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# SISTERS' MESSAGES

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TITUS◇CHU

Sisters' Messages  
by Titus Chu

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PART I

FELLOWSHIP  
FOR MARRIED  
SISTERS



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## CHAPTER ONE

### **A WIFE'S PURPOSE ON THIS EARTH**

*Prayer:* O Lord, we pray for the sisters; we thank You for the sisters. Lord, we pray that You would enlarge us. Grant that all of us could be so useful in Your recovery and in the testimony of our local church. Lord, we give our being to You. We say, “Lord, we are here for this.” We are not here on this earth just for the family life, or just for our job, or just for something that we can enjoy. Lord, remember that we were gained by You here for one sole purpose: that we would be for Your recovery. We want to be for Your testimony. So Lord, our spirit is open. Our heart is open. Lord, if You have any word, if You have any encouragement, if You have any admonishment, we are here ready for You. Do speak to us. Do bring us to Your presence. Do bring us into the enjoyment of Yourself. Lord, do have Your way. We pray, be the Lord over us. Be the Lord over our family. Be the Lord over our local church. In the name of Jesus Christ, we offer our praises and thanks. Amen.

### **THE WIFE CAME OUT OF THE HUSBAND**

All the sisters who are wives need to have at least two realizations. Firstly, their existence came out of their husband's existence. This may be hard for wives to accept, because all wives like to be themselves. But according to the Bible, Eve definitely came out of Adam. Without Adam, there would be no Eve. Without the husband, there would be no wife. The wife is born because the husband needs her. All wives need this realization, that

on this earth the center of their life is not themselves. Today's culture and education would not agree with this statement. Today's culture would argue that this statement is in total disregard of women's rights. But the fact is that Adam was created first. Then Eve came out of Adam. Married sisters, in God's predestination, your husband was considered first. Then God said, "He is not sufficient; he needs help." So God built and prepared you as his wife. Without your husband, there would be no you. The wife is for the husband. This may be hard to accept, but this is the fact.

**THE MAN WAS CREATED, BUT  
THE WOMAN WAS BUILT**

The second realization a wife needs is that the man was created, but the woman was built. Something created may not necessarily be that detailed, but anything that is built is according to a blueprint. All husbands are born in a particular "shape," with a certain disposition and character. But the wife was built with the specific intention to meet her husband's needs. Married sisters, every part of you, even your disposition, is the way it is because your husband needs it that way. If a wife makes her husband nervous, she was made in this way because her husband needs it. The husbands should also hear this word, so that they will have no complaints about their wives. The wife was made in a specific way for the husband. Every aspect of the wife's person is because her husband needs her to be that way.

When the Lord created each husband, He considered how to transform that husband. The Lord's way to transform the husband is to build a woman. This woman would meet all the needs of her husband. If the husband needs tenderness, the wife will be very tender. If the husband needs a tough wife, the wife will be very tough. If the husband likes to eat, the wife may not know how to cook. If the husband likes a neat house, the wife may always mess the house up. The wife is someone whom the Lord made beforehand to meet the needs of her husband exactly.

A wife can tell her husband, "Whether I am good or not, it is all your fault. If you were perfect, the Lord would not have built



me in this peculiar way. Rather I would have been built in a wonderful way because you were wonderful. But because you are so crooked, with so many problems, with dispositional difficulties and shortcomings, therefore the Lord built me in a specific way just to be with you.”

Any wife who has these two realizations is blessed. Having these realizations will save the wives from their egos. A wife should not have any ego. Firstly, there is no need for the wife to try to make herself someone, because she was not born for herself. For a sister to assume her own spirituality is not healthy. It is also not healthy for a wife to assume that she is “somebody.” The wife was simply built for the need of her husband. Secondly, because the wife was made for her husband, she was designed in a specific way. So you can be restful about your disposition because you were built to meet your husband’s specific needs.

When the Lord first created man, He saw that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). So God built Adam a helpmate to meet his need. Eve’s existence fully corresponded to Adam’s need. Whatever Adam needed was built into Eve. If these two points are clear, the sisters will be freed both from their egos and from accusation. Satan will not be able to accuse the wives by saying that they are so bad and poor. If a wife is bad and poor, then this is what her husband needs.

### **THE WIFE WAS BUILT TO HELP HER HUSBAND**

After seeing these two points, we should go on to see that the wife was built to help her husband. The wife may have many shortcomings to meet her husband’s needs. But sisters, you must realize that there are many ways to meet the needs of your husband. There are many ways to help your husband. If your husband is spiritual, then whatever you do according to who you are will meet your husband’s needs. But the ways of helping are different. The Bible does not give us “the way.” For example, Eve helped her husband, Adam, to eat the forbidden fruit. But that was not the right way to help him. Eve was built to help

Adam, but that does not mean she knew the right way to be a help to him.

How you help your husband can make a big difference. For example, the church was built to help Christ. Even today in our sinful condition, we are still helping Christ. After we have made so many mistakes, we help Christ to manifest His wisdom. We are defeated, we commit sins, and we get ourselves in trouble, but we should not condemn ourselves. Rather, we should realize that this is a good help to Christ, to manifest how wonderful He is. But we cannot say that this is the real help.

The best help will come when the New Jerusalem is here. In the New Jerusalem, Christ will be fully manifested. Today we are the Lord's helpmate in a different way. When we make a mistake, we realize the Lord's love. When we are defeated, we find the Lord as our victory. When we become defiled, we realize that the Lord is our holiness. In everything we go through, we experience this wonderful Christ. This helps Christ to be manifested. However, this is not the best help to Christ.

We must see that help can be given in different ways and degrees. Firstly, a wife should not have any ego, because she would not exist except for her husband. Secondly, a wife should realize that whatever she is in her personality and disposition is for her husband. Because of this she does not need to live a life under accusation and condemnation. Thirdly, a wife also should realize that she needs to be so positive in allowing the Lord to supply her spirit with His life so that she can help her husband in a higher way.

Whatever a wife does, she is a help to her husband. Even if she yells at her husband or throws things on the floor, he gets the help. But "help" has different degrees. Here the wife does bear some responsibility to give the best help to her husband. Again, the church is a help to Christ. In whatever we do, we help Christ. Even in our failure, we help Christ to manifest His grace, His love, His power, and His life. But this help is not high, rather it is poor. It is a help, but not a rich help.

The wives need to realize that there is a way to make their

help to their husbands higher. Sisters, do not yell at your husband all the time, reasoning that whatever you do is a help to your husband. Your husband may take it, but he will not like it. His realization will be that he needs better help.

**HELP YOUR HUSBAND'S ENTIRE  
PERSON AND HIS LIVING**

Sisters, to help your husband in a higher way, you must realize that every Christian, in order to have a healthy Christian life, must take care of his or her person. The "person" includes the body, the soul, and the spirit. Your husband is composed of a body, a soul, and a spirit. He is also related to several kinds of lives, such as the church life, the family life, and his occupational life. In a sense, the husband is involved in three small societies: church, home, and work. If you see how he is made, and what he is involved in, it will be easy for you to help him. Sisters, help your husband in his body, soul, and spirit. Also help him to be healthy in the church life, family life, and work life.

**HELP HIS BODY WITH GOOD  
FOOD AND GOOD REST**

Concerning his body, make sure you give him good food and good rest. All wives should try to learn this. "Good food" does not mean that you spoil him by only giving him what he likes. Feed him what is healthy and nourishing, because you are his helpmate and you have the right to do this. This is a wife's function. The husband needs this kind of care because he was created from the dust of the ground. All men are rough and rude. They do not know how to take care of themselves. Women were designed in a detailed way. Anything that is designed has a purpose. Wives were designed to help their husbands. You can help him to see that his body needs proper care.

To help your husband care for his health is not a small thing. A sister should not be so preoccupied with spiritual activities that she neglects her husband's health. When the husband is old and

sick, it is the wife that will care for him. And the husband will care for his wife. So it is wise to begin caring for one another when you are young. This is not to encourage you all to become excessively health-conscious. But in the church we should build a healthy atmosphere of the sisters' caring for their husbands' health. A wife's first priority should be to care for her husband's and her family's health, because man is made up of body, soul, and spirit.

**HELP HIS SOUL BY GIVING HIM REST  
AND UPGRADING HIS SOUL**

Then, you must learn how to care for your husband's soul. You may wonder why your husband does not care for you in the same way. But you were specifically designed to meet your husband's needs, not the other way around.

Everyone's soul has a certain capability and a certain limitation. A good wife should learn not to drain her husband's soul, because if she drains his soul in one area, his soul will be lacking in another area. Each person's function of the mind, emotion, and will can only go so far. Even a great soul has limitations.

Samson and Delilah show us an example of a wife draining her husband's soul (Judg. 16:4-20). Delilah wanted to know the secret of his great strength, but Samson would not tell her. So she wept and begged, until he could not handle it anymore and told her. The Bible records that his soul was tired to death (Judg. 16:16).

When a wife does not know how to help her husband, and she drains her husband's soul, he is in trouble. This sometimes happens when a wife puts too much pressure on herself. Not only does she become frustrated, but her condition can affect her husband. For this reason she should exercise to be free from condemnation and not put pressure on herself.

Sisters, just be simple. Try not to drain your husband's soul. Give him some rest. There will be times when you will be bothered and upset. But try not to make it a habit to drain your husband's soul. If a husband comes home and every night his

wife is upset and has many things for him to take care of, he cannot rest. This will drain his soul. Sisters, help your husband to develop the functions of his soul instead of draining his soul. Help him to develop his emotion, mind, and will. The bigger a soul is, the more it can be used by the Lord.

I am not saying this to pressure the wives. I repeat that you were designed for your husband. Whatever you do is right for your husband. But on the other hand, within yourself you must realize that you need to help your husband. Firstly, care for his health, and secondly, upgrade his soul. The wives should learn to be for their husband, one with their husband, and even make an effort to develop their husband more. Wives should learn to pray for their husband. Pray that his soul would be upgraded, that he would aim higher, that his heart could be enlarged. Pray that he could have a healthy soul for the Lord's use.

On the other hand, you should not push your husband beyond his capacity. Each person is made differently. Yet you can still help your husband to enlarge his soul for the church life. Because the soul is limited, every time you bother your husband you are reducing his soul quality. In the church life, we emphasize the need to use our spirit, but our spirit is released through our soul. If our soul is drained, it is hard to release our spirit. For example, if we spend all afternoon watching TV, it will be very hard for us to exercise our spirit afterwards. Sisters, learn to pray in the midst of your failures. Do not condemn yourself when you lose your temper. But within you, you should aim to grow in life, so that you may have a proper spirit to help your husband upgrade his soul. Even your husband's being positive toward the church has a lot to do with you as his wife.

### **HELP HIS SPIRIT BY EXERCISING YOUR SPIRIT**

Lastly, you must learn to help your husband feed his spirit. For example, a wife can help her husband by regularly reading spiritual books. Even if he just wants to relax and read magazines, his wife's example will help him so that eventually he too

will read something more healthy. This is the best way to help your husband feed his spirit. No person is completely good or completely bad. We all have our strengths and our weaknesses. We should develop the strong points. As wives, learn to live in the Lord's presence for your husband's sake. Realize that if you are in the Lord's presence, your husband will be in the Lord's presence. Sisters, learn this lesson before the Lord. Not only should you care for your husband's body and upgrade his soul, but you also need to feed his spirit. The more you can feed your husband's spirit, the more useful your husband will be in the church life and the more healthy he will be. This is not a small thing.

However much we may have failed in the past, we should at least have a sense of our need to be in spirit. Sisters, do not say that since you were designed for your husband, then no matter how you fail, your husband will get the help, so you will just be who you are. Within your conscience, you should have the realization that you are your husband's helpmate. The help you render can be in different degrees. You should desire to render your husband the highest degree of help.

For the husbands to feed on their spirit is not a small thing. Whether the church is healthy or not has a lot to do with whether or not the sisters know the secret of how to bring their husbands to their spirit. If many sisters do not know how to take care of their husband's body and soul, it is still okay. But if the sisters do not know how to help their husbands be in spirit, the church is in trouble. Therefore, sisters, you must learn to be in spirit. When you are in spirit and enjoy the Spirit, it will be easy for your husband to be in spirit.

### **DO NOT BE LAZY**

Be diligent about how you can render your husband the best help by caring for his body, upgrading his soul, and feeding his spirit. This requires one thing: do not be lazy. You may have many shortcomings which are not to be condemned or judged. But la-

ziness is not right. Many times we are lazy, so we cannot render others the help they need. Because of our laziness we are not positive about things. Sisters who get lazy may sit and think about how bad their husband is, how they were wronged by another sister, or how poor and lonely they are. But a wife who is positive to feed her husband's spirit, or even just to enjoy a message in the Life-Studies, will not have time to think about such things. Often we are weak because we do not exercise our spirit, so we allow our being to be consumed by our self and our self-love. Then we imagine all kinds of wrongs people have done to us, and even all kinds of illnesses. This happens because we are lazy and do not allow ourselves to be occupied properly.

