10-14; 3 John 9-10; Rev. 2:20.¹³
 - c. The crucial point is that it is not a matter of how much we can do, but of how much we depend upon the Lord—John 15:5; Phil. 4:13.¹⁴
- C. It is crucial that we learn of the Lord that only the “female” life is useful to Him:¹⁵
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.¹⁶
 2. Moses was trained to live a female life—Exo. 2:11-22; 3:1-6, 10-12; 4:10-12:¹⁷
 - a. Moses honored God as the unique initiator; he was called by God to ascend the mountain where God revealed to him what was on His heart and then charged him to build the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him on the mountain—25:40.¹⁸
 - b. If we would perfect others in a proper way and build up the church, we need such a “female” life—1 Cor. 2:1-5; 15:10; 2 Cor. 2:10, 12-14; 4:7; Phil. 3:3; Col. 1:29.¹⁹
 3. Moreover, all the warriors were living a female life of dependence on God—Josh. 6; 10:7-14; 11:1-9; cf. Psa. 18:1-3, 28-50:²⁰
 - a. If you have not learned to be a female, you will not be able to fight for the kingdom of God—Eph. 6:10-18; Rev. 19:7-8, 11, 14; *Hymns* #887, stanza 1.
 - b. God uses only female warriors; this means that if you are living an independent male life, you are useless as far as spiritual warfare is concerned—S.S. 6:10, 13.
- D. May we all see that God can use us only if we are “females” depending on Him at all times and for all things.²¹

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE LIFE USEFUL TO GOD

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

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

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

In the Bible the concept of a "male" is rich in meaning. It refers, of course, to a man, but it also indicates an independent life. Furthermore, it refers to Christ as the unique male in the universe. All married brothers need to realize that they are simply husbands in shadow and that the real husband is Christ. Because God is the unique husband, Isaiah 54:5 says, "Thy Maker is thine husband." In the Old Testament God regarded His people as His spouse (Hosea 2:19). No matter whether an Israelite was a male or a female, he or she was part of God's corporate wife.

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

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

ONLY THE REAL "FEMALE" LIFE BEING USEFUL TO GOD

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

we choose life instead of knowledge. This means that He wants us to choose dependence rather than independence.

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

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

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

Readers of the Bible usually regard Moses as the leader of the children of Israel. Moses, however, did not have this concept about himself; he never assumed a position as the leader. When the children of Israel rebelled against him, he considered it rebellion against God, not against himself. Moses simply went to the Lord and presented the problems to Him. In doing so, Moses honored the Lord as the head, as the unique male. This indicates that Moses was living a female life, a life of dependence on God.

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

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

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

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

...

We all need to live such a dependent life in the local churches today. None of us should behave as “males.” The problems among Christians and in the churches are due to brothers or sisters living an independent “male” life. Whenever there are brothers or sisters in a local church living like “males,” there will be trouble. How we must learn not to live independently of God! If we learn this lesson, we shall realize that we must not do certain things; this is not because these things are wrong, but because in doing them we would be independent of God. If we all have a healthy fear of independence, there will be no problems in the church life. Furthermore, there will be no problems among married couples. All problems in the church life, in married life, and among the saints come from one source, and that source is independence. We need to be like the midwives in Exodus; we need to pray, “Lord, I don’t want to be a strong ‘man,’ full of opinions and always insisting on my way. Lord, I want to be like the midwives in Exodus 1 and like the females in Exodus 2.”

As we shall see, when Moses confronted Pharaoh, Moses was not a “male.” In his dealings with Pharaoh, he was a “female” depending on God. Moses made no decisions nor did he make any proposals. Everything he did was initiated by God. Moses honored God as the unique initiator.

God’s initiating work is seen very clearly in the building of the tabernacle. Moses did not wake up one morning with an idea to build a tabernacle for God. On the contrary, he was called by God to ascend the mountain where God revealed to him what was on His heart and then charged him to build the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him on the mountain (25:40). God gave Moses no room to make independent decisions. Moses had to depend on God for every detail. This is the life God can use for His purpose.

In these days we have been speaking much about the perfecting of the saints for the building up of the Body of Christ. If we would be used to perfect others, we ourselves must have a dependent life. The only life the Lord desires to see perfected is the dependent life. If we live and work independently of God, the result of our work will be that other lives will be perfected to be independent. Only a dependent life can produce a dependent life. Only a life that depends on God for all things can perfect others to be “females.” Suppose a certain person is very strong in himself, confident of his abilities, proposals, and decisions. Such a one can produce only independent lives, capable persons who are independent of God. The result of such work will not be the New Jerusalem—it will be Babylon the Great, a city independent of God and rebellious against Him. The church, however, is a female. As a female, she does not have the headship, nor does she have an independent life. Her head is Christ, and her life is a dependent life. This should be the situation in the church today. If we would perfect others in a proper way and build up the church, we need such a “female” life.

The reason the church throughout the years has been torn down instead of built up is that the so-called builders have been too independent. They have been males instead of females. Nevertheless, we thank the Lord that there have been a small number who were willing to live a “female” life in dependence on the Lord.

The crucial point is that it is not a matter of how much we can do, but of how much we depend upon the Lord. We have pointed out that in John 15:5 the Lord Jesus says that apart from Him we can do nothing. Although we are familiar with this word, in our daily living we frequently forget it or set it aside. The Apostle Paul, however, was one who practiced it. In 1 Corinthians 2:3 he said, “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” Paul was fearful that he might do something in himself independently of the Lord. How we need such a fear today! May the Lord be merciful to us and grant us this proper kind of fear. If we have it, we shall be afraid to say or do anything in ourselves, anything that is independent of God.

Anything we do independently of the Lord is rebellion. Even our preaching of the gospel or our helping of the saints may be a form of rebellion. We may do many things to help the churches; yet all that we do may be rebellion because it is done independently of the Lord.

I am thankful for the light the Lord has shown us concerning the female life in the book of

Exodus. The only life useful to Him is the female life. We all must learn that God never uses the male life. The females in chapter one were used to preserve the children of Israel, and the females in chapter two were used to prepare the vessel the Lord had raised up. Eventually, even Moses himself was trained to be a “female”; he became like the midwives in chapter one and like the different females in chapter two. Because he was a “female” for the fulfillment of God’s purpose, he could be used by God. But even Moses, when he was provoked by the children of Israel in the wilderness, once acted like a male and in so doing lost God’s blessing. 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 use us only if we are “females” depending on Him at all times and for all things. It is crucial that we learn of the Lord that only the “female” life is useful to Him. (*Life-study of Exodus*, msg. 4, pp. 37-38, 41-44, 45- 48)

Study Questions:

1. What does it mean to be useful to God for His purpose according to the book of Exodus?
2. What does it mean to be a “female” spiritually?
3. What is the one source of all the problems in married life, the church life, and among the saints, and what is the solution to this problem?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Life-study of Exodus*, message 4.

¹ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, pp. 37-38.

² *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, pp. 38-39.

³ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 40.

⁴ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 40.

⁵ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 40.

⁶ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 41.

⁷ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 41.

⁸ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 41.

⁹ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 41.

¹¹ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 42.

¹² *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 45.

¹³ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 46.

¹⁴ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 47.

¹⁵ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 48.

¹⁶ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 42.

¹⁷ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 43.

¹⁸ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 46.

¹⁹ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 46.

²⁰ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, p. 43.

²¹ *Life-study of Exodus*, ch. 4, pp. 47-48.

SERVING BY PRAYING

To serve others with something also includes the matter of praying for others. A sister may realize that there are four younger sisters who need someone to serve them by praying for them, without talking to them, without letting them know she is praying for them. She simply needs to serve them with her prayer, with her intercession, even interceding for them desperately. That prayer is also a kind of serving.

In Shanghai the elderly sisters served in this way. They prayed very much not only for the young sisters but also for so many brothers. For example, a number of times one of the brothers stood up in the meeting and said something which he should not have said. Those serving sisters did not talk, but they picked up the burden to go home and pray for that brother, to serve that brother with their prayer. After a certain period of time, that brother testified how the Lord had turned him. The prayer of the sisters was a serving of the brother that gave the Lord a way to do something.

Those serving sisters also realized that a number of the younger ones needed to be served by their prayers for their marriages. In some cases, all of them were working together praying for one brother's marriage. That is the serving.

A number of times the sisters invited some for whom they were praying to dinner. During the mealtime there would be no idle word, no gossiping, no vain talks about certain points, and no vain talking about the church affairs, but there would be a serving that would cause these younger ones to be edified. Today there is too much vain talk about the church affairs, but not much serving. All the vain talk about so many points, all the vain talk about others, is just gossip in the eyes of God, and it wastes your time. The sisters must be the serving ones and must learn to serve.

In order to serve, first you have to stop talking. You have to learn what not to talk about, or to be simple, learn not to talk. Yet you need to fellowship one with another with a serving spirit. If you do have such a serving spirit with such a burden, day and night you will be more than occupied. So many brothers need your serving. They need you to pray for them. So many sisters need your serving. And the elders need your serving. The work, the ministry, needs your serving.

If the sisters mean business with the Lord, they have many things to do in the way of serving. Such a fellowship would surely cause something to rise up within all of you to be the serving ones. You have to labor, you have to serve, and you have to be the good patronesses. And all of this must be done in the church and for the church.

Out of such a fellowship I do believe the Lord would burden all of the sisters, and that He would open your eyes to see how many things need to be taken care of by your serving.

The best way to serve is to pray. In the home of the Mary in Acts 12 there was a prayer meeting to pray for Peter, who was imprisoned. The Scripture does not mention the other homes of the prayer. The prayer meeting in Mary's home was a serving.

When you sisters see a need in the church life, you must not talk, but bear the burden to pray. When you see that there is a need for a real broken life, you must not talk. You have to bear the burden with four or five, eight or ten, coming together to pray to serve this purpose. Pray for the real broken life.

When you see that a brother becomes a problem to the church, or that a sister has some problem in her life, don't talk. Pick up the burden to pray with two or three others to serve this purpose. If you would be like this, many of you would be today's Phoebes. Then the church will have the best serving.