#### **A CONCLUDING WORD**

As a wife you must realize that your existence is because of your husband. You must also realize that you were built in a detailed way to meet the needs of your husband. God designed both your strengths and your weaknesses with your husband in mind. Therefore, whatever you do is a help to your husband, both positively and negatively. But it is best to help your husband positively, by helping him in his person—body, soul, and spirit—and in his environment—church life, family life, and work life. For this, you must be diligent and positive in the Lord.





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## CHAPTER TWO

### **HOW TO HELP YOUR HUSBAND IN A POSITIVE WAY (1)**

*Prayer:* Lord, we are always encouraged by our spirit. We realize that our spirit has a treasure. Our spirit has the God of the universe within to be our everything. Lord, even now we pray, on the one hand, give us a full cleansing; on the other hand, may Your Spirit move among us, nourish us, feed us, supply us, subdue us, and enlighten us. Lord, we have no intention to dwell in our weakness. Lord, we have no intention to dwell in self-pity. Lord, we fully desire to be one with You and to cooperate with You. Lord, we pray that You would be so free to be the Lord in our family life, in the church life, and in whatever we do.

Lord, remember we all love You. Lord, if we did not love You, why should we be here? Lord, remember we have given our lives to You. Therefore, day by day we pay a price for Your sake. That's why we treasure these days. Lord, we do not want to live each day merely saying, "We are for Christ." We want, each day, to live for You. Neither do we want to spend today merely saying, "We are for our husband." We want to live each day for our husband. Lord, we pray that our family life, the church life, and everything else with us would be so normal and healthy. Lord Jesus Christ, we give this time to You. By Your precious blood, we ask for Your anointing. Lord, limit us to refrain from speaking whatever should not be said. Encourage us to fellowship whatever should be fellowshiped. Lord, may You have the full way among us. In the name of Jesus Christ, we give this meeting to You. Amen, Lord.

**A HEALTHY SISTER MUST HAVE  
SEVERAL REALIZATIONS**

**First, She Is Here because of Her Husband**

As we have seen in the previous message, a healthy sister must firstly realize why she is here. She is here because of her husband. Eve was brought into existence because Adam was created. Eve came out of Adam. It is not a small thing to see this vision. Sisters have had many problems because they do not see that the reason they were born, and the reason they were raised in a certain way, was because they came out of their husband.

**Second, She Is Built Exactly according  
to the Need of Her Husband**

The second thing a healthy sister must realize is that the wife is built exactly according to the needs of her husband. Married sisters, your upbringing, your appearance, your disposition, and everything about you is all because your husband needs it that way. This must be your vision. Once you see this, your whole life, even your whole attitude towards your existence, will be different. You will realize, “I am here because my husband was created. I am the way I am because my husband needs me to be like this.” If you lose your temper and do not clean the house or cook supper, you can just tell your husband, “You need me to be like this; otherwise I would be much better.”

**Third, She Must Be a Positive  
Help to Her Husband**

But you must also realize that your existence is not just to bother him or to “help” him in a negative way. Your existence is also to help him in a positive way. If you mess up the house, forget to cook supper, do not take care of your children, or neglect your appearance, you are helping your husband, but in a negative way. You should not feel condemned if you help your

husband negatively. But you must realize that your help to your husband should be positive. If a meal you cooked did not turn out the way you wanted, do not condemn yourself, saying, "I'm a bad housewife. I do not know how to feed my husband." If this is your attitude, you are caught under the craftiness and subtlety of Satan. Why should you be condemned? You can just tell your husband, "I was made like this because you like to eat, therefore I do not know how to cook."

But this should not always be your attitude. You must realize that there is a positive side to helping your husband. Your conscience should be peaceful. Then you are ready to help your husband positively. You should not be accused, bothered, or pressured. Otherwise you will not be your husband's helpmate but his troubler. The more you get pressured, the more your husband will get pressured. And in turn, the more your husband is pressured, the more you will be pressured. This cycle can continue until your husband is afraid to come home, while you get upset when he is late. This is too much for your husband to handle.

### **THE SECRET IS TO BE RELAXED**

You must be very relaxed in your family life, realizing that you were made with weaknesses and shortcomings. You were made to help your husband. Being relaxed is the secret of a happy family life. Even to be in spirit, you must first be relaxed. If your husband is coming home in half an hour and you have not started supper yet, do not worry about it. If you are so happy and charming when your husband returns, I do not believe your husband will be upset that there is no supper. He will be happy to take you out to eat. But if you are upset, then your husband will become upset.

Not many husbands realize how much work their wives put into a meal. Whether you spend four hours or thirty minutes cooking supper, he will still take the same amount of time to eat. Much of your nervousness you bring upon yourself. You should be relieved from your tension and be very restful in your family life,

even when you make a mistake. Realize that you were made the way you are for your husband's sake. There is no need to aim so high or to demand so much of yourself. You do not need to be perfect.

### **HELP YOUR HUSBAND IN HIS PERSON AND IN HIS ENVIRONMENT**

Your husband was made according to God's economy. For this reason, the help you render him positively should be related to God's economy. You should consider that the help you render to your husband can accomplish God's economy. With this in mind, you should help your husband by caring for his person and his environment. By his person, I am referring to his body, soul, and spirit. By his environment, I mean his work life, family life, and church life.

#### **Help His Body to Be Healthy**

If you cannot help his person, all your other "help" will be false. Just helping him go to church meetings is not real. You must help his body, soul, and spirit. To help his body, you must help him to be healthy. It is easy for the husband to eat if his wife is happy. But if his wife is anxious or upset, the husband will not eat properly no matter how good the food is. Our goal in helping our husband's health is to prolong his life as much as possible. How long a husband lives has much to do with his wife. Wives should learn to give their husbands the proper nourishment, and relieve him from pressure by being relaxed themselves. The wife must learn to be positive.

Every positive person can be relaxed. If you have nothing to do, you will begin to imagine all sorts of offenses against you by your husband, the church, the elders, and so on. Or you may begin to feel all kinds of aches and pains. This is because you are not positive. If a wife is not living positively, she gets nervous. Then her husband gets nervous because she is not relaxed. Then,

for some reason, the wife is unable to care for her husband's health properly.

As a mother, your best function is to take care of your children. As a wife, your best function is to take care of your husband. Do not try so hard to do spiritual things or have spiritual accomplishments. The wife's portion firstly is to take care of her husband and his health. If your husband is physically healthy, it is easy for him to be in spirit and to have a healthy soul. But if he is not healthy, it will be difficult for him to be in spirit. So the wife should take care of his nourishment and his rest to the best of her ability. This is the way to lay a good foundation for the church life. If you are feeding your husband with healthy food, most likely you will also be healthy.

I am afraid that we are short of healthy food, good rest, and a healthy atmosphere in the family life. A healthy family life should include an atmosphere of respect, love, and happiness between the husband and wife. To create this healthy atmosphere, the wife must be relieved from pressure herself. She can do this by realizing that she is made for her husband. She does not have to be so good. If she is "lousy," it is because her husband needs her to be "lousy." There is a right way to handle your mistakes. If you ruin the whole dinner, do not be bothered. When your husband comes home, just be happy. Most husbands will not be upset if their wife did not cook one meal. The more you care about something you think is wrong, the more your husband will be bothered about it also. If you just ignore the imperfection, your husband may not even notice it, and both of you will be happy.

### **Help His Soul to Be Relaxed and Upgraded**

To care for your husband, you must also learn to care for his soul. To accomplish this you must know two secrets. The first secret is to let his soul rest. When your husband comes home, do not bother him too much. If you relax, you will not bother your husband. When you are tense, he gets tense. Let your husband be restful in his daily life. Do not bother him with all the little details

of your life. If you need to do something, just do it. Let your husband rest as much as possible. If a wife learns this secret, she will be a successful wife.

The second secret is to upgrade your husband's soul. Allow your husband to get the education he needs to have a good job. If a wife knows how to do this, the husband can be successful. Learn how to help him be aggressive, yet not ambitious in an improper way. Learn how to enlarge him, to develop his talent. Also, help him to be more useful. When your husband is young, he may be satisfied to work as a laborer. But when he is fifty, life will be hard. To have a trade or a stable job will help the family life to be upgraded. A young couple should not rush to have children. It is worthwhile to sacrifice for a few years so that your husband can be educated.

I repeat, do not bother your husband too much. Let his soul rest. Whatever you want, your husband will give you. Women know how to bother their husbands until they get what they want. In the end, every husband will submit to his wife. But in the transaction, the husband will have very little rest in his soul.

### **Help His Spirit**

Finally, in caring for your husband's person, you must feed his spirit. This is the simplest part. If you feed your spirit, you will feed his spirit. It is just that simple. If you are in spirit, he can be in spirit. If you are not in spirit, he cannot be in spirit. So just take care that you are in spirit.

### **Help His Working Life to Be for the Gospel**

After you take care of his person, you must learn to care for your husband's environment. His environment is made up of his working life, his family life, and his church life. Related to the working life, I feel that since we do not aim at this kind of success, the wives do not need to pay too much attention to helping

their husbands in their work life. The only need in this area would be, for the gospel's sake, to invite his colleagues over for dinner. If you get involved in your husband's work life to promote his success at work, there will be no end to your involvement. This is not what we aim for. But for the sake of the gospel, we do need to know how to present ourselves and how to open our homes.

### **Help the Family Life to Be Part of the Church Life**

With regards to the family life, the family life is part of the church life. When the church life is healthy, it is easy for the family life to be healthy. When you and your husband are healthy in the church life, then you can both be healthy in the family life.

I would also add that I do not think we need to consider too much how to raise up our children, simply because no one knows how. Many people have come up with theories that they have tested on children almost like they test rats. But no one has "the right way."

The trend in the world shows that the family life is quickly being lost. Many young people are living together without being married. Some parents even encourage them to do this, thinking that in this way the young couple will avoid divorce later on. The family life and moral life are collapsing. But salvation is still in the church. To my observation, 90% of the parents who are healthy in the church life have children who turn out well. The children may go their own way for a period of time, but because their parents are healthy, they can return and be a blessing to the church. Naturally all the children will grow up properly if the church is healthy. If we are not healthy in the church life, there is no way to raise up our children.

It is difficult to know when is the right time to preach the gospel to children. You may ruin your child by preaching to him too early. He will not have a genuine salvation, yet he will think he is a Christian. Then, when he is older, he will criticize his salvation, because he feels he hasn't gotten anything out of the

church life. I would rather see the children be born again in a proper meeting, with a proper spirit, where the impression can go deep. But, to be honest, no one knows how to raise children. We all do our best. One thing is certain, that if we are healthy in the church life, then our family life can be healthy.

### **Our Family Life Is Not for Ourselves**

We must also realize that our family life is not for ourselves. Our family life is for the church life. When girls get married, they dream about how their life will be. You yourselves may dream about how romantic your husband will be, but he will never be what you expect. You must wake up and realize that in the sight of God, the husband and wife are one unit to serve the Lord. When you get married, you may feel that you will be for your husband, and your husband will be for you. But actually you will only be for yourself. You may dream of a little apartment and of how sweet you will be when your husband comes home, with dinner waiting on the table. After you get married your dreams are never fully realized, but you still behave according to your dreams, guarding your own small territory, with your husband, your house, and your children.

You must realize that a proper family life should be for the church life. Consider the example of Priscilla and Aquila. Paul preached the gospel to them in Corinth, and they got saved. Then they began to serve the Lord. Later on they migrated to Rome. Even in Rome, Priscilla's function was very healthy. When Paul greeted them in his letter to Rome, he greeted first Priscilla, then Aquila (Rom. 16:3), because Priscilla functioned so well, and her function upheld the church in Rome.

If the Lord can open our eyes, we will see that to keep the family life healthy, the family life must be for the church life. I am afraid that we utilize the church life for our own purposes, thinking that as long as we are in the church life, our husband is safe and will not cause problems. Or we may also try to control our husband, allowing our husband to only be for his wife and



family. But sisters, your husband cannot be healthy and proper under this kind of situation because you are laying two “foundations.” One is the church, to protect your husband so that he will not be naughty. The other is the family, to control your husband so that you will be happy. Sooner or later, these two foundations will confront one another. To be honest, your family life is not happy because you have laid two foundations. You do not lay these foundations on purpose. But you must realize that if you, your husband, and your family are not fully in the church life, then naturally your family will have two foundations.

Let me give you a simple illustration. Do you consider it too much if your husband goes to meetings four nights a week, or if he comes home late? Each wife will have a different answer to these questions. But do you realize that the healthiness of the family life depends on the healthiness of the church life? When both you and your husband are operative in the church life, you may not count the time. But if you are not functioning and your husband is, you begrudge how much time your husband spends for the church.