We all have to learn to serve the church and serve the saints like the sister Phoebe that Paul recommended in Romans 16. This should be the burden of the sisters, and they do have the position to serve in this way. What the sisters can do if they pick up this burden and are faithful to the Lord in it is something that the brothers cannot do. The need is so great with the sisters. May the Holy Spirit interpret these words to us. (*The Serving Sisters in the Church Life*, pp. 21-25)

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 5

Woman in God's Creation, Man's Fall, and God's Promise

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:18-24; 3:1-6, 15; 1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14

- I. “But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ”—1 Cor. 11:3:**
- A. First Corinthians 11:3 reveals the universal headship; in the universe there is the headship: God is at the top as the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman, and human beings are the head of all animals and plants—Gen. 1:26-28.
 - B. In the divine governmental ordination, woman is under the headship of man; God created the female in this way—Gen. 2:18-24; 1 Tim. 2:13.
 - C. Among the unbelievers, the women are not under the headship of men, and since the men do not have Christ, they are not under the headship of Christ and thus are not under the headship of God.
 - D. However, when we receive the Lord and become believers, Christ becomes our head; our enjoyment of Christ as our head brings us under the headship of God and sets up a proper order between man and woman.
 - E. Hence, we must enjoy Christ as our Head in order to live under God’s headship, the divine authority, and to keep God’s ordained order in His administration.
- II. “For Adam was formed first, then Eve”—1 Tim. 2:13; Gen. 2:18-24:**
- A. Paul's word of explanation in 1 Timothy 2:13 brings us to the beginning; God always wants to bring us back to His beginning—cf. Matt. 19:8.
 - B. First Timothy 2:13 gives the first reason that a woman should subject herself to man.
- III. “Adam was not deceived; but the woman, having been quite deceived, has fallen into transgression”—1 Tim. 2:14; Gen. 3:1-6:**
- A. Here [in 1 Timothy 2:14] is the second reason that a woman should subject herself to man.
 - B. Eve was deceived by the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6) because she did not remain in subjection under the headship of Adam, but overstepped her position to contact the evil tempter directly without her head being covered:
 - 1. The inward cause of man’s fall was the woman’s assuming the headship—vv. 2-3, 6.
 - 2. Eve was ensnared by the serpent because she forgot her husband; the Devil was crafty, knowing that the woman was weaker than the man (1 Pet. 3:7), and he chose her as his target.
 - 3. Regardless of what the woman said to the serpent, as long as she stood there and spoke to him, she was wrong, for it indicated that she had assumed the headship.
 - 4. The safest way for her would have been not to talk to the evil one, but to turn to her husband and hide behind him.
 - 5. Eve should not have spoken to the evil one, for while she was talking with him his wicked thought entered into her mind; thus, even before Eve partook of the tree of knowledge her mind had been polluted by the enemy’s concept already.
 - 6. Satan will always try to tempt you, induce you, and trap you by making a proposal which raises questions about God’s Word; any time you doubt the Word of God you must realize that that doubt does not originate with you; it comes from the serpent.

7. We should not question any of the words in the Bible, but should say “Amen” to every word.
- C. Adam and Eve failed because they did not use their spirit:
1. If Eve had turned to the spirit, there would have been no problem.
 2. Our husband is with our spirit; however, if we remain in our mind it means that we are assuming the headship, setting our mind to behave independently.

IV. The fall occurred through the woman and the deliverance was promised also through the woman; this shows us the importance of the sister’s position in the Bible:

- A. After man was created, what happened to man was very much related to the woman.
- B. By this we can see that whether or not God can have His way today in His purpose depends very much upon what the sisters will do.
- C. After the fall of man, God came in, not to do something through man, but to do something through the woman—Gen. 3:1-6, 15:
1. The subtle serpent, the enemy of God, came in through the woman—vv. 1-6.
 2. Therefore, God chose to defeat the enemy also through woman—through the same channel by which he came—v. 15.
 3. In Genesis 3 the serpent came in through the woman, and in the same chapter, God promised that this woman would bring forth a seed who would bruise the head of the serpent.
- D. Eventually we see that the woman is not so bad; she is glorious; though Satan came in through the woman, the Seed who would bruise the serpent’s head also came in through the woman:
1. Jesus was not the seed of a man; He was the seed of a woman.
 2. All the sisters should be proud of this; since the day Jesus came in through woman, there is the wonderful story of woman in the New Testament.
 3. There are six Marys recorded in the New Testament; the first Mary was the woman through whom Jesus was born; with Mary there is the seed of woman, and Jesus’ name is her seed.
- E. We should realize that the proper position of human beings is that of a woman; whether we are male or female we all have the position of a woman before God:
1. If we claim that we are men before Him, we will immediately be devoured by Satan.
 2. Undoubtedly, the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15 is Eve, and Eve signifies all the people of God, the people who take the position of a woman trusting in God; as long as we trust in God, we are His people, His wife.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

The Head of Every Man

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Christ is presented as the Head of every man, who brings man under God’s headship and sets up the order between man and woman: “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.” In Ephesians 1:22-23 the headship of Christ over all things is to His Body, the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 the headship of Christ over every man is related to individuals. Christ is the Head of the Body, the church (Eph. 5:23), corporately, and of the believers individually. He is the Head of every one of us directly.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul points out that the head of the woman is the man. In the divine governmental ordination, woman is under the headship of man. God created the female in this way (Gen. 2:18-24; 1 Tim. 2:13). According to the nature (1 Cor. 11:14) created by God, woman is

subordinate to man.

Paul also says in verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 11 that the head of Christ is God. Christ is God's anointed One, the One appointed by God. Hence, He is under God, and God as the Originator is His Head. This refers to the relationship between Christ and God in the divine government.

Verse 3 reveals the universal headship. In the universe there is the headship: God is at the top as the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman, and human beings are the head of all animals and plants (Gen. 1:26-28). Originally, there was such a headship in the universe, a headship that maintained a proper order in God's creation. Yet this order was overthrown by man's rebellion. Among the unbelievers, despite their civilized or cultured appearance, there is disorder in their private life, particularly in their marriage life. The women are not under the headship of men, and since the men do not have Christ, they are not under the headship of Christ and thus are not under the headship of God. Hence, all unbelievers, both men and women, are lawless. They live under the human government by compulsion, and many of them murmur and complain about the government, disliking the human authorities that rule over them. However, when we receive the Lord and become believers, Christ becomes our head. Our enjoyment of Christ as our head brings us under the headship of God and sets up a proper order between man and woman. We should enjoy Christ in His headship in order that we may be under the headship of God and man may be the proper head over woman.

We all need to be under the headship in God's governmental administration. The headship of Christ is related to the headship in God's universal governmental administration. The archangel with his subordinates rebelled against God's headship (Ezek. 28:13-18; Isa. 14:12-15; Matt. 25:41), establishing his kingdom of darkness (12:26; Col. 1:13), and became Satan, God's adversary. God created man to deal with Satan and his rebellious angels. Nevertheless, Satan seduced man to follow him and rebel against God. God then sent His Son to destroy Satan and rescue man out of Satan's authority back to God's kingdom (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13); in redemption God in Christ brought fallen man back to Himself. God's redeemed people are now the church. As the church, we should declare to the angels, to both the rebellious and submissive ones, that as God's redeemed people, we are not rebellious against His headship but are under His headship, the divine authority. We enjoy Christ as our Head and thus remain under the headship of God. Not only will we be under God's headship in the coming kingdom age and in eternity, but we submit to His authority even in the present rebellious age. We need to realize that we must be under the headship of Christ. When we enjoy Christ as our Head, this enjoyment brings us under God's headship and sets up the order between man and woman. Hence, we must enjoy Christ as our Head in order to live under God's headship, the divine authority, and to keep God's ordained order in His administration.

In Revelation we see that Christ, the slain Lamb, is absolutely under the headship of God for the carrying out of God's administration. Christ is the Administrator who is carrying out God's administration through His submission to God's headship. Revelation 4 and 5 show that the slain, resurrected, and ascended Lamb is taking the lead to submit Himself to the headship of God in the heavens. In contrast, the earth is filled with rebellion. Satan is taking the lead to rebel against God. Nevertheless, in the midst of all this rebellion, there is a Body composed of those who have been redeemed and baptized into the Triune God. This is the Body of the One in heaven who submits Himself to God's headship. The Body of Christ on earth should reflect Christ the Head in submitting Himself to the headship of God. Although the earth is filled with rebellion, we must be a people under God's headship, who through their submission to Christ reflect Christ's submission to God. (*Conclusion of the New Testament*, msg. 312, pp. 3165-3167)

The Woman's Assuming the Headship

Now we must see the inward cause of man's first fall. I am strong on this point. The inward cause of man's fall was the woman's assuming the headship (vv. 2-3, 6). Eve was ensnared by the serpent

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

The Significance of the Woman

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

The Position of the Woman

God is our Husband and our Head, and we must always keep ourselves under His covering. The woman must cover her head and never assume the headship (1 Cor. 11:3, 5, 14-15). Since God is our Head we should always turn to Him. By the Lord's mercy, I have learned of Him. If I had been Eve in the garden and the Devil had come to me, I would not even have looked at him. I would have turned to my husband and hidden myself behind him. I would have let Adam be the head and let him exercise his headship. Then there would have been no problem.

The Failure of the Woman

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

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

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

see this.

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

The Process

Not Using the Spirit

Adam and Eve failed because they did not use their spirit. If Eve had turned to the spirit, there would have been no problem. Our husband is with our spirit. However, if we remain in our mind it means that we are assuming the headship, setting our mind to behave independently. This is awful and sinful. We must realize that our husband is with our spirit and exercise our spirit accordingly. Even when your temper is stirred within you, you need to turn to the spirit. Although you may say that it is difficult to turn in such a circumstance, I would reply that in such difficult times it is all the more necessary for us to turn to our spirit. Do not deal with your temper; turn yourself to the spirit. Learn to use your spirit. All Christians know how to pray and ask God to help them, but few of them know that they have a spirit to which they can turn. We do have such an organ, and it has a wonderful function. Since God is with our spirit, we need to turn to it. If we will learn to turn to our spirit and to exercise our spirit in every situation, the results will be marvelous.

How do you know when you are using your spirit? It is very easy. Whenever you do a certain thing or contact a person without being with God it proves that you are not using your spirit. Regardless of what you do, if you are independent of God and not contacting Him while you are doing it, it proves that you are not in the spirit. Be assured that in such a case you will suffer loss. We all must learn to contact God in everything. As long as we contact Him, we are in our spirit. As long as I walk, I am using my feet; as long as I see, I am using my eyes; and as long as I contact God, I am using my spirit, since my spirit is the organ by which I contact Him (John 4:24). If I see, it means that I am exercising my eyes. Likewise, if I am contacting God, I must be exercising my spirit. This is very precious in our daily walk, and we all must learn to practice it.

Thus, the first step in the process of man's fall was failing to use his spirit. Adam and Eve did not contact God in eating of the tree of knowledge, but instead paid attention to things other than God, not taking Him as the Head. (*Life-study of Genesis*, msg. 18, pp. 232-236)

THE SEED OF WOMAN

Jesus also has another name: the Seed of a Woman. This is seen in Genesis 3:15. 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.'

Why is Jesus called the Seed of Woman? To see this we must realize that in order to fulfill His purpose God created man as the center of the universe. It is not a small thing that we have been created in God's image. Adam was made in the image of God. But God said that it was not good for man to be alone. So He took a part of the man and built this part into a woman. This is God's economy. Many times those of us who are husbands wish that we did not have a wife. Yet, on the other hand, we simply cannot go on without a wife. God's economy destines us in this way. Hence, God prepared a wife for man.

But not long after God made a help meet for man, Satan entered. He did not make his first approach to mankind through the man, but through the woman. The husband may be likened to the

front door, and the wife to the back door. He came in from the woman's direction, not from the man's. This may seem terrible, but it is really wonderful.

Forty years ago I heard a message by Brother Watchman Nee in which he said that in the entire universe God has an enemy, who may be likened to a mouse running loose in our house. How can we get rid of him? The best way is to set a trap. With the trap, there is always a little door. The door to the trap is the woman. The trap-maker made the door. Then one day Satan came into mankind through this door. He thought that he had captured man, but God had caught the enemy in a trap. This is why in Genesis 3 God told the enemy that the seed of the woman would bruise his head.

So eventually we see that the woman is not so bad. Eventually she is glorious. Though Satan came in through the woman, the Seed who would bruise the serpent's head also came in through the woman. Hallelujah! Jesus was not the seed of a man; He was the seed of a woman. All the sisters should be proud of this. Since the day Jesus came in through woman, there is the wonderful story of woman in the New Testament. Not long ago I fellowshipped with the sisters in Los Angeles about the six Marys recorded in the New Testament. Of course, the first Mary was the woman through whom Jesus was born. With Mary there is the seed of woman, and Jesus' name is her seed. (*The Wonderful Christ in the Canon of the New Testament*, msg. 1, pp. 8-9)

Study Questions:

1. In God's creation, according to 1 Corinthians 11:3, how did God arrange an order of headship in His administration?
2. Based on man's fall in Genesis 3:1-6 and 1 Timothy 2:14, how do we see woman's need to be under the proper headship?
3. After the fall, and according to God's promise, how did God do something through the woman to defeat His enemy? How does this show us the importance of woman in God's administration?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Conclusion of the New Testament*, msg. 312.
2. *Life-study of Genesis*, msg. 18.
3. *The Wonderful Christ in the Canon of the New Testament*, ch. 1.

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 6

Woman in God's Administration— Headship and Head Covering

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:7, 18-24; 3:1-6; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:14

I. The significance of the woman is that she represents man before God:

- A. Isaiah 54:5 says, "For your Maker is your Husband"; God is the unique, universal man.
- B. Whether we are males or females we are all a part of His wife; man's position is not the position of the husband; it is the position of a wife.
- C. God is our husband; the headship is with God, not with us, not even with the men.

II. The failure of the woman consisted in being over the man and assuming the headship—Gen. 3:1-6; cf. 1 Tim. 2:14:

- A. This failure on Eve's part typifies man's assuming the headship and signifies his being over God and putting God aside—Gen. 3:2, note 1.
- B. This same principle operates today; whenever we act on our own, putting the Lord aside, we are defeated.

III. The position of the woman is one of covering her head and never assuming the headship:

- A. We must always keep ourselves under God's covering; the woman must cover her head and never assume the headship—1 Cor. 11:3, 5, 14-15.
- B. Since God is our Head we should always turn to Him.

IV. Head covering is a sign of submission to authority—1 Cor. 11:10:

- A. First Corinthians 11:10 says, "Therefore the woman ought to have a sign of submission to authority on her head for the sake of the angels":
 - 1. The head signifies authority; according to God's ordination, a woman, even though she has her own head, should not be the head but should submit to authority.
 - 2. Thus, she should cover her head as a confession and declaration that even though she has her own head, she is not the head and does not act as head.
- B. Head covering declares that a woman is under authority and confesses and receives another as her head, allowing him to be the head; simply speaking, when the woman covers her head, it is a sign that she submits to authority.
- C. In verse 5 Paul says, "But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered disgraces her head; for it is one and the same thing as she who is shaved":
 - 1. Since woman is under the headship of man, she should keep her head covered, not exposed, when she touches the divine administration by praying to God and speaking for God.
 - 2. Otherwise she disgraces or shames her head, as if having her head shaved, because she denies the divine governmental ordination by exposing her head to the observing angels (v. 10) when she touches the authority of God.
- D. Verse 6 says, "For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off; but if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, let her be covered":
 - 1. This indicates that the head covering is a covering in addition to long hair.
 - 2. For a woman to have long hair, not having her head shaved, signifies that she does not reject God's governmental ordination; and for a woman to have a head covering in

addition to her long hair is to say amen to the divine ordination.

V. We need to see the reasons for head covering:

- A. Man is God's image and glory, but woman is the glory of man—v. 7:
 - 1. Man was made in God's image (Gen. 1:26) to express God and glorify Him; since man bears God's image and glory and represents God, he ought not to have his head covered; if he does, God's image and glory will be concealed.
 - 2. Since woman is the glory of man, she ought not to have her head expressed but covered; she should not express herself but the man, under whom she is.
- B. Man is not out of woman, but woman is out of man—1 Cor. 11:8:
 - 1. As a rib taken out of man, woman was made out of man (Gen. 2:21-23); God did not create a woman; He formed a male body from the dust of the ground and breathed into this body the breath of life; as a result, a man, named Adam, became a living soul.
 - 2. God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and then He opened his side, took out a rib, and used that rib to build a woman; thus, woman was not created, but came out of man; this indicates that the woman's place is by the side of the man.
- C. Man was not created for the sake of the woman, but the woman for the sake of the man—1 Cor. 11:9:
 - 1. Here the apostle takes God's purpose in the creation of man and woman as another strong ground for his teaching of head covering.
 - 2. It is based not upon any human-made customs, but upon the divine purpose of creation; in creation woman was made for the purpose of matching man—Gen. 2:18, 24.
- D. Woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels—1 Cor. 11:10:
 - 1. Authority here denotes the head covering, which signifies the authority of man's headship over the woman.
 - 2. Satan, a chief angel, had been commissioned to control the universe for God; but he rebelled, and certain angels followed him; of course, a good number of angels remained faithful to God. God created man to deal with the rebellious angels.
 - 3. As the church, we should declare to the angels, both to the rebellious and to the submissive ones, that as God's redeemed people we are not rebellious against His headship.
 - 4. Even in this rebellious age we submit to His authority; the covering on the sisters' head is a sign declaring this to the angels.
- E. Nature itself teaches us that long hair is a dishonor to a man, but long hair is a glory to a woman—vv. 14-15:
 - 1. When Paul says nature here, he is referring to our natural constitution according to God's creation; nature itself tells us that man should not have long hair, but the woman should.
 - 2. The woman by her female constitution realizes that to have long hair to cover her head is a glory; this is also a strong ground for the apostle's teaching concerning head covering.

VI. We do not want to make head covering a mere outward formality; but it is a fact that the Bible reveals that the church should have such a sign declaring that we are a people under God's headship:

- A. In the church meetings the sisters should wear a head covering to signify that we recognize God's authority and respect His headship and that we are not a people rebellious against

God; instead, we are absolutely submissive to Him and signify this by having a head covering.

- B. However, although this has been our practice for more than fifty years, we have never forced anyone to participate in such a practice; in speaking about head covering, it is not our intention for the sisters to accept an outward practice merely in a doctrinal way.
- C. When a sister puts a covering on her head, she needs to realize the significance of head covering.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

II. THE HEADSHIP

In [1 Corinthians 11:3] Paul says, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.” This verse through verse 16 deals with the seventh problem, the problem concerning head covering. The first six problems, dealt with in chapters one through ten, may be considered one group. They are concerned with matters in the realm of human life. The last five problems, dealt with in chapters eleven through sixteen, are another group. They are concerned with matters in the realm of God’s administration. The first is concerning the headship of Christ and of God in the divine government. In Ephesians 1:22 and 23 the headship of Christ over all things is to His Body, the church. Here the headship of Christ over every man is concerning individuals. Christ is both the Head corporately of the Body, the church, and individually of the believers. He is the Head directly of every one of us. In the apostle’s dealing with the Corinthians’ problems concerning God’s administration, this matter of the headship of Christ and of God is his first concern.

In verse 3 Paul points out that the head of the woman is the man. In the divine governmental ordination, woman is under the headship of man. God created the female in this way (Gen. 2:18-24; 1 Tim. 2:13). According to the nature (1 Cor. 11:14) created by God, woman is subordinate to man.

Paul also says in verse 3 that the head of Christ is God. Christ is God’s anointed One, appointed by God. Hence, He is under God, and God as the originator is His Head. This refers to the relationship between Christ and God in the divine government.

In dealing with the problem of head covering, the apostle takes the headship of God, the headship of Christ, and the headship of man as strong ground for his instruction. His instruction concerning head covering is not based upon any religious practices or human customs, but based upon the headship in God’s governmental administration. Such a strong base leaves no ground for any argument over the matter of head covering.

Soon after I was saved, I heard a great deal of talk about head covering. Some argued that Paul spoke concerning head covering because in his time there was such a custom among the people. Later, thorough study made it clear that there was no such custom either among the Greeks or the Jews. Actually, according to Jewish custom, it was the priests who were required to cover their heads. Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 is not based on any custom found in the Mediterranean area. On the contrary, his teaching is according to divine revelation.

The reason we need head covering in the church is that head covering is related to the headship of God. This is the reason Paul speaks the way he does in 11:3, telling us that he wants us to know that the head of every man is Christ, that the head of the woman is the man, and that the head of Christ is God. Thus, head covering is related to the headship in God’s government. In the universe, especially in God’s governmental administration, there is order. God is the head over Christ, Christ is the head over every man, and man is the head over the woman. Therefore, in the church meetings the sisters should wear a head covering to signify that we recognize God’s authority and respect His headship and that we are not a people rebellious against God. Instead, we are absolutely submissive to Him and signify this by having a head covering. However, although this has been our practice for more than fifty years,

we have never forced anyone to participate in such a practice. We do not want to make head covering a mere outward formality. But it is a fact that the Bible reveals that the church should have such a sign declaring that we are a people under God's headship.

III. THE HEAD COVERING

A. Every Man Praying or Prophesying Having His Head Covered Disgracing His Head

In verse 4 Paul goes on to say, "Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered disgraces his head." To prophesy here means to speak for God. Since man has the headship over woman and is God's image and glory (v. 7), he should keep his head manifested, unconcealed, uncovered, when he prays to God and speaks for Him in touching the throne of God's administration. Otherwise he dishonors or shames his head.

We should not think that praying or speaking for God by prophesying are insignificant matters. It is a great thing to speak for God. Both our prayer and our speaking for God are related to God's administration. They are related to God's authority and headship. Therefore, as those who are God's image and glory, the men should not cover their heads when praying or prophesying. To cover our head in this way is to shame our head.

B. Every Woman Praying or Prophesying with Her Head Uncovered Disgracing Her Head

In verse 5 Paul continues, "But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered disgraces her head; for it is one and the same thing as she who is shaved." Since woman is under the headship of man, she should keep her head covered, not exposed, when she touches the divine administration by praying to God and speaking for God. Otherwise she disgraces or shames her head, as if having her head shaved, because she denies the divine governmental ordination by exposing her head to the observing angels (v. 10) when she touches the authority of God.

Paul tells us that a woman who disgraces her head is the same as one who is shaved. This is a strong indication that for a woman to have her head shaved or her hair cut off is shameful (v. 6).

Verse 6 says, "For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off; but if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, let her be covered." This indicates that the head covering is a covering in addition to long hair. For a woman to have long hair, not having her head shaved, signifies that she does not reject God's governmental ordination; and for a woman to have a head covering in addition to her long hair is to say amen to the divine ordination.

IV. THE REASONS

A. Man Being God's Image and Glory, but Woman Being the Glory of Man

One reason for head covering is found in verse 7: "For a man indeed ought not to have his head covered, being God's image and glory; but the woman is the glory of a man." Man was made in God's image (Gen. 1:26) to express God and glorify Him. Since man bears God's image and glory and represents God, he ought not to have his head covered. If he does, God's image and glory will be concealed. Since woman is the glory of man, she ought not to have her head expressed but covered. She should not express herself but the man, under whom she is. This is also a ground taken by the apostle for his teaching of head covering.

When a man prays or prophesies, touching the throne of God's authority, he should not have his head covered. But when a woman prays or prophesies, she should be covered.

B. Man Not out of Woman, but Woman out of Man

In verse 8 Paul gives us a second reason for head covering: “For man is not out of woman, but woman out of man.” As a rib taken out of man, woman was made out of man (Gen. 2:21-23). God did not create a woman. He formed a male body from the dust of the ground and breathed into this body the breath of life. As a result, a man, named Adam, became a living soul. God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and then He opened his side, took out a rib, and used that rib to build a woman. Thus, woman was not created, but came out of man. This indicates that the woman’s place is by the side of the man.