To allow our family life to be fully for the church life is conditional to many of us. It all depends on how useful we ourselves are. If we are useful, then every room of our house is open for the church. But if we are not useful, then not even our bathroom is for the church. To allow our family life to be for the church life is not easy. I know that you all love the Lord and the church life, but if the husbands were always free to love the Lord as they desire, the church would be much more prevailing. At times, even though the wives love the Lord, they are a heavy weight on their husbands’ love for the Lord.

### **Our Family Life Is Part of the Church Life**

The basic problem stems from this one point: we have never seen the vision that the family life is part of the church life. We separate these two lives. A sister may be upset that her husband only spends one night a week at home. This is a good sister,

allowing her husband to be out six nights a week. I would even encourage all the brothers to spend at least one night each week with their family, and perhaps more depending on their family's need. But the problem is not how many nights the husband is home. It is this statement from the wife, "Honey, why don't you spend at least one more night with me?" This statement shows there is still "you." But when the church life is very healthy, there is no "you." This statement also shows that you still divide the family life from the church life. You do not see that the family life is part of the church life. And this is where all the problems start.

When we do not have the realization that the family life is part of the church life, then we do not take the church life as the family life. We consider our family life, then we consider what we can do in the church life. Even the thought, "Since I cooked a good meal I should invite someone over," shows that you still have a family life. If the family life is just a part of the church life, you will consider the family life and the church life at the same time. If you see this, your life will be much easier.

Sisters, what is your biggest struggle today? Basically you lack this one consecration, the consecration to say, "My family life is the church life." To count how many nights your husband is home with you is wrong. When the church is healthy, you and your husband will spend time at home together. But that time will be for the church life, not just for the family life. The family life is part of the church life.

Once you consecrate yourself to the Lord in this way, you will not separate the church life and the family life. Then you will become much more positive and aggressive, and you will be less bothered. This week, if your husband is not able to be at home any night, you will have peace. The next week, if your husband is at home with you three nights, you also will have peace. It will be fine if your husband comes home after midnight one night, and if he comes home by 9:30 p.m. another night. Do not separate the family life and the church life. Give your family to the Lord, realizing that when the family life is in the church life, everything is healthy.

This is also true concerning the way we take care of our home.

For example, do you like to keep your carpet clean, or do you like to see the saints raised up? When you are too cautious of your carpet, the young people are afraid to come over. Are you willing to have your carpet ruined so that a young brother can be raised up? Every dollar you spend is worth it if a brother can be raised up. If you know how to love the Lord, the Lord will take care of all your needs. This is the way to handle your money. You should invest all your belongings—your kitchen, your furniture, and everything in your home—into the church life, for the sake of gaining even one person for the Lord.

When you put your family life fully into the church life, you will have much to do. When you have two lives, you try to keep both the family life and the church life in a certain kind of pattern. But the church life will never fit into your pattern. Sisters, you need to take the initiative to place your family life into the church life. Learn to give whatever you have to the church for the sake of the church life. I am not talking merely about financial offering, but about allowing your time and possessions to be used for the church.

Do not consider so much what you can or cannot do. If you see a need, just take care of it. Isn't this how you raise your children? You cannot bargain with your newborn so that he will not cry in the middle of the night. When he cries, you just get up and take care of him, and you are still able to function during the day. Learn to give everything for the church life. Learn to say, "If it will be helpful to the church life, I do not care what price I have to pay."

In caring for individuals or in your serving, be positive and take the initiative. You do not realize how effective that is for the church life. As I said in the beginning, be relaxed in everything you do. Do not be pressured if you have invited too many brothers over for dinner. Just make them sandwiches. If you take the initiative to make your family life part of the church life, I believe you will be much happier. Even your daily life will turn out to be much more meaningful. There is no such thing as "my family life." When you try to struggle for your family life, you will miss

## FELLOWSHIP FOR MARRIED SISTERS

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the church life, and you will therefore miss the mark. When the church life is healthy, you will have a very healthy family life.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### **HOW TO HELP YOUR HUSBAND IN A POSITIVE WAY (2)**

*Prayer:* Lord, we ask for Your cleansing by Your precious blood. Lord, we do give this time to You. Lord, cleanse us and cover us. Lord, even at this moment, move among us that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened, that we may see all the glory and the riches. We want to see what You are doing, and we willingly drop everything for Your sake. Lord, surely this is our desire. Lord, we have given up so much just because of You. Therefore, Lord, we do open ourselves up more. Lord, please bring us into more of the reality, so our time will not be wasted. Day by day in the church life, day by day in the family life, we want our realization to be so real, so deep with You. Lord, cover us with Your precious blood. Cleanse our spirit. Cleanse our soul. Cleanse our body. Anoint us with Yourself that we all would see You in a marvelous way. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for this time.

#### **THE WIFE SHOULD BE A POSITIVE HELPMATE TO HER HUSBAND**

In this series of messages we have seen that the wife's existence is because of her husband. We have also seen that both positively and negatively the wife can be a helpmate to her husband. On the negative side, who we are in our shortcomings and weaknesses is a help to our husbands. For this reason, there is no need to feel condemned or pressured when we make a mistake. We can be very relaxed in our family life. But this kind of help is not

the best. The best kind of help is positive help, which a wife can render to her husband's person and to his living. Firstly, you need to take care of your husband's person, that is, his body, soul, and spirit. Secondly, you need to take care of his living, that is, his work life, family life, and church life.

### **HELP HIS BODY**

Related to his body, a wife should help her husband to be healthy. She can help him to eat and sleep well. This is more important than a wife's being spiritual. These matters seem very simple but are also very easy to neglect. A wife often prepares the meals according to what she likes or what is available without considering the needs of her husband. Even the kind of mattress and sheets you have will affect how well your husband sleeps. If possible, learn to care for these things. They are simple, but not small. If you know how to care for your husband in this way, your husband will serve the Lord with more strength and will live longer.

The Lord may have predestinated a man to live ninety years, but the wife may reduce her husband's life span by causing him to be too nervous, too pressured, and too bothered. This happens to every husband, so do not let your conscience be troubled. The wives need to learn how to help their husbands by taking care of their health.

### **HELP HIS SOUL AND HIS SPIRIT**

Related to the soul, we need to learn two things: first, give your husband rest. The more rest, the better. While he is eating, let him eat. If you can, tell him something that will make him happy. Do not bother him by talking about things you want to buy or problems you had with the children. At least let him rest during the meal time. You can save your complaints until after dinner. Your husband will be very rested if you are rested. If you are not so bothered, he will not get bothered. His restfulness comes

from your restfulness.

Secondly, learn to upgrade, to enlarge, his soul. If he does not have a degree, encourage him to get a degree. If he does not have a trade, encourage him to learn a trade. If it is possible, help him to gain something more than he already has. Of course, you must know when to stop. To push him to get three Ph.D. degrees is too much. However, proper enlargement is precious.

By encouraging your husband to go back to school, you may go through a period of financial restraint. But in the long run this is very worthwhile. It will save you more suffering later in life. Do not live for a poor life. Learn to have an upgraded life. Learn to upgrade your husband's soul so that he will not be so common.

If you learn these two secrets in caring for your husband's soul, you have done a good job. Firstly, learn to give him some rest. This is difficult because women all feel that they are the weaker vessel, so they are the ones who need rest. We think that our husband is strong; he can do everything. But you have to realize that husbands are weaker than wives. Only women can pack three kids into a car and drive around shopping for sales each week to get cheaper eggs. When a man has a fever of 100° he cannot get out of bed and needs constant care. When a mother has a fever of 102° she still gets up, makes breakfast, and sends the kids off to school before going back to lie down. In a way women are much more persistent and solid than men. So wives must learn to give their husbands rest and to upgrade their souls. Also, you must learn to feed your husband's spirit by feeding your own spirit. The more you feed your spirit, the more his spirit will naturally be fed.

### **HELP HIS WORKING LIFE**

A wife should not only care for her husband's person but also for his living, for his daily life. Your husband has a working life, a family life, and a church life. In the working life, because we do not aim for promotions or success, we just perform our duties

properly. If the gospel is preached, that is good enough. You should not completely neglect your husband's working life; otherwise you will not have much chance to preach the gospel. But you should not involve yourself in the working life with a view to promotion. Otherwise, you will get caught in endless social activities. Rather, you should have a proper openness for the gospel to be preached.

**HELP HIS FAMILY LIFE TO BE  
FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

The second part of the daily life is the family life. This was the major burden of the previous message. In the family life, you must have a vision that the family life is part of the church life. Most sisters have this problem: they consider that they have their own family life, and that within that family life they practice the church life. Families experience much unhappiness because they divide the family life from the church life. They have an idea of how they want their family life, and they try to fit the church life into their family life.

Many times there is a conflict because the church life does not fit into your family life. This forces you to make a choice. Either you insist on your family life, which both you and your husband will find hard, or you just give up your family life to be in the church life; then you are bothered because you feel that you do not have a family life. This happens because you do not have a vision that the family life and the church life are actually one and the same.

A healthy family life is for the church life, and a healthy church life strengthens the family life. The healthier the church life is, the happier the family life should be. If you and your husband love the Lord and are fully in the church life, your family should be healthy. If either you or your husband withdraws from the church life, then both your church life and your family life will be hard. You must have the vision that you cannot separate the two from each other. Whatever is best for the church life should be



carried out in the family life. When you properly participate in the church life, then naturally you will have a wonderful family life.

### **We Should Not Hold On to Our Family Life**

The problem is that we like to hold on to our family life. We give some time to our family life and some time to the church life, but this will never work. I do know that if you and your husband both love the church, you will easily know how to handle your family life. Your family life will be so healthy. If, by the Lord's mercy, you have this basic consecration to the Lord, that your family life is for the church, then you will know how to help your husband, how to raise your children, and how to behave yourself in the family life and in the church life. If you are for the church life, you will have a healthy, happy family life.

When you try to hold on to your family life, keeping it separate from the church life, you will be frustrated. The church life is like a big bulldozer. When it moves, everything in its path goes with it. You cannot hold anything back from the church life. If you try to hold on to your family life, you will begin to fight with the church life. Then you and your family will be frustrated and unhappy, and the church life will be hurt. In the end you will gain nothing by fighting. You will not gain the proper growth. Instead, you will just be bothered.

If your family life is for the church life, life is simple. Then whatever you do related to the family life will have the church life in view. Everything you do will become simple and you will have very little frustration.

When you invite people over to your house, your furniture and your carpet will become worn out more quickly. If your family life is not for the church life, then you may consider that your possessions are your own and you do not want people to use them or wear them out. You may not want to invite saints over because you will have to take more time to cook or because you only like eating alone with your husband. This is because you like to live a mechanical life, with everything done precisely the

way you want it. To live this way is to fight the church life. You are trying to hold on to your family life. You are telling the Lord, "Lord, I have given You everything already. Just let me keep this one thing." But this is not possible.

I repeat to you, the church life is like a bulldozer. When the bulldozer comes, there is no excuse or compromise. Whatever is in its path is taken away. When people stop coming to meetings, the church life does not die; the church life continues to go on. When they return, they find out that the church life has continued to go on. The church life does not wait for anyone. The church life is always positive and strong. If the church life would ever stop, then the family life will quickly die out as well. The reason the family life is healthy is because the church life is like a bulldozer, never stopping, always going on. There is no way to hold onto it; you can only struggle with it, and that struggling will cause you to suffer.

If you do not have the vision that your family life is for the church life, then you will not be that happy. You must consider all the fellowship we have had so far in sequence. Firstly, you must learn to relax. You can have the boldness in your conscience to tell your husband that you were designed very specifically to meet his needs. But once you are relaxed, you need to be very positive, realizing that your family life is for the church life. Do not be concerned for your carpet, your sofa, or your dishes. Let them be worn out. When you take this attitude, your house will be much more open.

Also, when you realize that there is no way you can control or limit your husband, you can give him the liberty to serve the Lord. If he comes home late, let him come home late. No husband would rather stay at the meeting hall than come home. Your husband does not stay late at the hall because he does not like you. He would much rather be at home. If he stays late at the hall, it is because he cannot help it. Let him do what he has to do. And your husband will have to learn the same thing if you ever stay late at the hall serving. Give your husband the liberty to love and serve the Lord according to the way the Lord leads him.

You should not worry about your children, because the church raises children much better than anyone else. Most of our children have been raised in a proper, healthy way. They may want to leave the church life for a time, but later they come back and become very healthy. If you could see that your family life is for the church life, then your attitude towards your family will be different. You will always consider how your family can be most useful in the church life.

### **Having an Open Home to Swallow Up Death and Weakness in the Church Life**

There are certain homes the young people like to visit. I believe the main reason they prefer these homes is that the families there do not pressure the young people. The young people are not afraid of making themselves comfortable. They just feel peaceful in that home and are able to be open there. The families are so relaxed, so all the young people like to go there.

Today in the church life, we do not have enough families that serve as functioning units to swallow up the death in people's daily lives. Rather, whenever there is death, the death only gets magnified. If a young brother has a problem, there may be no place he can go that will not pressure him. He has no one to talk to about his problem, no shoulder to weep on. Maybe this is because we are all too "right." On the one hand, some do have the gift of making people feel comfortable. But on the other hand, all of us should learn to open up our homes a little. If the young people feel free to drop by your house any night and eat with you without pressure, then your house functions very well. Inviting the young people over will bring in this kind of atmosphere.

When your house functions well, any young person should feel free to walk in and eat with your family, even if it is only hot dogs. You should not feel pressured because you are not serving them steak and potatoes. They should not feel that they are bothering you. When there is a sense of family among the saints and among the young people, then many weaknesses will get swal-

lowed up instead of being magnified.

Today in the church life it seems that if there are any shortcomings, they only get magnified. If a brother or sister loses his temper, soon the whole church knows about it, but nobody “swallows up” the temper. What that saint needs is for someone to swallow up the temper, not to talk about it. It is very common for people to lose their temper; it is not that serious. If so many homes with so many saints are open, then we do not even have to be spiritual. Just naturally we will render help to the members in the church. You can do this only by having this realization: there is no separate family life. My family life is for the church life.

When the church life is healthy, you do have a family life. But the priority should not be the family life. The church life should be our priority. Naturally every family should spend some time each week together, to read together or talk together. But this should not be your aim. Your aim should be the church life. When you aim at having the church life, you allow the church life to care for your family life.

The atmosphere in your home may seem dead if you do not have people in and out of your house. Young people will eat whatever you serve them. They are not as picky as older people. The young people just care for the atmosphere. If you have a fun, lively atmosphere, they are happy to be there. Some of our houses seem dead mainly because we have never given our family life to the church life. You always enjoy visiting homes where you sense life. We should be positive and aggressive in having an open home. Our home should be one that always has saints over, that always gives hospitality, and that always exercises to enjoy Christ.

### **HELP HIS CHURCH LIFE**

The third kind of living is the church life itself, especially the sisters' church life. On the one hand, if you have seen what has been shared in these messages, you should have seen what the sisters' church life is already. But the sisters do need to learn a few things related to the church life.

### **Do Not Be “Spiritual”**

Firstly, we must learn not to be spiritual. A church that has many “spiritual” sisters is in trouble. The fewer “spiritual” sisters there are, the better. However, this does not mean we should not be in spirit. Nor does it mean that we should be in our flesh. Often the sisters aim at the wrong thing. We want to be spiritual so that we can be a certain kind of sister in the church life, but that is not right. In all my years in the church life, I have never seen an exalted, spiritual sister end up being healthy. Once you are “spiritual” you become opinionated. It becomes easy for you to tell others the “right way” to do things. The best way for us to see the church life is to first see that we do not have to be spiritual.

### **Do Not Push Your Husband to Be “Spiritual”**

Secondly, we should not push our husbands to be “spiritual.” Many sisters may not care to be spiritual themselves, but they want to see their husband achieve something in the spiritual realm. They push their husband to be somebody, to be manifested. This is wrong. If your husband is spiritual, it will not come from your pushing. He will be what he is in the hands of the Lord. You should just help him to be in spirit and to enjoy the Lord. You should feed his spirit, but you should not push him to be spiritual. This will only cause frustration and possibly even damage your husband. Let him grow. Feed his spirit. Then, wherever he is, he will end up being what he should be.

Even if your husband achieves something because of your pushing, in the long run he will just become more and more pressured. He will find out that he is not in the place he should be. Then he will be bothered and you will be bothered. Your husband should be nourished and fed, and then he will be manifested according to who he is. Whatever the Lord has given to him will come out naturally. If you push him, he will be frustrated and will feel that he is not able. Sisters, you should not be spiritual, and you should not push your husband to have a certain

kind of spirituality either. You should learn that in the church life, we all grow, and our growth is very natural. We will be what we are according to the measure of the Lord.

### **Learn to Be Very Practical**

Thirdly, in the church life we should learn to be practical. The more practical a sister is, the better. It is hard for sisters to be practical, yet the Lord has given all the practical duties to the sisters. The Lord has put the sisters in the place to do the most practical things, but for some reason, the sisters still are not practical. All practical people have one virtue: they are “doers.”

All the practical things in the church life should be carried by sisters. You should learn to carry the church life in a very practical way. The more practical, the better. This is more precious than giving a testimony in the meetings or getting someone saved. If you know how to carry the church life in a practical way with your husband, you will be much more of a blessing than if you get someone saved or function in the meetings. This is because you are touching something that is very basic in relation to the church life.

There are many young brothers and sisters in the church life. If a family were to pick up a burden for each one, these young ones could be perfected and become useful in the church life. Each one needs a home where they can relax. In a relaxed atmosphere they will be able to touch their spirit. Many times you cannot care for new ones properly because you are not practical. You can talk about spiritual things, but the new ones may not need spiritual talk. They need practicality. They need a mother, an older sister, someone they can open their heart to. They need someone they can trust, someone they know will never betray them. They need the practical ones who will sit with them, be open with them, and allow them to open up. Then they can really touch their spirit.

You need to help young people in the most practical way. Help them to quit smoking or to style their hair properly. They all need

very practical help. It would be good for you and your husband to care for some young people in a very practical way. Again, the more practical, the better. Help them in every practical aspect. Help them with their finances, their clothing, their daily living, and their hair, as well as their spiritual function, their labor in the word, and their releasing of their spirit. All these things need to be fellowshipped practically. If we do not know how to raise up the saints practically, they will not know how to go on with the Lord practically.

You may feel that the points I have shared with you are hard, or that they place too much responsibility on the sisters. But I believe that you are able to do what I have shared. It just depends on whether or not you want to do it. If you want to do these things, you will be able.

We should not allow the church life to be so loose, a place where the new ones do not get help from those who have been in the church life for a longer time. That is not right. Even if you have not been in the church life a long time, you should still learn to allow your household to be for the church life.

### **Realize That the Church Life Will Always Have Problems**

Finally, you must learn that the church life will always have problems. If one day the church life has no more problems, that means the church life is not going on. May the Lord cover this statement with His blood so that Satan does not use it negatively. If the church life is filled with problems, then you should rejoice because this shows that the church life is quite good. When you have more increase, surely you will have more problems. The more positive the church life is, the more problems you will have. In dealing with such problems, you need to learn to praise the Lord.

A large family has more problems than a couple with no children. This is just natural. We need to have this kind of understanding related to the church life. When the church life is so

enjoyable and prevailing, a lot of problems will be happening at the same time. It is foolish to be discouraged by the problems. There is no need even to talk about the problems. There is no need to worry or make issues. If you can help in a positive way, then do so, but do not be bothered by all the problems.

There is not one person who is positive twelve months out of every year. Everyone has his down times and his struggles. Every week some brother or sister will have a problem with his spirit, with the church life, with his attitude, and so on. If you pay attention to his problems, you will be bothered. But there is no need to be bothered and no need to make an issue. If you can help, just help positively. If you cannot help, just let it go. Meanwhile, you should just go on positively.

Problems show that there is life. You have to learn to praise the Lord for the problems. When you talk about them, you just give place to Satan. The more you talk, the more Satan has ground to work. For example, a husband may be angry when he comes home and may throw some dishes on the floor. Just by chance you may stop by when this happens. You see the broken dishes, the angry husband, the weeping wife, and the frightened children. You may feel that something must be terribly wrong for the husband to be that angry. The more you dwell on it, the more Satan can distort things in your mind. You should just praise the Lord and realize that the husband needs more growth. Then the whole thing will be over. Do not tell the whole church what happened. If everyone knows about it, then when that brother goes to the meeting everyone will look at him in a strange way. He may have forgotten about what happened. He and his wife may have already made up. But the rest of the church will now be bothered.

Sisters, you must learn these four things: do not aim at any kind of spirituality; do not push your husband to be spiritual; be very practical in helping the saints in the church life—the more practical, the better; and learn not to pass on any problems that are told to you. If someone tells you about problems in the church, help them learn not to gossip. The church will always have prob-



lems, but they do not have to become issues. When a problem becomes an issue, that is serious. The only “issue” among us should be Christ and the church life. Then the church life will be prevailing.

My last word is this: do not just take this message as fellowship. Please do according to what has been shared. Once you learn to pick up a burden and do according to what has been shared, the church life will be different. The sisters will become a rich blessing to the church life.



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## CHAPTER FOUR

### **HEADSHIP IN THE FAMILY LIFE AND CHURCH LIFE**

*Prayer:* Lord, we are so short of Your glory, so short of Your testimony. But every time we come to You we have a sense of worship. We realize that all our sins have been cleansed and all our shortcomings have been covered. Lord, You are the life-giver, and You are ready to bless us with all the heavenly blessings. Lord, we do open our spirit. Lord, we do open our heart. Lord, speak to us. Appear to us. Lord, when You appeared to Abraham, he gave up everything for You. When You appeared to Jacob, he became Israel. Lord, how we want to give ourselves to You for Your appearing, for Your manifestation. Lord, we realize no human encouragement or admonishing has any value. But Lord, give Yourself to us. Lord, no matter where we are, let all our spirits be so open to hear from You, so open to touch You, so open to realize You, so open to experience You. Lord Jesus Christ, bless this gathering. Cover this small gathering with Your blood. Speak to us in a rich way so that everyone who has come here would realize some blessing, enjoy Your presence, and go on in a more healthy and proper way in the church life through this fellowship. Lord, bless us. Bless Your church. Bless all the sisters. Oh, Lord Jesus, thank You. Thank You for always blessing us.

#### **PERFECTING YOUR HUSBAND'S HEADSHIP**

According to the Bible, God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman (1 Cor. 11:3). If

Christ were somehow improper to God, then God would be our head directly. But, of course, Christ has always been very proper, so therefore Christ can be our head. If a husband rejects Christ's headship, then his wife has the liberty to take Christ as her head, since her husband has rejected the headship of Christ. Rejecting Christ's headship does not mean having a weakness. No husband is fully one with Christ yet. All husbands will have experiences of being very weak. At these times you will realize that your husband does not look like Christ, and he does not look like he can be the head. But your husband's weakness alone does not give you the freedom to reject his headship. You have such a freedom only if he himself rejects Christ's headship. The wife is here to help her husband into a proper headship.

Sometimes a husband's heart is hardened, causing him to reject the headship of Christ. He may not want to have anything to do with the Lord or with the church. Then naturally, in that condition, the sister has to learn to walk in the Lord's presence. In this way she can help her husband, because she herself takes Christ's headship. Eventually her submission to Christ will put her husband in his proper place, and then she must take her husband as her head. He should still have the headship.

If a sister does not have a husband, then the church is her husband. In a sense, the Lord is her husband, but in practicality the Lord is the church. To say, "I love the Lord," is not worth much. Only when you practically know how to love the church do you really love the Lord. Otherwise, a verbal declaration that you love the Lord could just be a kind of superstition. It may not be real. Very few people can really love the Lord without practically loving other Christians. If a sister is not married, she must realize that her real husband is the Lord, and in practicality this means that her husband is the church.

### **THE NATURE OF THE HEADSHIP**

To realize the headship is a high thing. Satan became Satan because he never realized the headship. In the Bible we see that

his one mistake was his desire to be equal with God (Isa. 14:14). He did not try to kill anyone. He was not even a revolutionary. He just wanted a “democracy.” Because of this, he became Satan.

This shows us that to realize the headship is a very high matter. Democracy is the highest form of government human beings can have. It gives all people the full right to grow, to develop, and to attain success according to their ability. The basic function of a democracy is to give everyone a chance. For example, you do not have to be from a politically powerful family to be elected to public office. Furthermore, as long as a person has the ability and the desire, he can become a millionaire. However, the negative aspect of democracy is that negative things are also allowed to develop, so crime and corruption also survive in this kind of society.

In a very negative sense, Satan was the founder of democracy. He was the highest of the three archangels, above Michael and Gabriel. Thus when Michael contended with him over the body of Moses, Michael did not rebuke him but said instead, “The Lord rebuke you” (Jude 9). Michael realized his position. He was not in a position to rebuke Satan, since God had created Satan to be higher than Michael. Satan was second in the universe under God. Once he wanted to be equal with God, he lost the position. If he had gotten what he desired, there would be two heads in the universe. Instead, when he lost his position, he was cast down to the earth (Isa. 14:12-15). Then the whole universe was brought under judgment.

In the church life we may not see the matter of headship. We must remember that the church is an organism, not an organization. It is easy for us to consider the church a democracy, but not many of us see the church as an organism. This is exactly what Satan is after. We consider that everyone is free to do what they want, and no one can tell anyone what to do. This is democracy, and this is what Satan utilizes.

An organism has a natural order. This order is set up according to life, not according to arrangement. Both an organization and an organism are organized. But the organism is organized

according to life, and the organization is organized according to human maneuvering. For example, my human body is an organism. My hand has always been my hand. It has no right to jump to my face and become a nose. The hand cannot say that it has been created equal with the nose. It was not created equal. The hand is simply the hand. This is not through human maneuvering, but because the body is a healthy organism.