However, a man should not be proud regarding his position in relation to the woman. Notice what Paul says in verses 11 and 12: “However, neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord. For just as the woman is out of the man, so also is the man through the woman; but all things are out of God.” In the Lord’s plan and arrangement, neither is the woman apart from the man nor the man apart from the woman. Man is the source of the woman’s existence. Hence, the woman is out of the man. But woman is the means through which the man is born. Hence, the man is through the woman.

Regarding the relationship between man and woman, Paul is balanced. On the one hand, he says that the woman is out of the man, for she was made from a rib out of Adam. On the other hand, Paul says that the man is through the woman, for man comes into existence through his mother. [474] We also should be balanced, realizing both that the woman is out of the man and that the man is through the woman.

C. Man Not Created for the Sake of the Woman, but the Woman for the Sake of the Man

Verse 9 says, “For also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman for the sake of the man.” Here the apostle takes God’s purpose in the creation of man and woman as another strong ground for his teaching of head covering. It is based not upon any human-made customs, but upon the divine purpose of creation. In creation woman was made for the purpose of matching man (Gen. 2:18, 24).

D. Woman Having Authority on Her Head for the Sake of the Angels

In verse 10 Paul continues, “Therefore the woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels.” Authority here denotes the head covering, which signifies the authority of man’s headship over the woman.

In this verse we have another ground for the teaching of head covering. Head covering is closely related to God’s headship, God’s authority. The archangel with his subordinates rebelled against God’s headship (Ezek. 28:13-18; Isa. 14:12-15; Matt. 25:41), establishing his kingdom of darkness (Matt. 12:26; Col. 1:13), and became Satan, God’s adversary. After God created man, Satan seduced man to follow him and rebel against God. Then God sent His Son to destroy Satan and rescue man out of his authority back to God’s kingdom (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14; Col. 1:13). Now when the believers worship God in praying to God and speaking for God, they should have signs that they are under God’s headship, the divine authority, showing the observing angels (see 1 Cor. 4:9), who are concerned with this matter, that they (the believers) keep God’s ordained order in His administration. For this sake, the sisters should have a sign, a covering, on their head.

It is significant that Paul says that the woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels. Satan, a chief angel, had been commissioned to control the universe for God. But he rebelled, and certain angels followed him. Of course, a good number of angels remained faithful to God. God created man to deal with the rebellious angels. But Satan seduced man, and man followed

him. Then in redemption God came in to bring fallen man back to Himself. God's redeemed people are now the church. As the church, we should declare to the angels, both to the rebellious and to the submissive ones, that as God's redeemed people we are not rebellious against His headship. Rather, we remain under the headship of God. Not only in the coming kingdom age in eternity shall we be under God's headship, but even in this rebellious age we submit to His authority. The covering on the sisters' head is a sign declaring this to the angels.

In verse 13 Paul asks, "You judge among yourselves: Is it fitting for a woman to pray uncovered to God?" Here Paul is indicating that, judging according to the reasons he has given, it is not fitting for a woman to pray uncovered to God.

**E. Nature Itself Teaching Us
That Long Hair Is a Dishonor to a Man,
but Long Hair Is a Glory to a Woman**

Verses 14 and 15 say, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him; but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? Because the long hair has been given to her for a covering." When Paul says nature here, he is referring to our natural constitution according to God's creation. Nature itself tells us that man should not have long hair, but the woman should. The woman by her female constitution realizes that to have long hair to cover her head is a glory. This is also a strong ground for the apostle's teaching concerning head covering.

No matter how bold a sister may be, she would not feel peaceful if she were to assume authority over her husband. There is no need for anyone to teach her to feel uneasy about this. By her natural constitution created by God, she knows that she should not assume authority over her husband. There can be no doubt that the female constitution is different from the male constitution. Therefore, even the feeling we have from our natural constitution supports Paul's teaching concerning head covering.

In verse 15 Paul says that a woman's long hair has been given to her for a covering. Some who debate about head covering claim that in chapter eleven head covering simply refers to a woman's long hair. According to their opinion, as long as a woman has long hair, she has a head covering. But if we read these verses carefully, we shall see that head covering is something in addition to a woman's long hair. For a woman to have her hair long indicates that she recognizes God's authority over her. When she puts on a head covering, this indicates that she says amen to God's governmental arrangement.

V. NO CONTENTION

In verse 16 Paul concludes the portion on head covering: "But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." Custom here denotes the custom of contention, disputation, and debating. Neither the apostles nor the churches tolerated any disputation concerning the apostles' teaching. Furthermore, the plurality of the churches in this verse indicates that all the local churches are independent of one another, yet they all act in the same way according to the apostles' teaching.

In speaking about head covering, it is not our intention for the sisters to accept an outward practice merely in a doctrinal way. From the time the Lord's recovery came to this country, I have never given a message charging the sisters to cover their heads. Had I given such a message, I would just have been encouraging a formality. We do not want to see an outward form. The wearing of head covering by women is widely practiced in Catholicism. Among the Arabs, women are also instructed to wear a covering on their heads. However, in such cases, I do not believe that there is any understanding of what head covering signifies. When a sister puts a covering on her head, she needs to realize the significance of head covering. (*Life-study of 1 Corinthians*, msg. 53, pp. 470-476)

Study Questions:

1. What is the headship in God's administration and how can the sisters be proper in relation

to this headship?

2. What is the significance of head covering? Why is realizing this significance necessary in properly applying this teaching?
3. What are the five reasons Paul gives for head covering?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Life-study of 1 Corinthians*, msg. 53.
2. *Life-study of Genesis*, msg. 18.
3. *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, ch. 19.

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 11

The Normal Life of the Sisters in the Church— Adorning Themselves with Modesty and Sobriety

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 2:9-15

I. We need to see the normal life of the sisters in the church—1 Tim. 2:9-15:

- A. Adorning themselves—“Similarly, that women adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, what befits women professing godly reverence, by good works”—vv. 9-10:
 - 1. The sisters should clothe and cover their body in a proper way; proper clothing denotes what is fitting to the sisters’ nature and position as saints of God.
 - 2. In Greek the word for clothing implies deportment, demeanor; a sister’s demeanor, of which clothing is the main sign, must befit her saintly position.
 - 3. The Greek word rendered modesty literally is shamefastness, that is, bound or made fast by an honorable shame (Vincent), implying not forward or overbold, but moderate, observing the proprieties of a woman.
 - 4. Sobriety denotes sober-mindedness, self-restraint; it means to restrict oneself soberly and discreetly; the sisters in a local assembly should clothe themselves with these two virtues—shamefastness and self-restraint—as their demeanor.
- B. Learning—“Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection; but I do not permit a woman to teach or to assert authority over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived; but the woman, having been quite deceived, has fallen into transgression”—vv. 11-14:
 - 1. Quietness means silence; for a sister to learn in silence and in all subjection is to realize her position as a woman; this safeguards the sisters from the presumption of overstepping their position in the local assembly.
 - 2. Eve was deceived by the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6) because she did not remain in subjection under the headship of Adam, but overstepped her position to contact the evil tempter directly without her head being covered.
 - 3. This is the strong ground for the apostle not to permit the sisters in a local assembly to teach with authority or to exercise authority over men, but to learn in silence and remain in all subjection; man’s headship is woman’s protection.
- C. Their salvation—“But she will be saved through her childbearing, if they remain in faith and love and holiness with sobriety”— 1 Tim 2:15:
 - 1. Childbearing is a suffering; suffering restricts and protects the fallen one from transgression.
 - 2. In verse 15 Paul also mentions faith, love, and holiness:
 - a. Faith is to receive the Lord (John 1:12), love is to enjoy Him (John 14:21, 23), and holiness is to express Him through sanctification.
 - b. By faith we please God (Heb. 11:6), by love we keep the Lord’s word (John 14:23), and by holiness we see Him (Heb. 12:14).

II. The two virtues of modesty and sobriety are of great importance in the church life:

- A. In this [lesson] we are especially burdened concerning modesty, the leading female virtue.
- B. In some families there is not adequate stress on modesty; rather, both boys and girls are brought up and instructed in the same way.

- C. Modesty is a virtue which emphasizes the difference between male and female; as we have pointed out, the Greek word rendered “modesty” in 1 Tim 2:9 is literally shamefastness, that is, bound and made fast by an honorable shame:
1. A word related to the virtue of modesty is shamefacedness; to be shamefaced is to be modest and have a sense of shame and know how to show shame.
 2. When a sister speaks in a church meeting, she should do so with modesty, with a certain amount of shamefacedness.
 3. Modesty is a great safeguard and protection to a female; it is a mistake to teach girls in the same way as boys.
 4. Boys may expose themselves in certain situations; girls, however, should not; otherwise, they will be without protection; this lack of protection can open the way for fornication.
 5. If the women working in an office have the virtue of modesty, they will be free from any improper involvement with the men who work there; the proper covering, the necessary modesty, shamefacedness, causes them to keep a proper distance.
- D. All the sisters in the church life should have the virtue of modesty:
1. The sisters should dress according to the principle of modesty; this principle does not allow the exposure of one’s body.
 2. For a woman to expose her body is to go against the principle of modesty.
 3. A sister needs to have a head covering, not only physically, but also psychologically, ethically, morally, and spiritually; this is the modesty spoken of in the Bible.
 4. To be modest simply means that a female is fully covered in every way.
- E. The sisters should never forget that they are females; this must be true especially of young unmarried sisters:
1. They should be careful not to allow any evil thing to defile their holy body, which has been separated unto God and which is the temple of the Holy Spirit—1 Cor. 6:18-19.
 2. For a young woman to preserve her body in this way requires modesty.
 3. All the young sisters need to wear a heavenly cloak to cover themselves from the influence of this evil age; then they will be preserved for God’s purpose.
- F. Along with modesty, the sisters need sobriety; as a sister is practicing modesty, she needs to be sober—1 Tim. 2:9:
1. Far from being foolish, she should be sober-minded and discreet; she should be clear about things and have a keen discernment—cf. Prov. 11:22.
 2. A sister should be quiet, but she should not be without sobriety and discernment—1 Tim. 2:11.
 3. The sisters should attend the church meetings in order to gain the full knowledge of the truth; this knowledge will cause them to be sober in their understanding; then, along with their modesty, they will have what Paul calls “holiness with sobriety”—v. 15.
 4. They will not be holy in a foolish way, in a way devoid of knowledge; on the contrary, they will be holy in a way that is full of knowledge, understanding, and discernment.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE SISTERS

In verse 9, Paul turns to the sisters. He begins this verse with the word “similarly.” This refers to “I will” in verse 8. It may also indicate that Paul’s word about praying in every place applies to the sisters as well as to the brothers.

Adorning Themselves

Verse 9 says, “Similarly, that women adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing.” Proper clothing denotes what is fitting to the sisters’ nature and position as saints of God. Clothing in Greek implies deportment, demeanor. Clothing is the main sign of a sister’s demeanor, and it must befit her saintly position.

The Greek word rendered modesty literally is shamefastness, that is, bound or made fast by an honorable shame (Vincent), implying not forward or overbold, but moderate, observing the proprieties of a woman.

Sobriety denotes sober-mindedness, self-restraint. It means to restrict oneself soberly and discreetly. The sisters in a local assembly should clothe themselves with these two virtues—shamefastness and self-restraint—as their demeanor.

In verse 10 Paul continues, “But, what befits women professing godly reverence, by good works.” Godly reverence is reverence toward God; it is the revering and honoring of God as those who worship Him should. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 4, p. 38)

Their Salvation

In this message I am especially burdened concerning modesty, the leading female virtue. In some families there is not adequate stress on modesty. Rather, both boys and girls are brought up and instructed in the same way. Modesty is a virtue which emphasizes the difference between male and female. As we have pointed out, the Greek word rendered “modesty” in 2:9 is literally shamefastness, that is, bound and made fast by an honorable shame.