This can be related both to the church life and the family life. In the family life, your husband is your head. Whether he is good or bad, prevailing or defeated, as long as he is under the headship of Christ he is qualified to be your head. The wife has to learn to submit herself to her husband. If her husband's headship is poor, it is up to the wife to perfect the headship, not to replace the headship.

For example, we could say that senators and congressmen are elected to perfect the president. The Congress is not elected to be the president, but sometimes Congress tries to be the president. Whatever bills the president proposes, Congress proposes competing bills. They compete with the president to see who has the better bills. They are acting not to perfect the president, but rather to replace the president. This creates chaos. The Congress is elected with the purpose of perfecting the president. If the president is wrong, or goes too far, the Congress guards the president and keeps him in check.

### **NOT CONTROLLING BUT PERFECTING**

This principle also applies to the wife. Your husband may not be a good head, but as long as he does not reject Christ, you must help your husband be under the headship of Christ. You cannot replace his headship. In worldly society, when a man and woman get married, they immediately begin to struggle to see who will have control of their relationship. Most often, the wife wins and takes control of the family. She has many weapons: her tears, her anger, her threats to run home to her mother. This is not healthy. The wife should not win control of the family. She should learn to

perfect her husband's headship.

I believe this is not difficult for a wife to do, because basically most husbands have "surrendered" already. If a husband gets angry when everything is not the way that he wants, he will be difficult to help. But most husbands are not like this. Most husbands just want a peaceful life. They are not too concerned with the details. The older a man gets, the simpler he gets. He eats whatever his wife serves without complaint, because he has learned that if he touches his wife, he is in trouble. The wife has already won. I am not saying this is good or bad, but this is the actual case with most couples. In this case perfecting the husband is very easy. The husband cannot overcome the wife. Even Jesus cannot "overcome" the church. We are so sloppy, yet He is so patient with us. In the family life, as long as you help your husband's body, soul, and spirit, as discussed in the previous chapters, perfecting your husband's headship will not be hard.

### HEADSHIP IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Let me use this opportunity to say a word about the headship in the church life. In the church life all thoughts of democracy are satanic. You should not ask all the time, "Why are we doing it this way?" You should not question the elders' headship, or question that the elders are under Christ's headship. To question things in the church life is to show you do not trust that the elders are under the headship of Christ. This insults Christ's headship.

It is very serious to question the elders in any way. Whether the elder is right or wrong, you should not touch it. Even if the elder is wrong, it can turn out right. But if you touch it, then even if he is right, it will end up wrong. Do not make the church a place where the elders must submit to the members. Once this happens, the church testimony is over. To threaten the elders and try to force them to do what you want is satanic.

In the church life we need to realize the headship. Once we realize the headship, we will hate any kind of threatening. We will hate any thought of democracy in the church life. For ex-

ample, it is a blessing to have someone functioning as the “brain” in the body life. That one can direct the movement for the whole body. You may consider that in an organism no one can tell you what to do. But the finger is always controlled by the hand. And the hand has no choice but to move when the arm moves. The hand cannot be responsible only to the head. If the hand wants to be responsible to the head, it must be responsible to the arm.

In your body, each member’s function is so much in life. It is really an organism, yet it is most organized. It is organized according to life and function, not according to maneuvering.

When the elders take a direction in the church life, and you have the thought of democracy, you may get frustrated by their decision. But if you realize how hateful democracy is to the church life and to the heading up, you will be much more restful. Very few of us really understand the heading up. Only Christ fully knows. In the process that Christ went through, His submission was so marvelous. Even before creation He fully realized what was going to happen in God’s economy. He designed the whole universe (Prov. 3:19-20). He knew what would happen to man. Adam’s fall was not a surprise to Him. Christ realized that the 4000 years of human history before His incarnation were a preparation for Him to come, to suffer, and to die. No one knows how much He suffered. Only in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His crucifixion do we get a glimpse of how difficult His path was. Even though Christ had engineered the whole process and even though He knew He would be in that garden on that night, yet He still prayed to God to remove the cup if He were willing (Luke 22:41-44). He wept and prayed even to the point that His sweat was like great drops of blood. Yet He still fully submitted to God’s headship.

Even Christ’s resurrection and ascension were under God’s authority. After He resurrected, He waited for God to call Him to ascend to the throne. He did not presume that because of His accomplishments He deserved to ascend, but He waited for God to call Him. Philippians 2:9 tells us that it was God who highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above ev-



ery name. Everything is under God's headship.

In the church life, if we realize the heading up in the church, we will have a godly fear. We will be fearful that we might offend God. We who have been raised in a democratic society always like to find out "why." Jesus never asked "why." He did not need to wait for God to exalt Him after resurrection, yet He waited on God. According to our understanding, He had already accomplished everything, so He had the right to ascend to the heavens. Instead, He waited. We can see Christ's godliness when Mary tried to touch Him in the garden. He told her, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17). Apparently He was waiting for God's order to ascend.

This kind of heading up is how the church is produced, and the exercise of this heading up is how the church will be built up. This is not cheap. Just consider how Christ came down to earth. He lived as a carpenter. He died on the cross. After He resurrected, He waited for God's order to ascend. Then He was put on the throne and given the name above every name. His being headed up was not cheap. In the same way, the church is not produced in a cheap way. It requires a heading up.

If after resurrection Christ had not waited for God to call Him up, the whole process would have been a failure. That would have been according to Satan's principle of rebellion. Praise the Lord that this did not happen. We must realize this principle in the building up of the church. We should pay attention to the heading up in the church life. If we do this, we will be blessed. Learn in the church life not to have any voice. Whatever the church arranges, stand with it.

You must learn to trust that if you have a spirit, the elders have a spirit even more. If you say to them, "The Lord hasn't told me to do it," you are rejecting the spirit of the elders. If you think the Lord has told you something, you have to realize that the Lord speaks to the elders even more. We all must pay attention to the headship in the church life.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Prayer:** Lord, every time we are in Your presence, we always feel so short, so poor, so naked. Yet, Lord, how thankful we are for the blood that renders us the boldness to come again to Your presence. Lord, how we desire to live in Your presence in such a simple way. We are not trusting in our victory; rather we are trusting in Your blood. We are not trusting in excitement; rather we are trusting in life. Our spiritual life can be simple and single. There is no murmuring, no strife, just a full rest in the salvation You have accomplished for us. Even this morning, Lord, anoint us. Grant us Your presence. Grant us spiritual utterance and spiritual understanding that we all can be so proper. Lord, we pray, be with us in Your precious name. Amen.

**Question:** *It is easy to submit to the Lord, because you know that He is right. But how do you submit to your husband when he considers himself to be under the Lord's headship but you know he is making a mistake?*

**Answer:** The husband should not reject anything that is positive towards the Lord, like going to meetings, reading the word, prayer, enjoying Christ, and so on. To reject these things, in principle, is to reject the Lord's headship. However, a sister may go too far in carrying out one of these practices, causing her husband to restrict her. We need to help our husbands take a stand for these positive practices. But in all matters not related to the divine life, the sisters should learn to submit.

Sometimes your husband may not be prevailing. You need to

perfect him and help him to be prevailing. It is not easy to help your husband be prevailing and yet submit to him at the same time. While you are perfecting your husband, you need to learn submission. Usually the wife likes to “rub it in” when she is right about something. But this ruins the headship. You may be right, but you are the helpmate. Your husband is the head, so the glory should go to him, even though the problems come to you.

This principle matches that of the headship in the church. We need to realize that no matter whether the elders are right or wrong, if we stay one with them, under the covering, we are all right. But in the family life, the wife is usually persuaded that she knows more than her husband. She may feel, “My judgment is better than my husband’s 95% of the time.” This is something sisters are always fighting against. They try to find ways to protect the family from their husband’s “mistakes,” feeling that if he makes a mistake the whole family will fall apart. So the sisters try to do things themselves. However, this is to insult the headship. The safest way is to trust your husband and stay under his covering. You are much safer under the covering, even if he is making a mistake, than to come out from under the covering and be “right.”

Very few sisters realize how wonderful it is that they have a husband. It does not matter whether or not your husband is prevailing. Most sisters are bothered by their husbands. If the husband is too prevailing, they complain that he neglects the family. If he is not prevailing, they want him to be somebody glorious yet spend all his time with his wife. The wives often do not realize that the husband’s existence is a great help to the wife. If they realize this, they know how to properly be under the headship.

A sister who knows how to honor her husband will know how to honor the church. But I do not believe that any sister who does not know how to honor her husband will know how to honor the church. If you know how to honor your husband, you can help him have an interest in spiritual things. But if you do not honor your husband, you will not help his interest in the church to grow. If a sister is not able to stand with her husband, I do not believe she has the ability to stand with the elders. If you always find

fault with your husband, you will also be able to find fault with the church, because no elders are perfect. Then you will always have an opinion about how things should be done. This could cause small matters to become big issues.

If you know how to appreciate your husband, then to the degree that he is in the Lord, he will become your covering. Then it will be easy for you to learn to cooperate with the church. A sister who knows how to be under her husband's covering can be a real blessing. The genuinely spiritual saints always know how to put themselves under a proper headship. To have a husband and to be under his headship is a blessing, not a limitation. Even if it frustrates us, it is still a blessing, because it forces all our spiritual things to be genuine. Without "frustration" from your husband as your head, you may pick up spiritual things too easily and become obsessed with them.

An obsessed person becomes a worshipper of himself. He becomes overconfident and no longer has proper judgment. He is caught by something and is not himself anymore. It is easy for a sister to be upset or obsessed. A sister likes to think of herself as a good wife, a good sister, or a good mother. If you have just a little success, you are obsessed. Your husband is the best help to take you away from your obsession. You have to praise the Lord that you have a husband. Treasure your husband.

***Question:** When I come to the Bible, I'm not sure if I should try to read as much as my husband does each day or if I should be serving my family.*

***Answer:*** How often you touch the Lord will determine how you get into the word. Realistically, the Lord has not given the sisters the function of reading the entire Bible 52 times a year. Even many brothers would be ruined by this practice. Only a few have the mercy to do this. Your exercise of reading the word depends on quality, not quantity.

Quality is very important. You should care more for quality than quantity in the time you spend with your husband, your children, or the Lord. Quality in this context relates to life. I may

only read three verses a day. But if those three verses become alive to me, then reading those verses is more worthwhile than reading a whole chapter. If you practice this, you will become rich in the word. I am not implying that everyone from now on should read three verses a day. But whatever you read, whether one chapter or one phrase, should become life to you. In this way your spiritual life will be well-nourished.

Too often, even in spiritual things, we desire instant results. According to my realization and experience, I doubt many people can be used by the Lord before they reach the age of forty or fifty. Yet we still hope that in two to three years we can attain something significant. We want results too quickly. How different things would be if the church could be so restful, caring just for quality in praying or reading the word. Even if you only pray for thirty seconds, but in those thirty seconds you touch the Lord, then that is quality time. Your spirit is made alive. You have solid enjoyment. Then your spiritual life will be very prevailing.

In coming to the word, do not feel pressured to read it through once a year. Just come to the word in a simple way. Starting from Genesis, read as much as the Lord leads you day by day, even if it is only five verses. Just concentrate on having a quality time with the Lord, whether in praying, calling on the Lord's name, or reading the Bible.

I emphasize quality rather than quantity because we do not expect woman prophets. We do realize that woman prophets were mentioned in the Bible. But that was the Lord's special work. We should not try to reproduce it. Our hope is that you sisters would be good, healthy sisters. Actually, I would even tell the brothers the same thing. We do not expect apostles. If the Lord would raise up some apostles, that is His business. We just expect that all the brothers would know how to be so simple in loving the Lord, loving the church, enjoying the Lord, enjoying life, and enjoying the word. Everybody will be properly fed and nourished. This will give us a very peaceful church life.

The Christian life is not a competition. You may read ten chapters, but another sister may only read one verse. In reading that

verse her quality can be so high. All day long she can enjoy that verse while she is cooking, cleaning, or serving her husband. Then that one verse will become so real to her. This kind of testimony is more valuable than someone who reads ten chapters but never gets anything out of his reading. When one verse becomes living to us, this is high quality.

We need to pay attention to quality because Christ's quality is so high. When we have the reality of Christ, when we are living in His presence, we have high quality. When we use our human thought to evaluate the Christian life, we are so low. I cannot tell you how bothered I am that we are so low. If two new people come to the meeting, we get excited. It seems that we only care to do or be something in the church life. This is so low. We do not have bad intentions; we love the Lord and His recovery. But our person is so low. Therefore when we judge or evaluate things, our judgment is low.

A good illustration of this is how excited we get when we buy something on sale. Maybe the item was originally \$5, but now it is marked down to \$3.50. You are so happy that you saved \$1.50. On the one hand, you may need to learn to save like this. But you should not be so excited about it. That excitement is low. You can thank the Lord that He provided for your need, but there is no need to tell others how much you saved. This shows us how low we are in everything.

In the church life we may get excited because we are put in charge of a certain service. We may begin to order the saints around. Or we may tell them how many chapters we have read today. This is so low. You may never realize how high Christ is. This is why the church has problems. The problems come in because our mind has not been transformed and our person is so low. Our low person causes us to be easily bothered or excited by things which have no value. Neither your excitement nor your frustration is necessary. If you know the Lord and the quality found in living in His presence you will not be bothered by these outward circumstances at all.

Coming back to the question, we do not need to strive with

our husbands to see how many chapters we can read. Among the brothers, to read more of the Bible is not a sin. There is nothing wrong with this. It is good for them to read more. But even the brothers will not gain much if they neglect the quality and only care for the quantity. They may be able to say they have read the Bible many, many times, but what is most meaningful is the quality. In the time you spend with your husband, pay attention to the quality. In the time you spend with your children, pay attention to the quality. In the time you spend with the Lord, pay attention to the quality. In everything you do, the quality of that time must be high. In other words, in all your activities you should have a strong realization of the Lord's presence.

Recently I have been encouraged by the church meetings. Why? Because the quality of the church meetings has been very high. All the meetings are high. In every meeting a lot of riches come out, either through the ministry or the fellowship. It is quite wonderful. But I do know that the quality of the love feasts has not been so high. In fact, it has been rather common. There is no burden for the love feasts. People bring food, pick out what they like, and then sit and eat and talk. After eating they rush to the meeting to sing some songs. This shows we are very common.

Also, the quality of the testimonies after the gospel message has not been very high. Whether people receive the Lord or not, you always testify the same way: "Twenty years ago, before I was saved, I was so bad, but now I am so good." All this is a performance. It is not high, nor is it genuine. Why is it not genuine? Maybe it is because we eat too much at supper and do not have time to pray.

In the church life you must try to be high. Whether it is related to your reading of the word or to your prayer, do not aim for quantity. Quantity cannot compare with quality. There is no comparison between something of great quantity and something of high quality. For example, when you look at precious stones, you know they have quality. Because they are all high quality, they all are very attractive. Even in the New Jerusalem, with its twelve foundations of precious stones, you will not be able to say which



one is better. They are all wonderful because they are all precious stones. There is no way to say which one is better, because they are all of the highest quality.

Sisters, if we realize how important quality is in our church life, we will be relieved from a lot of pressure in our daily affairs. A restful time with the Lord lasting 30 seconds is better than rushing through 30 minutes. When I say “rush,” I believe you know what I mean. You sit down to read the Bible. Then you get up to turn on the stove. Then you come back to the Bible again. Then you realize that you forgot to put the water pot onto the stove. Then you come back to read the Bible again. Then the kids come home for lunch. Then you go back to the Bible. You say that you have spent 30 minutes with the Lord, but there is no quality. Just in and out, in and out, from kitchen to bedroom, changing diapers, yelling at the kids, then back to the Bible. There is no quality in such a time.

But if you would be so restful in your coming to the Lord for 30 seconds, you would not care whether or not your work is done during that time. You should say, “Whether the stove is turned on or not, for these 30 seconds I am resting.” You can turn to any verse and pray over that verse. For example, you may pray over 2 Corinthians 5:1-3: “Lord, I’m so thankful that the earthly house is going to be dissolved. Lord, I’m groaning to be clothed upon so that I will not be naked. Lord, I’m burdened....” In those 30 seconds you are brought into a peacefulness, a restfulness. You realize that the Lord is with you. Now, when you go to turn on the stove, you can begin to enjoy what you touched in your 30 seconds with the Lord. So those 30 seconds continue, perhaps for half an hour, perhaps for three hours, perhaps for the rest of the day. Those 30 seconds of quality time will carry you through your daily life. However, if you only pay attention to quantity, you will lose this experience. We thank the Lord for the practical church life.

Perhaps some days you will read three verses, while other days you will read three chapters. You might skip your reading two days in a row. Do not be condemned. Just come back on the

third day and continue where you left off.

Insist on one thing: reading the Bible from beginning to end. Do not keep starting over again and again. If you stopped at Exodus two years ago, begin again with Exodus. Determine to finish the Bible. You may go slowly, one verse at a time, one chapter at a time, according to what the Lord has measured to you. Many of the verses you read can become a real nourishment to you. Out of three or four verses, one verse may be good. Out of a chapter, one phrase may be good. You may spend five minutes reading a chapter, but in those five minutes you can have so much enjoyment. This makes the quality of your time high. Then after this, as you carry out your daily responsibilities, your enjoyment from the morning will still be with you. As you cook, that verse is with you. When your husband comes home, that verse is with you. In caring for your kids, your morning prayer is still with you. A quality time with the Lord will bring you into a prevailing life. Every one of us needs this kind of understanding of our Christian life.

***Question:** I'm not sure how much I should encourage my children to have a spiritual seeking. I encourage them to sing hymns, but I do not want to go too far. Should I give my children any encouragement to pray with me or anything like that?*

***Answer:*** No, I would never tell them to read the Bible or to pray. Even if they follow you to pray, I would tell them to stop if they are just imitating a way of praying that they learned in the meetings. Ask them to stop praying and just allow you to pray. But no one knows how to raise children. I do not say that I'm right in how I raise my children. If we did know the right way, then there would be no need of God. God is the One who knows. Every individual is different. Every child is different. I do warn my children against idol worship. I do tell them to praise the Lord that we have a God whom we believe. I tell them this mainly for them to realize a little bit of godliness. But I seldom touch the matter of salvation. But I do not know if this is right. Only the Lord knows. My expectation is that perhaps, when my children are twelve or thirteen years old, the church will have some good

meetings for young people so that they can touch the Lord by themselves.

So many families in the United States try so hard to raise up their children. Most couples never go to church until they have children. Then they start to attend church because they realize that their life is now for the second generation. By doing this they are trying to make a profit from the Lord. They do not care for the Lord; they just care for their kids. The parents have been corrupted enough to know that they do not want their kids to be corrupted. The parents did many things before they had children, but they stopped doing those things, thinking that their children will be different from them. But naturally the children will be like the parents. Through all the parents' trials you can see very little success.

I do not see many children testifying that they were trained so well by their father to love the Lord from a young age. If this did happen, then at the age of 20 that child would be a spiritual man because he had loved the Lord for so many years already. But I have not seen any 20-year-old spiritual men yet, not even among the children raised in the church life. What I have seen in the church life is that almost all the second generation go away for two or three years. They all like to try something else. If your family's testimony is strong, do not be afraid of this. But if your family's testimony is weak and loose, then you surely cannot afford for them to leave. If your family is really walking in the Lord's presence and what you have is real gold, then you should not be afraid to let them try the world. In two or three years they will all come back. Of course, we hope that they will not even go out to try the world, because during the time they are gone it is so hard on the parents. The parents do not know when their children will come back. The best is for us to pray that they all will be saved at the proper time.

The children know what is genuine. At the age of six they try to defeat their parents, to expose them by asking funny questions. Kids are smart. They like to expose their parents so they can feel important. And they know what is genuine. I have seen

families in the church life that live a religious life, not fervent, just coming to meetings. Their life is very godly. They do not love the world or go to movies. But they are not fervent. In a sense they are the best of Christianity. They take the church life as the best Christianity. They go to all the meetings and live a nice family life. But when their children reach their late teens, they have no interest in the church. They realize that this is just a style of living, and they want to choose a style of living that suits them.

Some parents seem crazy in following the Lord. One couple moved six times in six years. Isn't this crazy? It is not that the parents never fight or that they always behave, but the children are impressed with their parents' fervency. This kind of fervency touches people. They wonder what makes their parents crazy like this. Surely the children will complain when they have to switch schools again. It is not easy to always be making new friends. This may bother them and cause them to leave the church for a time. But they will come back because they realize that something real is here.

You consider too much how to raise your children properly. As long as you are short of the power, the dynamo of the Spirit, the younger generation will just see your life as a certain style that they may or may not want to imitate. They may prefer a different style of living. Without that power they will feel free to choose whatever style they want, even though the local church life has more Christ. From this you can see that to love the Lord is not easy.

So all we can do in raising our children is pray, and as Brother Lee has said, "do our best." Even Brother Lee realized there is no formula. Otherwise, there would be no need of the living God. If there were a formula to make all our children apostles, we would surely all use the formula. But there is no such formula.

***Question:** One Lord's Day after the meeting, the children told us that something happened during children's meeting that I did not agree with. We did not know what to say. How do you*

*handle something like that?*

**Answer:** In the church life one of the secrets of building is openness with no requirements. However, we may have many requirements but little openness. Every time you require something from someone, that creates a standard. If we require that all the sisters have their heads covered, then we have a standard of head covering.

Let us suppose I am a sister in the church life, and one day my children come home from children's meeting where they listened to rock music and began to dance around. I would find out who their teacher was and invite him over for dinner. Or I might approach him in a very nice way, saying, "You know, when my children came home they were singing a peculiar song. Did someone play that in the meeting while they were there?" When you ask a question in this way, even if he was wrong he will not be bothered by you. And he would have a chance to explain the situation. Perhaps a child brought a record in and played it a little bit before the teacher was able to stop him. By taking care of the matter in this way, the teacher would not be bothered even if he was wrong, but he may be helped to realize that what happened was improper.

The brothers and sisters in the church life are even closer to you than your brothers and sisters in the flesh. With your brothers and sisters you can always be so open without requirements. Requirements kill the church. Any kind of requirement is the same. But everyone likes to have requirements. Human beings are fallen and full of requirements. The longer you are in the church life and the more messages you hear, the more demanding you become because now you have a standard, a "ruler" to measure things by. When you first come to the church life you have an empty pocket, without any ruler, although you may try to measure things by your human concept. But the longer you meet with the church and the more you hear, the more you can measure who has morning watch, who reads the Bible, who has growth in life, etc.

Someone could be criticized to death without ever hearing

about it because no one would say a word to him directly. This is satanic. This means the church life is full of politicians, not real brothers and sisters. Everybody is demanding, requiring, murmuring, yet nobody is imparting life. No one has the honesty to open up the situation and fellowship. You do not know how willing the brothers and sisters are to receive fellowship. No one likes to be criticized behind his back. If I do something wrong, I would not want the whole church to talk about what is wrong with me without my knowing about it. If you do not want this to happen to you, then do not practice this with others. Always learn to be so frank and open with the saints. As long as you are in a good spirit it is always good.

As for the young people, they respect you as a married sister, even if you were just married last month. If we have love for the young people, we can be very bold to help them. But do not be opinionated with them. No young person will tolerate 30 mothers all telling him what to do. Just care for their person. I have been sharing this for some time. We should care for their person, not for the work. In caring, we should have no thought of gain. As I raise my three children, I am not expecting a great deal out of them. Especially in this corrupted culture, I am expecting that when they are eighteen years old they will leave home. If your parents tried to tell you to do something, you would get so mad at them. In Chinese there is a saying, "Only when you have a baby do you know how to appreciate your parents." Before you have a child your parents just seem to bother you. But after you begin to raise a child you really love your parents. So with your children you are not expecting much, but you still give yourself to them because you are hoping that they can grow up properly. There is no self-interest involved. This is the way to care for young people.

Even the sisters with us may feel isolated because we are not related to one another. There is no building together and very little life-imparting. Some have paid a big price to be in the church life, but they are not being properly cared for. It seems the young people have to invite the older couples over to their homes first, before they get invited to your homes. Sisters, my suggestion to

you is to be a little bit dynamic; open up a little. Do not try to all become their mothers, telling the young people what to do. This will utterly frustrate them, causing them not to know how to go on. But if anyone renders them the care they need, they will not be bothered.

My children are cared for by us. But if some of the other saints care for them, I do not think my wife and I would say they are getting too much care. Rather, the children would enjoy it. The care does not include requirements. It is just a care for the person. You need to know the difference. If you learn to care for the saints in this way, you will not have so much time to sit at home and think about your problems, complain about the church, or blame the ministering brothers. If you would drop all this you would be so happy. Right now you are limited because you are short of the care for the saints.

In caring for the saints you can always be open, not in order to tell them what to do but with proper, healthy fellowship. Even if they do not listen to you, it's okay. Only be careful that you are not demanding, not checking how many chapters they read in the Bible, whether they prayed today, or if they preached the gospel. Do not do this. Just invite them to your home. Care for them. Feed them well. Be their friend. If you have any suggestions for them just tell them; do not order them to do anything.

***Question:** I am happy to have the young people over, but sometimes I feel that they are not that comfortable coming over to my house. What should I do?*

***Answer:*** I would suggest that you sisters take a little initiative. A new brother in Taiwan went to a certain university in another city. The first thing the leading one in that city did when the new brother came was to invite him over. The leading one lived in the meeting hall. He showed the new brother the refrigerator and the couch and told him, "This refrigerator is yours and this couch is yours. Come over any time you want. This is your house." We need to learn from this. At first the new brother may not come over. But after a year or two he will drop in, open the re-

frigerator and make himself at home. Why will this happen? Because you initiated it. You need to learn to initiate a little. You do not have to try too hard. There may be a few you are already burdened for, some young sisters or brothers. Of course, you should care for the young brothers only with your husband. But with the young sisters, feel free to act as the Lord has burdened you.