A word related to the virtue of modesty is shamefacedness. To be shamefaced is to be modest and have a sense of shame and know how to show shame. When a sister speaks in a church meeting, she should do so with modesty, with a certain amount of shamefacedness.

Modesty is a great safeguard and protection to a female. It is a mistake to teach girls in the same way as boys. Boys may expose themselves in certain situations; girls, however, should not. Otherwise, they will be without protection. This lack of protection can open the way for fornication. If the women working in an office have the virtue of modesty, they will be free from any improper involvement with the men who work there. A woman working in an office may easily become involved with a man if she does not have the proper covering, the necessary modesty, shamefacedness, which causes her to keep a proper distance.

All the sisters in the church life should have the virtue of modesty. The sisters should dress according to the principle of modesty. This principle does not allow the exposure of one’s body. For a woman to expose her body is to go against the principle of modesty. A sister needs to have a head covering, not only physically, but also psychologically, ethically, morally, and spiritually. This is the modesty spoken of in the Bible. To be modest simply means that a female is fully covered in every way.

In the church life the brothers and sisters have quite a lot of contact with one another in fellowship. In such fellowship it is necessary for the sisters to wear a moral, ethical, and spiritual covering known as modesty. In all their contact with the brothers, the sisters should be covered with an “overcoat” of modesty. This is a great safeguard and protection.

The sisters should never forget that they are females. This must be true especially of young unmarried sisters. They should be careful not to allow any evil thing to defile their holy body, which has been separated unto God and which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. For a young woman to preserve her body in this way requires modesty. I advise all the young sisters to wear a heavenly cloak to cover themselves from the influence of this evil age. Then they will be preserved for God's purpose. At the time appointed by God, He will arrange for the right brother to marry a young sister as a virgin. Again and again I would remind the sisters to wear a cloak of modesty. The sisters must always remember that they are females. As females it is necessary for them to be covered. This is modesty.

Along with modesty, the sisters need sobriety (2:9). As a sister is practicing modesty, she needs to be sober. Far from being foolish, she should be sober-minded and discreet. She should be clear about things and have a keen discernment. A sister should be quiet, but she should not be without sobriety and discernment. A sister should be quiet soberly, not foolishly. As a sister exercises herself to be quiet and not to overstep her position, she needs a keen discernment within. Her spiritual sky should be clear, without clouds or smog. Then she will be clear, careful, and discreet.

The two virtues of modesty and sobriety are of great importance in the church life. The sisters should attend the church meetings in order to gain the full knowledge of the truth. This knowledge will cause them to be sober in their understanding. Then, along with their modesty, they will have what Paul calls "holiness with sobriety" (2:15). They will not be holy in a foolish way, in a way devoid of knowledge. On the contrary, they will be holy in a way that is full of knowledge, understanding, and discernment. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 4, pp. 35-40)

The sisters should clothe and cover their body in a proper way. First Timothy 2:9 charges the sisters to "adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing." The word proper denotes fitting to the sisters' nature and position as saints of God. In Greek the word for clothing implies deportment, demeanor. A sister's demeanor, of which clothing is the main sign, must befit her saintly position. The word modesty means, literally, "shamefastness," denoting being bound or made fast by an honorable shame (Vincent), implying not forward or overbold but moderate, observing the proprieties of womanhood. The word sobriety means "sobermindedness, self-restraint; the restricting of oneself soberly and discreetly." The sisters in a local church should clothe themselves with these two virtues—shamefastness and self-restraint—as their demeanor. (*Life-study of Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, msg. 23, p. 46)

Proper Clothing with Modesty and Sobriety

Let us look at 1 Timothy 2:9-11: "Similarly, that women adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, what befits women professing godly reverence, by good works. Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection."

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

Verse 9 continues: "Not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing." This particularly refers to the curling of hair. Peter was referring to the many fashions that women apply to their hair. Curling the hair means making many curls like clusters of vines. Women were already concerned with fashion two thousand years ago. Today many think that it is fashionable to curl their hair into clusters.

Actually, this is something very ancient; it was being done two thousand years ago. Costly clothing is spoken of here as well. Some dresses have the same value but are priced differently. We should not wear the costly ones or spend extra money on them.

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

Some sisters spend too much time on their clothing. They pay too much attention to fancy clothes and costly dresses. Other sisters do not care for the tidiness and the cleanliness of their attire; they are very careless about their clothing. This shows that they are sloppy. A woman's dress is a true reflection of her character. If one does not pay attention to personal grooming and cleanliness, such a person is loose, sloppy, and careless. Our clothing must be proper, neat, and clean. It must be simple, but clean. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 3, ch. 37, pp. 610- 611)

Study Questions:

1. What is modesty or shamefastness as referred to by Paul in 1 Tim. 2:9 and how is such modesty a protection to the sisters?
2. How is such modesty particularly related to the sisters' adornment?
3. Explain how the sisters also need sobriety in their practice of modesty?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Life-study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 4
2. *Life-study of Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, msg. 23
3. *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, volume 3, ch. 37

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 12

The Adorning of the Hidden Man of the Heart in a Meek and Quiet Spirit

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 3:3-4; Lev. 13:47-59

I. First Peter 3:3 says, “Whose adorning, let it not be the outward plaiting of hair, and putting on of gold, or clothing with garments”:

- A. Women's hair was intended by God for their glory and a sign of their submission—1 Cor. 11:15; S. S. 4:1; 6:5; 7:5.
- B. But it was abused by many, especially by those who lived in the luxurious and corrupt life of the Roman Empire at the time of this Epistle, to beautify their lustful flesh by its extravagant adornment with gold and other costly things.
- C. Christian wives, as holy women, should absolutely abstain from this God-condemned matter.

II. In 1 Peter 3:4 Peter goes on to say, “But the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very costly in the sight of God”:

- A. Our heart is composed of all the parts of our soul—mind, emotion, and will—and of the main part of our spirit, the conscience—Heb. 4:12:
 - 1. Among all these, our spirit is the center; hence, our spirit is the hidden man of the heart.
 - 2. The hidden man is in contrast to the outward plaiting, putting on, and clothing in 1 Peter 3:3; and a meek and quiet spirit, in contrast to hair, gold, and garments.
 - 3. The wives' adornment before God should be their inner being—the hidden man of their heart, which is their spirit, in meekness and quietness.
 - 4. This is the incorruptible adornment in contrast to the corruptible hair, gold, and garments; this spiritual adornment is costly in the sight of God—v. 4.
 - 5. A spirit that has become meek and quiet is the kind of adornment that should be possessed by all Christian wives.
- B. According to 1 Peter 3, the most beautiful part of our being, the prettiest adornment, in the sight of God is a meek and quiet spirit:
 - 1. This is the hidden man of the heart; this point shows that our spirit is the deepest part of our being.
 - 2. So if we are going to be pretty in the eyes of God, we have to be pretty from the depths of our being; we should not be pretty just outwardly, in a physical way.
 - 3. We have to be pretty inwardly, in the hidden man; this man is hidden from the eyes of man, but it is not hidden from the eyes of God, because such a hidden man, that is, a meek and quiet spirit, is pretty in the eyes of God.
- C. One serious lesson for wives to learn is not to argue, not to exchange words, with their husbands; the sisters need to realize that when they exchange words with their husbands, they do not have a meek and quiet spirit.
 - 1. But if as a Christian wife a sister maintains a meek and quiet spirit, she will not lose her temper, and she will not even exchange words with her husband.
 - 2. Knowing the situation of married life from experience and observation, Peter charges the wives to adorn themselves with a meek and quiet spirit.

III. Peter's word indicates that many sisters tended to adorn themselves with

plaiting of hair, gold, and apparel; he did not feel happy about the way they dressed—v. 3:

- A. The plaiting of hair and ornaments of jewelry are not suitable, nor is beautiful apparel.
- B. We are not saying that sisters should be careless in their clothing; if a sister dresses herself in a careless, untidy, and unclean way, it means that she is a careless and loose person; this is not what Peter meant.
- C. Peter's emphasis is that sisters should not adorn themselves with the plaiting of hair and the putting on of gold and costly garments; instead, they should adorn themselves with a meek and quiet spirit.
- D. This must also be the result of man having been dealt with by God.

IV. We need to see the principles concerning clothing:

- A. The principle of clothing is for covering; Christians should not wear any clothing which does not cover them—cf. Gen. 3:21.
- B. There should be a clear distinction between males and females; the Bible forbids men to wear women's clothing and vice versa; anything which confuses the distinction in gender does not glorify God—Deut. 22:5.
- C. Our clothing must be sealed with the mark of holiness; there should be the seal of the Holy Spirit, the seal of the anointing oil, on our clothing—Lev. 8:30.
- D. There is one basic principle of Christian clothing—God has given everyone the freedom to wear what they like; we are free to choose the materials we like and to pick the style we prefer.
- E. However, we should take note of one thing: no one should wear anything that draws attention to their clothes rather than to their person.
- F. Another matter needs special attention: a person's clothes should match their status; do not dress too poorly and do not dress too well; others should not feel that we are too much or too poor in our attire; our clothing must glorify the Lord.
- G. Furthermore, our clothing should not arouse our own consciousness; some people are always conscious of what they wear; this means that something is wrong with their attire.

V. While God does not give specific instructions on how to dress, two principles are presented: our clothing must be proper, and our clothing must not be extravagant:

- A. We dare not say that there is a specific standard for what is proper, but regardless of where we are or what we are doing, we have an inward sense of whether or not our clothing is proper.
- B. While it may be more difficult in determining whether or not a particular garment is extravagant, we each have an inward sense of what is extravagant and what is not.
- C. Under the new covenant God does not give us dead ordinance after dead ordinance concerning every matter; instead, He imparts His living law of life inside of us so that we know what to do with respect to every matter (Heb. 8:10); may we be willing to follow His inward leading in the matter of clothing and adornment.

VI. We need to bring our clothes to the Lord and deal with them one by one—Lev. 13:47-59:

- A. If you have any doubt about any of your clothes, you should bring them to the priest for examination; the Lord is the High Priest today; you must ask Him whether or not you can wear this clothing.
- B. Do not expect others to come and tell you what is good and what is not; you must bring everything to the Lord yourself and let the Lord judge you; you must ask the Lord, "I have become a believer now. Is this clothing all right?"

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE SISTERS' ADORNING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As we have pointed out, this meek and quiet spirit is the hidden man of the heart. We believers actually have two men. The first is in our soul with our body. This is the outward man. The other is the hidden man in the center of our heart. The fact that the hidden man of the heart is a meek and quiet spirit indicates that our spirit is the kernel of our being, hidden in the midst of our heart, which is composed of the mind, emotion, will, and conscience. Our spirit, therefore, is surrounded by the mind, emotion, and will. If our spirit is meek and quiet, this will influence our mind, emotion, and will. To be sure, if our spirit is meek, our mind, emotion, and will also will be meek. When we are meek, we are quiet. Meekness and quietness of spirit is a beautiful adornment in the sight of God. (*Life-study of 1 Peter*, msg. 22, pp. 200-204)

First Peter 3:4, “The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit” (KJV). This kind of spirit is not only meek, but also quiet, and is therefore a most valuable ornament in the sight of God. This must also be the result of man having been dealt with by God. (*The Experience of Life*, ch. 13, p. 283)

OUR SPIRIT BEING THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART

First Peter 3:4 reveals that our spirit is the hidden man of our heart. The hidden man is a meek and quiet spirit. When our spirit is meek and quiet, it is hidden. First Peter 3:4 indicates that every part of our being may be considered as a man. Our physical body is our outward man, our soul is our expressed, manifested man, and our spirit is our hidden man.