Then, you must initiate. At first the young people may be bashful. They will not know where to sit down or what to say. Do not be bothered. Just keep inviting them every week or every other week. After one or two months they will tell you everything. A young brother will tell you and your husband that he is in love with some sister, but she is in love with some boy already, and he does not know what to do. This kind of thing is going on all the time. As all these things are going on, the young people will need some place where they can pour out their heart. We need to learn how to be spiritual when we fellowship with them. We should not gossip with them. Just bring them to Christ. Bring them to realize His Lordship; bring them to an enjoyment of the Lord and of the church life. As young people their hearts may change easily. But in the midst of their “passion” it is a very serious thing to them. So they need the proper help.

The young brothers and sisters that live with a family see how pressured a couple can be when someone comes over. They do not always see how much enjoyment the couple has from that visit. Since they are living with a husband and wife they see the fights. There is no way for a husband and wife not to fight. If you tell me that you never fight with your husband, then I would say that you do not love him. Rather, you have given up on him. If you do not fight with a person, you have given him up. I bother the people I love. We are all human, so it is natural that we are bothered by one another, especially by those we love.

When a young person is living in your household, it is just like being married. You see each other all the time. This can cause the young person to become sensitive. They may be afraid of causing everyone to feel pressured by their presence. It is healthy for



them to realize the “pressure” because you live together all the time.

Even among the sisters some of you may feel pressured, so you need to restore the fellowship. There is no need for any pressure. Through the fellowship gradually any problems can be resolved.

Do not show any superiority. To show no superiority is the key among the sisters. Among the brothers it’s acceptable to be blunt. But sisters are too fine. If you offend them they will close up, and you will not be able to help them. Therefore, do not show any superiority. Just be their friend; be with them. If you have a genuine concern for a certain sister, she will know. She will also know if you are making her a target of your work. You need to produce a genuine concern for that sister, not work on her.

***Question:** When a young brother comes over but my husband is not there, how open should I be to him?*

***Answer:*** It is best not to let him in for very long. Although we do not doubt a sister’s integrity, it is very important to have a proper practice, especially as the church life grows. If it were a common practice for married sisters to care for single brothers alone, that could lead to a serious problem in the church life.

My practice when I fellowship with a sister alone is to always leave a door or a window open so that anyone can walk in or hear what we are saying. I practice this way because I realize we all are fallen. Our practice is very important.

If a young brother comes over and your husband is not home, you should not cast him out. Treat him politely and nicely, but do not prolong the fellowship. Make sure that the proper care for the young brothers goes through your husband. Your husband is the proper vessel to care for the brothers. If you have a burden for a young brother, you should fellowship with your husband and help him to be burdened. Then together you can help that young brother.

***Question:** I have seen that problems have been created in certain households between the young people and their host families due to gossip. I would ask that we do not allow ourselves or*

*the young people to criticize how other households operate.*

**Answer:** If you hear from the young people that a certain household does not operate properly, tell the young people not to talk about it. They should go to the older ones to fellowship. As long as the young people are open, they will receive the fellowship. They need to exercise not to have any requirements. The younger you are, the more you require of other people. The older you are, the less you require of other people because you realize you are not somebody. When you are young, you think you are somebody, so you are very critical. But you should not have any requirements. If you can give the saints Christ as their life, then everything will be fine. If you cannot give them life, then you are not qualified to require anything from anyone. If you can impart life, there is no need of requirements. Your life-imparting will take care of all the problems.

PART II

THE POSITIVE  
FUNCTION  
OF THE SISTERS  
IN THE  
CHURCH LIFE



THE CHAPTERS IN THIS SECTION WERE  
ORIGINALLY GIVEN AS MESSAGES DURING  
A SERIES OF MEETINGS  
FOR SISTERS IN WILLOUGHBY, OHIO,  
BETWEEN FEBRUARY AND APRIL OF 1980



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## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CRUCIAL ROLE AND DECISIVE NATURE OF THE SISTERS' FUNCTION

#### *Verses*

*Now as they went, He entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to His word. But Martha was being drawn about with much serving, and she came up to Him and said, Lord, does it not matter to You that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to do her part with me. But the Lord answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; but there is need of one thing, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

*Luke 10:38-42*

*Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Therefore they made Him a supper there; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of the ones reclining at table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of ointment, of very valuable pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.*

*John 12:1-3*

**AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

These five messages cover the positive, normal, and healthy function of the sisters in the church life. The role of the sisters in the Lord's work is a very extensive topic in the Bible. For the Lord to gain His testimony, the function of the sisters is essential. In this message we will look at the crucial role and the decisive nature of the sisters' function. We must realize that the health of the church life is largely dependent upon the health of the sisters. When their function is healthy, the Lord's testimony will be strong.

**THE FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH  
LIFE: LOVING THE LORD AND SERVING HIM**

First we need to define the function of the sisters according to the Bible. In the New Testament the normal church life is typified by the family in Bethany. This family is a prototype, a pattern, of the church life. In this family there was one brother, Lazarus. His life was a testimony of resurrection. Then there were two sisters, Mary and Martha. Mary expressed a pure love for the Lord with an absolute consecration, and Martha diligently served the Lord. For the church life to be healthy these three elements are necessary. We need the element of Lazarus, which is the testimony of resurrection. We need the element of Mary, which is the pure love for the Lord in consecration. And we need the element of Martha, which is the diligence in serving the Lord. When these three elements are present, then the church life will be healthy and prevailing.

The picture of this family in Bethany shows us how critical the sisters are in the church life. In this prototype of the church there are two sisters but only one brother. This shows that in the church life the function of the sisters is even more needed than the function of the brothers. Why is the function of the sisters so important and so necessary? Because it is by the function of the sisters that the church can have the testimony of resurrection. In the house at Bethany, Lazarus's testimony of resurrection was

dependent upon Mary's pure love for Christ and Martha's diligent serving. If a sister's spiritual understanding is enlightened, she will worship the Lord that she is a sister, because without the function of the sisters the church cannot have the testimony of resurrection. This testimony of resurrection comes from the healthy love and serving of the sisters.

The first element of the church life that rests on the sisters is that of loving the Lord. The sisters should love the Lord with a pure love in consecration. This seems so simple and unnoticeable, but it is essential to the church life. When a sister's love for the Lord becomes her daily experience, eventually it causes her to pour out everything she is upon the Lord. This is to be like Mary. Sisters, your love towards Christ provides the sweetness of the church life. Without a fervent love being exercised by the sisters in the church life, the church will be lacking in its testimony. Of course, the brothers should also love the Lord, but that is not their main function. The Bible says that the brothers' function is to bear the testimony of resurrection, and that this is the result of the sisters' function. The first element of the sisters' function is a pure and single love for the Lord, which issues in a genuine consecration to Him.

A sister's love for the Lord should also cause her to serve Him diligently and practically. When a pure love for the Lord is lacking, the practical serving by the sisters becomes theoretical. If the sisters only have the outward performance in their serving life, without the inward reality of loving the Lord, then there will be no demonstration of the power of resurrection. But when there is both the pure love for the Lord and the diligent serving of the Lord by the sisters in the church life, then the brothers will have the way to bear the testimony of resurrection.

**THE FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS CAUSING  
THE CHURCH TO BECOME PREVAILING**

Sisters, when you properly exercise to love and serve the Lord, the church will become prevailing and fruitful. You are not re-

quired by the Lord to be so “spiritual.” You do not need to put so much pressure on yourselves by thinking that you need to fulfill some high requirement. There is no high requirement. Instead, you should help bear the burden of the Lord’s testimony by simply loving the Lord and serving Him. When you learn to love and serve the Lord in a hidden way, the church will become prevailing.

According to this picture of the family at Bethany, loving the Lord and serving the Lord are mainly the function of the sisters. If we were to take away Mary’s portion, there would be no satisfaction for Jesus. If we were to take away Martha’s portion, there would be no enjoyment and rest for Jesus. This is why the sisters should be very thankful to the Lord. They should pray, “Lord, thank you that we are sisters. We are not those who are appointed to give messages. We are not outwardly manifested, we are not holding conferences, and we are not taking the lead. But the healthiness of the church life depends on us. Because we are learning to love You and serve You, the church can have the testimony of resurrection. The church can become prevailing because of our function.” Sisters, once you have this realization you will be so happy that the Lord made you a sister. Your portion may be hidden. Your function will not necessarily be known or manifested. But if you just love the Lord and serve Him faithfully, then the church will become prevailing.

### **THE SISTERS PROVIDING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE LORD’S WORK**

At the house in Bethany, Lazarus did not do that much. He had been raised from the dead by the Lord’s command, and afterwards he was eating with Jesus at the table. There was no “doing” on Lazarus’s part. Through loving and serving the Lord the two sisters did everything that was necessary for Lazarus to bear the testimony of resurrection. This shows that the foundation of the Lord’s work is with the sisters. As an example of this, it was a sister, M.E. Barber, who was the greatest help to Brother



Nee. Her raising up of Brother Nee became the foundation for the Lord's recovery in this age. The Lord may have said, "There are so many brothers running around, doing this and that. Let me just use one sister to raise up My servant." Similarly, it was a sister who helped Brother Lee get saved. The Lord may have said, "There are so many men out there preaching and evangelizing. Let me just use one sister to get My servant saved." The principle we see here is that the sisters provide the foundation for a healthy, prevailing testimony. Sisters, all you need to do is simply love the Lord with a pure heart and serve the Lord with diligence. If you learn these two things, then the church will be uplifted and will have the testimony of resurrection.

#### **THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE SISTERS AS SEEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The Lord's work is intimately related to the sisters. We can see from the New Testament that the role of the sisters was crucial whenever the Lord desired to meet a certain need according to His purpose. Many times in the New Testament the sisters' function was absolutely essential to bring in a blessing or meet a particular need. We see this firstly in the Gospels. During the Lord's earthly ministry it was the sisters who cared for His financial need, along with the needs of His disciples (Luke 8:3; Mark 15:41). Then when Mary poured out her alabaster flask of ointment upon the Lord, He testified, "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:13). The Lord did not say such a thing about any brother, but He said that whenever the gospel was preached, this sister would be remembered.

Then at the time of the Lord's crucifixion, it was the sisters who stood with Him the most firmly in His suffering. Among the brothers, including His own disciples, only John was there at the cross. But the sisters were there standing by Him (John 19:25). After His resurrection, the Lord first appeared to a sister, Mary the Magdalene (John 20:14-17). He did not firstly appear to any

brothers, but to a sister who loved Him. Where were the brothers? On one hand the brothers did so much. They heard all the words from the Lord's mouth, they saw Him transfigured, and they were sent out by Him. But at the end of the four Gospels, where were they? Yet the sisters were there. Those who satisfied Jesus, those who comforted Jesus, those who met His financial need, those who stood with Him at the cross and saw Him immediately after His resurrection—they were all sisters. These examples show us how crucial the sisters were to the Lord when He was on the earth.

The crucial role of the sisters in the Lord's work continued after the Lord resurrected and ascended. There were many sisters who were praying with the disciples immediately after the Lord's ascension (Acts 1:14). This prayer eventually brought in the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Later in the book of Acts, King Herod had Peter put into prison. When Peter was released from the prison by an angel, "he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was surnamed Mark, where there was a considerable number assembled together and praying" (Acts 12:12). Peter did not go to the home of a brother, but to the home of a sister where the church was praying for him (Acts 12:5). Then in the book of Romans, Paul greeted the sister Prisca (Priscilla) and her husband Aquila, naming her first (Rom. 16:3). Paul's greeting to the saints was a spiritual one. He greeted Priscilla before Aquila because he knew that a spiritual burden was being generated by this sister. Priscilla's loving and serving the Lord caused her husband's serving to become effective. From these examples in the New Testament we can see that the sisters were intimately involved with the Lord's work.

Sisters, do not look down at yourselves. If you see how essential you are to the Lord and His work, you will worship the Lord that He made you a sister in the church life. Do not think, "Who am I? I'm merely a sister who must submit to my husband." Yes, you do need to submit to your husband, just as your husband needs to submit himself to the Lord. But this should not be your

focus. Your focus should be on loving the Lord and serving Him. This is your function. The normal and healthy function of the sisters is crucial to God's purpose. Just as it was in the New Testament, your role is essential to the Lord's work.