According to 1 Peter 3, the most beautiful part of our being, the prettiest adornment, in the sight of God is a meek and quiet spirit. This is the hidden man of the heart. This point shows that our spirit is the deepest part of our being. So if we are going to be pretty in the eyes of God, we have to be pretty from the depths of our being. We should not be pretty just outwardly, in a physical way. We have to be pretty inwardly, in the hidden man. This man is hidden from the eyes of man, but it is not hidden from the eyes of God, because such a hidden man, that is, a meek and quiet spirit, is pretty in the eyes of God.

We have to point out that 1 Peter 3:4, on the one hand, says something about the hidden man but, on the other hand, refers to it as being in the sight of God. This means that this meek and quiet spirit is hidden in our heart from human eyes, but it is not hidden in the sight of God. God sees it. So this is the real beauty a godly person should have. (*Basic Lessons on Life*, lesson 17, pp. 134-135)

COSTLY APPAREL AND MEEKNESS

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

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

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

Peter was saying that it is wrong for women to plait their hair in the manner he described. The phrase plaiting of hair in the original text means to fashion the hair in many styles. Throughout history, many styles have been designed to plait the hair. Putting on of gold means to wear jewelry. Christians cannot do this. Clothing with garments may refer to colorful and stylish dresses. Peter's emphasis is

that sisters should not adorn themselves with the plaiting of hair and the putting on of gold and costly garments. Instead, they should adorn themselves with a meek and quiet spirit. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 3, ch. 37, pp. 608-610)

CLOTHING

In the Dispensation of Grace

The verses from 1 Timothy and 1 Peter clearly show that in the dispensation of grace, God wants us to pay attention to inward spiritual virtues rather than outward beauty and costly ornamentation. These verses are specifically directed toward the sisters because they pay more attention to matters of adornment.

While God does not give specific instructions on how to dress, two principles are presented: our clothing must be proper, and our clothing must not be extravagant. I dare not say that there is a specific standard for what is proper, but I believe that we each have a sense of whether or not our clothing is proper. This is marvelous! Regardless of where we are or what we are doing, we have an inward sense of whether or not our clothing is proper. With regard to the matter of extravagance, God is a little more specific. He counts gold, jewelry, and costly items as extravagant and does not allow us to wear them. While it may be more difficult in determining whether or not a particular garment is extravagant, we each have an inward sense of what is extravagant and what is not. Under the new covenant God does not give us dead ordinance after dead ordinance concerning every matter. Instead, He imparts His living law of life inside of us so that we know what to do with respect to every matter (Heb. 8:10). May we be willing to follow His inward leading in the matter of clothing and adornment. (*Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 3, ch. 7, pp. 562-564)

PRINCIPLES CONCERNING CLOTHING

Personal Freedom

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

Not Attracting Attention

However, we should take note of one thing: No one should wear anything that draws attention to his clothes rather than to his person. No Christian should do this. If our clothing always draws others' attention to us, there is something wrong with it. What we wear should express our being. If I put a bouquet of flowers into a vase and others only pay attention to the vase, something is wrong with the vase. Clothing is meant to express the person. Our clothing should not usurp who we are. The worst thing would be for us to wear clothing that draws attention away from our person to our appearance. This is a great mistake.

Clothing Needing to Match One's Status

Another matter needs special attention: A person's clothes should match his status. Do not dress too poorly and do not dress too well. Please bear in mind that poor clothing attracts attention in the same way that fancy clothing does. We should not pay that much attention to our clothing, neither should we draw the attention of others to it. It is wrong to give others the impression that we are

particularly well dressed. However, it is also wrong to be so poorly dressed that others begin to feel uneasy about us. Our clothing must match our status. Others should not feel that we are too much or too poor in our attire. Our clothing must glorify the Lord.

Clothing Not Arousing Self-consciousness

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

It is best to wear something which does not arouse your attention or the attention of others. Your clothes should be very ordinary. At the same time, it should match your status and should be worthy of Christ. Anything that goes beyond this limit is improper. It is a great thing to present a Christian testimony in our attire today. This means that others can identify us as Christians by our appearance. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 3, pp. 607-613)

Bringing Clothes to the Lord and Dealing with Them One by One

A new believer must pay attention to the matter of clothing. If you have any doubt about any of your clothes, you should bring them to the priest for examination. The Lord is the High Priest today. You must ask Him whether or not you can wear this clothing. Do not think that this is a small matter. Clothing is a big issue to a new believer. If you do not know which clothes are plagued with leprosy, you should bring them to the Priest and let the Lord tell you whether they are plagued.

Remember that a person has to separate himself from a leper. A house plagued with leprosy had to be torn down and a garment plagued with leprosy had to be burned. Of course, today you do not need to burn your clothing. But at least you must not wear those things anymore. There are many garments which are plagued with leprosy. Many of them can be worn again after the sleeves are lengthened and the dress dyed to a different color or changed to a different style. Some clothing can be kept after it is examined by the priest and altered a little. Some clothing has the nature of leprosy even after it is examined and altered. It must be thrown away. As soon as a person believes in the Lord, he has to present his clothes piece by piece to the Lord and allow Him to examine each one in detail. He should let the Lord tell him whether or not the clothing is appropriate for him. All of it must be dealt with piece by piece.

I hope new believers will behave as Christians when they present themselves before men. I do not want to see anyone doubting a Christian's genuineness because of the kind of clothes he or she wears. Others will say whether or not we are Christians by the kind of clothes we wear. A cleansed person would never wear plagued clothing. Our leprosy has been cleansed and our sins are forgiven. From now on, we should not wear any leprosy-infested garments.

New believers must present everything in their wardrobe piece by piece to the Lord and pray over each item. Do not expect others to come and tell you what is good and what is not. You must bring everything to the Lord yourself and let the Lord judge you. You must ask the Lord, "I have become a believer now. Is this clothing all right? Is this clothing right?" Some items of clothing have to be thrown away, while others must be altered. Let the Lord teach you what to do. Some garments cannot be altered at all. You must decide for yourself whether sin is involved in a certain garment. Your clothing has much to do with you. This matter must be dealt with soberly. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 3, pp. 607-608)

Study Questions:

1. What is the hidden man of the heart?
2. How can the sisters be pretty in the eyes of God?
3. Explain how, on the one hand, the Scriptures give us principles concerning clothing adornment and, on the other hand, we must apply these principles according to the inward leading of the law of life.

References and Further Reading:

1. *Life-study of 1 Peter*, msg. 22.
2. *Basic Lessons on Life*, lesson 17.
3. *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, volume 3, ch. 37.
4. *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 3, ch.7

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 13

The Human Life and Family Life of the Sisters (1) Expressing Christ through Human Life and Building Up a Proper Family Life for the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Col. 3:18-4:1; Prov. 14:1; 31:10-31

I. God desires that Christ be expressed through human life—Col. 3:18-4:1; Eph. 5:22-6:9; cf. *Hymns #403*:

- A. “I have seen some seeking ones, particularly sisters, who do not seem to be human beings. They are so ‘spiritual’ that it seems they are strange creatures—half human and half angel... We all prefer to be something else. The sisters especially like to be something else, but we all need simply to be human” (*The Visions of Ezekiel*, p. 33)—cf. Ezek. 1:5, 10:
1. We should never think that if we reach God’s standard, we no longer need to be human; the more spiritual we are, the more human we shall be—cf. Acts 16:7.
 2. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was very human; if we would live Christ, we must learn to be human in a genuine way—Matt. 15:32; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 7:11-15; John 19:25-27; Phil. 1:21a:
 - a. We are to live a genuinely human life by the divine life and nature—Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; 1:19-21a.
 - b. In this way we shall be able to live the highest human life, a life like that of the Lord Jesus.
- B. Many of those in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Catholicism have a low estimate of human life; they do not care for marriage or for the proper family life; they prefer to remain unmarried, and they aspire to live a type of angelic life; but the angelic life cannot express Christ:
1. Many monks and priests in Catholicism have a living that is abnormal.
 2. The requirement that priests and nuns not be married not only is contrary to humanity, but has its source in demons—1 Tim. 4:1-3.
- C. Christ needs to be expressed in those who are husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, and slaves; in order to express Christ, we need to have a proper and normal human life—Col. 3:18-4:1:
1. If we live in union with Christ, Christ will be expressed through our humanity; Christ is to be expressed in the human life, not in the angelic life; angels cannot express Christ.
 2. Through our family life we learn many valuable lessons from the Lord; it is not as difficult to live out Christ in the church life as it is to live Him out at home, but how wonderful it is for a brother or sister to express Christ in his or her married life!—cf. Gen. 29:16-30:24; 34:1-31; 35:16-22; 37:3-35; 42:29-38; 43:6-14; 45:26-27; 49:1-33:
 - a. No brother or sister in the Lord’s recovery should aspire to live like a monk or nun.
 - b. At the right time, the brothers and sisters should marry and then learn through the experiences of married life to express Christ in their human living.
 3. The living of the saints in union with Christ should result in the expression of Christ in human life; if we see this, we shall praise the Lord for our human living; furthermore, we shall have a fresh appreciation for married life.
- D. For us to live Christ we must practice the one spirit with Him, and for us to practice the one spirit with Him, we must exercise our spirit to pray unceasingly—1 Thes. 5:17; Eph. 6:18:

1. If we try to live Christ beyond or apart from praying we cannot make it:
 - a. If we make up our minds to try to live Christ, that is actually the living of our self; if you try to live Christ without praying you will fail.
 - b. It is only by a continual living prayer, a breathing prayer, that we spontaneously live Christ.
 - c. This is why Paul charges us to pray unceasingly; to pray unceasingly simply means to stop our own effort; if you do not pray, yet you try to do something, that is your own effort.
 - d. This point is like a small screw in a large machine; when a large machine works, it depends upon some small screws; not to try to live Christ, but to pray is a small thing, yet it is very crucial.
 - e. Do not make up your mind to try to live Christ, but all the day long pray, “Lord, live through me”; pray every moment in anything, in everything, and everywhere.
2. In the spiritual life to pray is to breathe, and to breathe is to live; to live Christ is to pray unceasingly, and to pray unceasingly is just to call on the Lord while you are doing anything—John 20:22; Lam. 3:55-56:
 - a. We have a lot of duties and responsibilities, but regardless of how busy we are, we still breathe; while you do things, you breathe; we must build up such a breathing habit.
 - b. All day long you should call on Him; you must do all things by talking to the Lord, by praying to Him, by calling on Him—Psa. 116:1-2; Job 27:10; 1 Cor. 1:2.
 - c. By this you are breathing; this is to live spiritually, and to live spiritually is just to live Christ.

II. A good church life is maintained through good families—cf. Prov. 14:1; 31:10-31:

- A. 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.
- B. First we need to build up the proper married life and family life, and then we shall be able to build up the church life.
- C. In order to have a proper family life, the mother is more important than the father:
 1. In a family the responsibility is mainly on the side of the wife.
 2. In order to have a proper family life with a proper home life, the wife must bear the majority of the responsibility.
- D. Although the man occupies the higher position, in a secret, actual, practical, and subjective way the real situation of the family depends on the female side:
 1. On the surface a woman’s position may not be as manifest as that of a man, because the man is the head according to God’s ordination—1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23.
 2. Nevertheless, the woman in a family bears a large and important responsibility, and her influence is profound.
 3. As a good wife and mother, a woman needs to bear everything in a family; nevertheless, she should not make decisions and act on her own; a wife should do things with her husband’s consent and under her husband’s leading, even though ninety percent of the household matters are in her hands—Prov. 31:10-31.
- E. “A wise woman builds her house”—Prov. 14:1a.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FACE OF A MAN

The first face [of the four living creatures in Ezekiel one] is the face of a man. We are men, and because we are men, we should look like men. We were created as men, but we were corrupted, poisoned, and damaged by the fall. Therefore, we need the Lord's redemption. Through the Lord's redemption we are brought back to the proper humanity. Actually, the humanity we have now is not ours but His, for we have the humanity of Jesus.

Some say that it is difficult to be a man and claim that they are disgusted with being a man. Those who have this attitude toward their humanity need to see that their concept is absolutely different from the Lord's concept in His salvation. The Lord's salvation is to make us proper men. If you are a husband, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper husband. If you are a wife, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper wife. If you are a parent, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper parent. If you are a child, the Lord's salvation is to make you a proper child. The Lord's salvation is to make us proper human beings. Thus, we all should bear the face of a man. However, some Christians, especially certain sisters, do not seem to be human beings. Rather, they are so "spiritual" that it seems that they have become strange creatures—half human, half angel. We need the face of a man. We should not prefer to be something else, and we should not pretend to be something else. We should just be what we are—a man. Instead of trying to be something other than a human being, we should simply be human. However, we should be human not by our natural humanity but by the humanity of the Lord Jesus.

If we read the four Gospels again, we will see that Jesus was a person with a proper humanity. Many who read the Gospels only pay attention to the miracles worked out by the Lord in His divinity; they do not pay adequate attention to the things worked out by the Lord's humanity. For example, John 4 relates how the Lord Jesus was traveling with His disciples to a city in Samaria. He was tired and thirsty, and He asked His disciples to go into the city to buy something to eat. After they went away to buy food, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well near which the Lord Jesus was sitting. Although He was the Almighty God, in this situation He conducted Himself just like an ordinary man, without any indication or hint that He was God. When He asked the woman for water, He gave no indication that He was anything more than a man. The woman questioned Him, saying, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, who am a Samaritan woman?" (v. 9). He responded to her question in a very human way. The four Gospels record many similar stories which show us how the Lord Jesus behaved Himself like a normal man, bearing the face of a man. Unlike certain religious people today who dress in way that is very strange, the Lord Jesus did not dress in a peculiar manner. In His clothing He was not strange or different from others. On the contrary, His living was that of an ordinary human being. His living was ordinary to such an extent that some would say, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55). In the eyes of the people, the Lord Jesus was the son of an ordinary carpenter. Far from being strange, He was an ordinary man and He bore the face of a man. Today, we too need to bear the face of man.

Some believers have the thought that once they begin to pursue the Lord, they should be special or different from others. We need to realize, therefore, that we should be ordinary, that is, we should be the same as common, ordinary human beings. Although we pray, read the Bible, attend the meetings, and serve God, our appearance is still the appearance of a man, and our face is the face of a man. In our dress we are proper, but we are ordinary, not peculiar or eccentric. Yes, we experience the Lord as the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, but the issue of this experience is that we bear the face of a man. As living creatures, we are not angels but are very human. In fact, the more spiritual we become, the more normal and human we will be. The more we have of Christ as our life (Col. 3:4), the more we will bear the face of a man. In the Epistles we are taught by the apostles to be proper human beings, in particular how to be proper husbands, wives, and parents (Eph. 5:22—6:9; Col. 3:18—4:1). God's salvation causes us to be proper men for His manifestation, move, and administration. (*Life-study of*

LIVING A NORMAL HUMAN LIFE

First, all the instructions given here [in 1 Timothy 5:1-16] are presented in a very human way. We should never think that if we reach God's standard, we no longer need to be human. Some believers have been influenced by the false teaching that Christians should be like angels, that it is no longer necessary for them to lead a normal human life. Many monks and priests in Catholicism have a living that is abnormal. Furthermore, the requirement that priests and nuns not be married not only is contrary to humanity, but has its source in demons. According to Paul's word in 4:1-3, forbidding others to marry is a demonic teaching.

We all need to learn to be human. In fact, the more spiritual we are, the more human we shall be. If we would live Christ, we must learn to be human in a genuine way. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was very human.

To damage humanity is to ruin both the means and the channel created by God for His economy. The reason demons and fallen angels forbid marriage and command people to abstain from foods is that their intention is to destroy mankind. Thus, we in the church must be human and follow the standards of normal human living. Some have falsely accused us of not being human. We utterly repudiate these allegations. In the church life we definitely emphasize the proper humanity. I can testify that I myself live in a normal human way. If you examine my living, you will find me to be very human. I am not a "saint" or an angel; I am simply a human being. Furthermore, I encourage all the elders to be human. The elders should not help the saints in their locality to be like angels. We appreciate the angels, but we do not want to imitate them. Instead, we prefer to be human.

We should be human Christians. On the one hand, we have the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4); on the other hand, we are normal human beings. The fact that we have the divine nature with the divine life does not mean that we shall ever be deified. Rather, we are to live a genuinely human life by the divine life and nature. In this way we shall be able to live the highest human life, a life like that of the Lord Jesus. When He was on earth, He lived a human life by means of the divine life and the divine nature. The Lord's human living was by the divine life. Our human living should be the same. Thus, we all must learn to be human.

In 5:1-16 we see that Paul instructed his young co-worker Timothy to contact the saints in a human way. Verse 1 says, "Do not upbraid an elderly man, but entreat him as a father." To entreat an elderly man as a father is surely to behave in a very human manner. In relation to brothers who are a generation older than they, the younger brothers should deal with them as fathers.

Paul also tells Timothy to entreat "younger men as brothers; elderly women as mothers; younger women as sisters." Timothy was not to assume an elevated position as a bishop, regarding himself as superior to others. On the contrary, he was to behave as a brother to younger brothers and sisters, as a son to a father, and as a son to a mother. In the church life there are many fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. To deal with the saints as such is to behave humanly.

Our contact with the saints must be in a proper atmosphere and with the right attitude and spirit. The atmosphere, attitude, and spirit in our contact with others mean a great deal. If a young brother assumes some kind of elevated position in relation to an elderly man, the relationship between them will be damaged. But if he would contact him as a son speaking to a father, their fellowship will be intimate, loving, touching, and even inspiring.

Suppose that in my relationship with the saints I conduct myself as a teacher and treat the saints as my pupils. If this is my attitude, my contact with the saints will be quite poor. But if I am very human in my relationships with the saints and regard myself as a brother among brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, the contact will be loving and intimate. What a difference it makes when we are truly human in our relationships to one another! I repeat, in the church life we all must be human. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, msg. 9, pp. 78-79)

EXPRESSING CHRIST IN HUMAN LIFE

God desires that Christ be expressed through human life. We see this in 3:18—4:1, a sister passage to Ephesians 5:22—6:9, regarding the believers' ethical relationships. In Ephesians the emphasis is on the need of spirit-filled ethical relationships for the expression of the Body in the normal church life. In Colossians the emphasis is that we should hold Christ as our Head and take Him as our life by having His rich word dwelling in us, that the highest ethical relationships, issuing not from our natural life but from Christ as our life, may be realized for His expression.

If we live in union with Christ, Christ will be expressed through our humanity. Christ is to be expressed in the human life, not in the angelic life. Angels cannot express Christ. The Father has ordained that we, His chosen ones, be the expression of His Son. “Live Thyself, Lord Jesus, through me,” should be our prayer (see *Hymns* #403).

If we would be those through whom Christ can live, we need to pass through the first two and a half chapters of the book of Colossians. Then, coming to 3:15 and 16, we need to be those in whom the peace of Christ arbitrates and in whom the word of Christ dwells richly. Then Christ will be expressed in our human living.

Many of those in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Catholicism have a low estimate of human life. They do not care for marriage or for the proper family life. They prefer to remain unmarried, and they aspire to live a type of angelic life. But the angelic life cannot express Christ. On the contrary, Christ needs to be expressed in those who are husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, and slaves. In order to express Christ, we need to have a proper and normal human life.

As an elderly person with eight children and more than twenty grandchildren, I can testify that the Lord knows how to choose the best husband or wife for us and what kind of children we should have. He also knows how to break us and make us transparent so that we can express Christ. Through our family life we learn many valuable lessons from the Lord. I believe that the angels are observing to see whether or not we live out Christ in our family life. It is not as difficult to live out Christ in the church as it is to live Him out at home. But how wonderful it is for a brother or sister to express Christ in his or her married life! No brother or sister in the Lord's recovery should aspire to live like a monk or nun. At the right time, the brothers and sisters should marry and then learn through the experiences of married life to express Christ in their human living.

The living of the saints in union with Christ should result in the expression of Christ in human life. If we see this, we shall praise the Lord for our human living. Furthermore, we shall have a fresh appreciation for married life. I can testify that I am thankful for my wife, children, and grandchildren. I am grateful for all the lessons the Lord has taught me through them. The more I advance in years, the more I appreciate the lessons I have learned through the course of my human life. In the relationship between wife and husband and between children and parents we need to live out Christ and express Him.

The principle is the same in the relationship between masters and servants. In verses 22 through 25 Paul gives a charge to the slaves. In verse 24 he speaks of receiving “the reward of the inheritance.” This point is not made as clear in Ephesians 6:8 as it is here. There is an inheritance for the believers (Rom. 8:17; Acts 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4). The reward of the inheritance indicates that the Lord uses the inheritance which He will give His believers as an incentive that they may be faithful in their service to Him. The unfaithful ones will surely miss this reward (Matt. 24:45-51; 25:20-29). (*Life-study of Colossians*, msg. 30, pp. 250-252)

Study Questions:

1. What is God's desire regarding human life?
2. How practically can we live Christ in our daily life?
3. Why is the wife more important than the husband in building up a proper family life for the church life?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Life-study of Ezekiel*, msg.5.
2. *Life-study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 9.
3. *Life-study of Colossians*, msg. 30.
4. *Perfecting Training*, chs. 13, 14, 15, and 16.
5. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1967*, volume 1, “Serving in Coordination and Washing in Love,” msg. 11.
6. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968*, volume 1, “Various Messages in Los Angeles,” msg. 15.
7. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, volume 1, “The Crucial Function of the Sisters in the Church Life”

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 14

The Human Life and Family Life of the Sisters (2) The Family Wholly for the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19; Prov. 31:23

I. The best way and the highest way for a family to have the church life is for the wife to take the lead—Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19:

- A. In a family, if the wife does not take the lead to have the practical church life, the husband would always be frustrated.
- B. In any other matter the wife should not take the lead; but in the matter of taking the way of the practical church life for the family, the wives may take the lead.
- C. In every family, if the wife takes the lead to have the church life, it could be so easy to bring the whole family into the church life; let all the Aquilas follow the Priscas in this one matter—Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19:
 - 1. It may seem that the sisters are breaking the principle of the headship, but they should not allow legality or religion to hold them back from taking the lead in this one matter.
 - 2. In every local church there is the need of a group of sisters to be so bold to take the lead for the practical church life.
 - 3. Someday the Lord will show us all that this is exactly what is on His heart.

II. We are on the earth to care first for the church and then for our family—cf. Num. 2:2:

- A. Proverbs 31:23 says of the worthy woman, “Her husband is known in the gates, / When he sits among the elders of the land”:
 - 1. This verse indicates that the place for a man is “in the gates,” the place of administration, and not primarily at home.
 - 2. For a man to remain at home with his family is a great help to them; however, we must know the purpose for which we were placed on the earth by God; we all must realize that the church is the primary purpose of our being on the earth and is what we are living for in this age—Eph. 3:3-11; Rom. 12:1, 4-5; cf. Hag. 1:1-11; Psa. 132:1-5.
 - 3. It is truly helpful for a man to stay at home to be a husband to his wife and a father to his children; however, in himself, a husband is not able to make his wife spiritual and cause his children to be regenerated; at best he can help the children to improve their behavior:
 - a. Regeneration altogether depends upon God’s selection and predestination before the foundation of the world—Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Pet. 1:2-3.
 - b. We should not think that if a man spends all his time with his family, all his children will be regenerated; the Bible tells us clearly that Jacob was selected and Esau was not—Rom. 9:10-13.
 - 4. We should all do our duty concerning the raising of our children, but we must also realize that the care of the parents is only one of many factors in the children’s upbringing:
 - a. Children are born with a disposition that cannot be changed even if we spend more time with them; what children turn out to be is very much related to their birth.
 - b. The disposition that our children are born with is not up to us but altogether according to the Lord’s mercy—cf. Rom. 9:11-18.

5. For a father and a husband to remain at home may be a help on the human side, but it cannot determine the salvation and spirituality of the children on the spiritual side; whether or not our children will be saved and be spiritual is up to God, not up to us.
- B. 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.
1. 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—Matt. 13:45-46; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 12:2; Eccl. 1:2.
 2. Only when our family life is brought into the church life will it be reality.
 3. 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—Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 12; Titus 2:4-5; Matt. 13:45-46.
 4. 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.
- C. The church meetings are crucial because the church life is practically expressed by the church meetings—Heb. 10:25:
1. Without the church meetings, the church is something ethereal; the church meetings constitute the practical church life.
 2. We need to encourage the mothers to get together for babysitting so they can attend the prayer meeting on a rotating basis:
 - a. Every month one sister among four can take care of the babysitting for one Tuesday night; then three other sisters can be released to come to the prayer meeting.
 - b. Even the church can consider doing something to help the mothers take care of this babysitting burden.
 - c. To please God by attending the prayer meeting is the best thing.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

The main function of the sisters both in the church and in the family is to preserve and maintain life. 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. The success of a home depends on the function of the wife and mother. It is the same in the church life. Much of the burden of the church life is on the shoulders of the sisters. 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. In caring for many things in the church life, the sisters must rise up to bear the burden.

OPENING TO THE LORD TO REMAIN NEW, FRESH, AND LIVING

The secret of being new, fresh, and living is to always be open to the Lord so that He can come into us in a practical way. Day by day and hour after hour the Lord desires to have a way to come into us. However, we are not always open to Him. A sister may be unhappy with her husband and may remain in this condition for several days. During this time she may close her inner being and may not be open to the Lord. As long as she is unhappy and closed, the Lord will have no way to come into her practically. She will not be new, fresh, and living again until she puts aside her unhappiness and opens anew to the Lord. Being new, fresh, and living depends on whether or not we are open to the Lord and give Him the way to come into us.

CARING FIRST FOR THE CHURCH AND THEN FOR OUR FAMILY

Proverbs 31:23 says of the worthy woman, "Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land." This verse indicates that the place for a man is "in the gates," the place of administration, and not primarily at home. Many people have the concept that a husband should spend his time to be with his wife and children. For a man to remain at home with his family is a great help to them. However, we must know the purpose for which we were placed on the earth by God. Before a man enlists in military service, he may consider that his purpose is to care for his wife and children. After he enlists, however, his purpose changes, and it is no longer possible for him to stay at home with his family. While a war is raging, soldiers must forsake everything else, even their own lives. Although a soldier's wife and children miss him and need him, he must put his nation before his family. In such a case the entire family must put the nation ahead of the family. Likewise, we need to see what the purpose of our existence is. We are on the earth to care first for the church and then for our family.

It is truly helpful for a man to stay at home to be a husband to his wife and a father to his children. However, in himself, a husband is not able to make his wife spiritual and cause his children to be regenerated. At best he can help the children to improve their behavior. Regeneration altogether depends upon God's selection and predestination before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Pet. 1:2-3). We should not think that if a man spends all his time with his family, all his children will be regenerated. If this were the case, there would be no need for God's selection and predestination. The Bible tells us clearly that Jacob was selected and Esau was not (Rom. 9:10-13). We should not think that Isaac could have done something to cause both of his sons to be selected. Only God, not Isaac, could decide this. For a father and a husband to remain at home may be a help on the human side, but it cannot determine the salvation and spirituality of the children on the spiritual side. Whether or not our children will be saved and be spiritual is up to God, not up to us.

The New Testament does not tell us the names of the wives and children of the apostles. Because all the apostles were "drafted" into the heavenly, divine, and spiritual "military service," their home and family were secondary to them. Although we do not have the portion that the early apostles had,

we are in the same position as they were and have the same purpose. To be sure, the Bible tells us that we need to care for our children and raise them in the way of the Lord (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15), but we must also realize that we have been drafted into the heavenly military service. If for the sake of the Lord's work we sacrifice our time with our children, our sacrifice will be very small compared to what the Lord gains. Many times this kind of sacrifice cannot be avoided. We all must realize that the church is the primary purpose of our being on the earth and is what we are living for in this age.

We should all do our duty concerning the raising of our children, but we must also realize that the care of the parents is only one of many factors in the children's upbringing. Children are born with a disposition that cannot be changed even if we spend more time with them. A carpenter knows that no matter how much he works on a certain kind of wood, it cannot become a different kind. What our children turn out to be is very much related to their birth, which cannot be changed even if their father stays home with them the whole day. The disposition that our children are born with is not up to us but altogether according to the Lord's mercy. (*CWWL, 1975-1976*, vol. 3, "Practical Points for the Sisters Concerning the Building Up of the Church," pp. 137-139)

THE VANITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Apart from the Triune God, the human life is altogether empty and vain. I was born into a very poor family; hence, I suffered great poverty in my childhood. Despite my family's poverty I endeavored to acquire a high education. By the Lord's mercy I gained a decent education and a well-paying job. However, in 1933, I gave up my job in order to answer the Lord's call to serve Him full time. Consequently, I chose to become poor for the Lord's sake. Yet by the Lord's grace I can testify that in His work a great amount of money has passed through my hands.

After passing through all kinds of experiences, I can say that the totality of human life is vanity. Every aspect of the human life, including wealth and poverty, is vain. For this reason the wise King Solomon said that everything under the sun is vanity of vanities (Eccl. 1:2, 14). Young people should work hard to be successful in their pursuit of an occupation in order to support their family. However, they need to realize that whether or not they succeed, their human life is vanity.

THE CHURCH LIFE BEING THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Without Christ the human life is vain. However, with Christ our human life is altogether meaningful; the human life with Christ is the Christian life. In contrast to the vanity of the human life, the Christian life is exceedingly purposeful (1 Pet. 1:18). Although Christ is the life of every Christian (Col. 3:4), the church is the purpose of the Christian life. If we have only Christ yet do not participate in the church life, our Christian life is without purpose. The Christian life is not only for Christ but also for the church. If we are faithful to the Lord, He will reveal to us that He is for the church, which is His Body (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ was incarnated, lived the human life, and carried out His public ministry in order to produce the church. He went to the cross, falling into the ground as a grain of wheat so that He might produce many grains for the church, His corporate expression (John 12:24; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25-27). In resurrection He regenerated the believers in order to bring forth His Body, the church (1 Pet. 1:3). If we intend to take Christ as our life, He will indicate that He desires us to live a life for the church. If we are not for the church, He will not be happy with us. Because the church is Christ's goal and destiny, it should also be our goal and destiny. We need to see that the church is the meaning of the Christian life.

When I was a young believer, I was taught that Christ is the meaning of my human life. Nevertheless, it was not until I turned to the church that both my human life and Christian life became purposeful. Through the years I have been persecuted and defamed because I have emphasized in my ministry not only Christ but also the church (Eph. 5:32). I have preached Christ with the church and for

the church. Apart from the church, our Christian life has no purpose.

Human life is vanity, but the church, which is the purpose of the Christian life, is a great reality, for the church is the mingling of man with the Triune God as the unique reality (4:4-6; John 14:6; 17:17; 1 John 5:6) In order for us to be normal Christians, we need to have the genuine church life. In the eyes of God, nothing in the universe counts except Christ and the church.

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," msg. 7, pp. 27-30)

All the members of the vital groups should endeavor to attend the prayer meeting of the church. In the 1960s when we were in Elden Hall in Los Angeles, at least seventy to eighty percent of those who attended the Lord's Day morning meeting also attended the prayer meeting. Why could we have such a highly attended prayer meeting at that time, but not today? Some of the mothers may take their children as an excuse, but I would encourage the mothers to get together for babysitting so they can attend the prayer meeting on a rotating basis. Of course, the mothers need to care for their children, but they should not take this as an excuse for always missing the prayer meeting.

We need to care for the Lord and His interests above our consideration for our family (Luke 14:26). Abraham is an example of this. The Lord asked him to come out of Chaldea and from his relatives into the good land. But Abraham came out of Chaldea with his father Terah and with his

nephew Lot, and they stopped at Haran. Eventually, Terah died, and then Abraham came into the good land (Acts 7:2-4). When Abraham was asked by God to get out of that idolatrous country, he could not leave his father or his nephew.

Abraham's nephew Lot also became a source of trouble to him. Lot eventually separated from Abraham and drifted into Sodom, where he became settled. He was captured and Abraham had to fight to defeat the capturing ones in order to recover Lot (Gen. 14:14-16). Later, Sodom was destroyed by God.

Before His destruction of Sodom, God came to Abraham, in Genesis 18, in the form of a man. Abraham prepared water for Him to wash His feet, and He had a meal with Abraham, prepared by Sarah. He stayed with Abraham in such a way for the purpose of rescuing Lot. We can see from the life of Abraham that we need to take care of our relatives, including our parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, and children, in a proper way. Otherwise, we will suffer some dealing.

I am saying this to encourage all of us to attend the prayer meeting of the church. I would propose that four mothers come together for the purpose of babysitting so that they can attend the prayer meeting in a rotating way. Every month one sister among the four can take care of the babysitting for one Tuesday night. Then the three other sisters can be released to come to the prayer meeting. Even the church can consider doing something to help the mothers take care of this babysitting burden. We should not easily take an excuse for missing the prayer meeting. We have to be careful before God. To please God by attending the prayer meeting is the best thing. I hope that all of us would promise the Lord that we would attend the prayer meeting of the church. (*Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, msg. 13, pp. 116-118)

Study Questions:

1. What is the best and highest way for a family to have the church life?
2. Why do we need to bear the responsibility to bring our family into the church life?
3. What is a practical way for the sisters to be free to attend the prayer meeting, even in the midst of many family duties?

References and Further Reading:

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, volume 1, "A Word for the Sisters," msg.1.
2. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, volume 3, "Practical Points for the Sisters Concerning the Building Up of the Church"
3. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1982*, volume 1, "Miscellaneous Messages in Anaheim," msg. 7.
4. *Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, msg. 13.