**A SISTER'S UNHEALTHINESS CAN HINDER THE LORD'S WORK: THE NEGATIVE EXAMPLE OF MIRIAM**

We have seen some of the positive examples in the Bible of the sisters' functioning, but there is also a negative side. Sisters can become the source of problems. The clearest example is that of Miriam, Moses' sister. Miriam was someone who was greatly used by the Lord. When Moses was put in a basket into the river by his mother to protect his life, Miriam stood at a distance on the riverbank. When Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter, Miriam made sure that their mother became his nurse (Exo. 2:1-9). Then later, after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, she took the lead among all of the women to praise the Lord with tambourines and dance (Exo. 15:20-21). She was a very good sister who was greatly used by the Lord. However, she eventually became a serious problem to the Lord and to His people. She took the lead to rebel against Moses after he married a Cushite woman. Aaron also rebelled, but it is implied that she took the lead because she is named first. The two of them asked, "Has Jehovah indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not also spoken through us?" (Num. 12:1-3). Her rebellion caused her to become leprous, as white as snow (v. 10). She even caused the entire move of the Lord's people to stop for seven days, until she was purified (v. 15).

By this one example, we should realize that the sisters have the ability to greatly hinder the Lord's work and to stop the progress of the church. When a sister is not going on with the Lord and becomes unhealthy, she may easily influence her family and the saints around her in a negative way. From our experience we have learned that when a few brothers are unhealthy the church can usually still go on. But when a few sisters are un-

healthy the church will often have to wait for them to recover. The unhealthiness of the sisters can hinder the progress of the church more than the unhealthiness of the brothers. Brothers can cause a lot of problems, but they do not usually stop the church from going on. But when there are several sisters in the church who are unhealthy, there may be no way for the church to go on until they are healthy again. When there are just a few sisters in the church who are exercising in an unhealthy way, it is almost impossible to have a prevailing church life.

**FURTHER EXAMPLES OF SISTERS BECOMING  
THE SOURCE OF PROBLEMS**

There are several more examples in the Bible of women who became the source of major problems to God's people. It was Eve, the first woman, who brought all of mankind into trouble. "And Adam was not deceived; but the woman, having been quite deceived, has fallen into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). Eve brought the whole human race into its fallen condition. Then after Eve, there was Sarah. Sarah suggested to Abraham that he should have a child by her maidservant, Hagar. Abraham listened to Sarah, went in to Hagar, and Hagar conceived (Gen. 16:1-4). Hagar brought forth a son, Ishmael (v. 15), and the descendants of Ishmael have been a frustration to Israel ever since. In both of these examples a sister was the source of a major problem. Where did sin come from? From Eve's being deceived. Where did Ishmael come from? From Sarah's suggestion. These two mistakes, from Eve and from Sarah, are not small mistakes. They have affected the whole human race. Eve's mistake caused all of the inward problems, because her transgression opened the way for sin to enter into mankind. Sarah's mistake caused the greatest outward problem to God's people. Even today, the situation between the Jews and the Arabs in the Middle East continues to be the most serious political problem in the world.

Another example of a sister who caused problems was Rebekah, the wife of Isaac. Rebekah spoiled her favorite son Jacob

due to her lack of spiritual understanding. Even though she knew God's selection and purpose concerning her children she still did many improper things so that Jacob would receive Isaac's blessing (Gen. 27:5-29). She deceived her own husband and maneuvered her whole household. Rebekah truly loved Jacob, and Jacob also loved his mother. But eventually because of her maneuvering Jacob was forced to leave his home (Gen. 27:42—28:5). Jacob never saw Rebekah again. She died before he came back home from his uncle. This is one of the saddest stories in the Bible.

This principle is also true in the New Testament. According to Acts, the first problem in the church life was caused by the sisters. This was when the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because "their widows were being overlooked in the daily dispensing" (Acts 6:1). This complaining distracted the apostles from their prayer and labor, thus hindering the church. Later in the New Testament, in the book of Philippians, we see that two sisters were the source of another problem. The whole book of Philippians is very joyful. It is possibly the most joyful and encouraging book in the entire Bible, until we come to the problem in chapter four. What was the problem? Two sisters, Euodias and Syntyche, could not be one (Phil. 4:2). They were co-workers with Paul, they were mature and effective, and yet they were not able to get along with one another. This caused Paul to have a deep concern for the whole situation.

**THE SISTERS ARE THE DECISIVE  
FACTOR IN THE CHURCH LIFE**

Sisters, you may be discouraged after seeing all of these negative examples. But remember, who was it who took care of the Lord's need when He was on the earth? It was the sisters. Who did Jesus say would be remembered wherever the gospel was preached? A sister. Who stood with Jesus at His crucifixion? The sisters. Who did He first appear to in resurrection? A sister. Whose house did Peter go to after he was released from prison? A sister's. The sisters are crucial to the Lord's work. It is largely because of

the sisters that the Lord's need can be met and the church can be blessed.

At the crucial times in the church life many positive things have been produced by the function of the sisters. Because of the sisters the Lord can raise something up. On the other hand, once the Lord raises something up, who can cause the most damage and frustration? Again, it is the sisters. When the sisters are healthy, something prevailing can be produced. Then once something prevailing is produced, it is often the sisters that become a frustration. Furthermore, once the Lord's work is frustrated and hindered, it is the sisters who can cause it to become prevailing again. This shows that the sisters are the decisive factor in the church life. They can bring the church into life, and they can bring the church into death. They can cause the church to go on, and they can cause the church to come to a standstill. From all of the previous examples in the Bible we can see the crucial role and decisive nature of the sisters' function.

Sisters, you are the decisive factor in determining the condition of the church life. This means that you have to respect yourselves. Often sisters have no respect for themselves. They feel that being a sister is so unfortunate, and they would rather be brothers. Yet, sisters, do not look down on yourselves. You are too crucial to the church life. Whether or not the Lord can have His way, and whether or not the church can have the testimony of resurrection, all depends on you. You may think that the church is frustrated only when brothers cannot take the lead well or cannot give good messages. But inwardly speaking, in a hidden way, the church life is more affected when the sisters are not healthy. The function of the sisters is crucial to the church. The church life depends upon the sisters' function, which is their pure love for the Lord and their diligent serving life. When the function of the sisters is so healthy, then the church life will be prevailing and the Lord will be able to carry out His desire among us.

**RESISTING TODAY'S TREND AND BEING  
BURDENED FOR THE CHURCH**

There is a trend on the earth today for both the husband and the wife in a family to work. This is not necessarily wrong. Due to the higher standard of living, women often need to work. There may be a specific need for the wife to support the family along with her husband. However, we should still be careful regarding this trend. A sister should never try to find fulfillment by seeking a career in the world because she thinks that she does not have any useful function in the church life. If too many sisters work, especially in the way of seeking worldly riches or position, then the church life will nearly be finished. Sisters, your function in the church life is too crucial. If too many sisters are occupied with a job during the day, then the church will suffer and become frustrated. There will not be a sufficient foundation or life supply for the church to have the testimony of resurrection. Again, it is not wrong for the sisters to work, especially if there is a financial need. But we should also not agree with the trend of the world, because this trend can greatly damage the church life. Sisters, if there is no particular need, try not to go to work. Rather, be burdened for the church. Be burdened to love the Lord and to serve Him with simplicity in the church life. If there are many sisters that are like this, then the church will become prevailing.

We must remember that the sisters are the decisive factor in the church life. When the function of the sisters is healthy, then the church life will be healthy. In a certain sense, the sisters are more important than the brothers, because when the sisters love the Lord, the brothers will also love the Lord. When the sisters are so positive, then the brothers will be positive. When the sisters' function is healthy, then the brothers will bear the testimony of resurrection. This is also true in the family life. When a wife is loving and serving the Lord, then it is easy for her husband to bear a prevailing testimony. So it is good for the sisters to pray, "Lord, thank You for making me a sister. Thank You that I am so crucial to You in the church life. Because of my healthy function,

## THE POSITIVE FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS

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the church can be rich and prevailing. Lord, I just want to love  
You and to serve You in the church life!”



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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE PURPOSE AND SOURCE OF THE WOMAN'S EXISTENCE

#### Verses

*And Jehovah God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart. And Jehovah God formed from the ground every animal of the field and every bird of heaven, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called any living animal, that was its name. And the man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of heaven and to every animal of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper as his counterpart. And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. And Jehovah God built the rib, which He had taken from the man, into a woman and brought her to the man. And the man said, This time this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman because out of Man this one was taken.*

*Genesis 2:18-23*

*For man is not out of woman, but woman out of man; for also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman for the sake of the man.*

*1 Corinthians 11:8-9*

**AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

This message provides a Biblical perspective that is very different from the teachings of the world. Dear sisters, please take all of these words with grace. Try not to be discouraged or troubled if the realizations described in this message conflict with your upbringing, your education, or your cultural background. There may even be times when your mind does not agree with the Biblical understanding of the purpose and source of a woman's existence. However, you will find that your conscience and your God-created female nature correspond to and agree with God's word.

**THE PURPOSE OF A SISTER'S EXISTENCE:  
TO BE A "HELPER" TO HER HUSBAND**

For us to understand the purpose and meaning of a sister's existence, we need to come to Genesis chapter two. According to the Biblical account of creation, the woman came into existence because it was "not good for the man to be alone." God made man after He had created everything else in the universe. As He was creating all the different items, the Bible says several times, "God saw that it was good." But after God made man He declared that something was "not good." God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart" (Gen. 2:18). According to the Bible, God made the woman to be a helper to the man. God designed Eve as a helper to meet all of Adam's needs.

Before God made a helper for Adam, He first brought to him all of the animals He had created. This was a kind of "dating," to see if Adam wanted to "marry" anything. Out of all the animals Adam did not find a helper as his counterpart. Many of these animals could have met a specific need. Adam may have found some use for a horse or a cow or a dog. But obviously none of these animals could be a helper as his counterpart to meet all of his needs. God brought these animals to Adam to heighten his

desire for a counterpart. When Eve was built out of his side and presented to Adam, he realized that she could meet all of his needs.

**THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH'S EXISTENCE:  
TO MEET ALL OF THE NEEDS OF CHRIST**

In the Bible, the husband and the wife are a picture of Christ and the church. Spiritually speaking, the church came into existence to meet all of the needs of Christ. The church is a “woman,” and Christ is her Husband. Whenever Christ has a need, the church should be able to meet that need. The church came into existence not to just meet a certain kind of need, but to meet every need of Christ. For example, the church is the Lord's habitation. The church is His abode. The church is also His Body, His army, His testimony, and His everything. Whatever He needs, we are here to meet that need. The church is able to meet every need that Christ may have. With this desire in view, God made a statement, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” This means that it is not good for Christ to be alone. In the same way that God made a helper for Adam to meet all of his needs, God brought the church into existence to meet all of the needs of Christ.

We as the church are not a “horse” or a “dog” or a “bird” to meet a certain kind of need. We are here to meet all of the needs of Christ. This utterance may sound peculiar, but there is an important principle involved here. An animal may be able to meet a certain kind of need in a limited way. For example, a dog can meet particular needs. Some people keep dogs for companionship. Others have a watchdog for protection. A dog can even be trained to help lead a blind person. But all of these needs are very specific, and the meeting of these needs by a dog is incomplete. There are other ways to meet the same needs. An animal such as a dog may have its usefulness, but only in a limited sense. The church is not like a “dog” to meet just a few needs in an incomplete way. The church is a “helper” to Christ. This means that the church can meet every need that Christ has.

Our existence as the church is very high. We as the church are here to meet whatever need Christ has. If Christ needs the preaching of the gospel, then we must preach the gospel. If Christ needs a greater expression and manifestation, then we must grow in life. If Christ needs a testimony, then we must build it up. When Christ has a need, then we as the church must meet that need. The church cannot give excuses. The church has no right to tell the Lord, “Your needs are too high, and there is no way for us to meet them.” The church was brought into existence to meet all of the needs of Christ. This is what it means for the church to be His “helper.”

**YOUR HUSBAND’S NEEDS ARE MET BY YOUR  
PERSON, NOT BY YOUR ACTIVITIES**

When we come to the matter of a sister’s existence, it is the same. Sisters, your existence is to meet all of the needs of your husband. You are his “helper.” If you are a single, unmarried sister, then Christ Himself is your Husband, and your existence is to meet all of Christ’s needs. But once you are married, you must realize that you are your husband’s helper. Only you can meet all of his needs. You were not designed just to meet a few of your husband’s needs in a limited way. In other words, you should not say, “I am my husband’s helper, so I must cook for him, keep the house clean, and help manage his finances.” It is not a matter of doing particular things for him. No, that is too low and too limited. Your existence is much higher than this. The way for you to meet all of your husband’s needs is by your person, not by your activities. You were built and designed as a unique, precious sister to meet all of your husband’s needs with your very person.

To understand this more clearly, we may use the illustration of a mother with a baby boy. The mother does not just meet the practical needs of the baby. The mother does not say, “When my baby is hungry, I feed him. When he is cold, I make sure he is dressed warmly. When he is tired, I rock him to sleep. Therefore

I am a good mother.” If a mother only cared for these practical things, would the baby grow in a healthy way? The baby needs much more than this. The baby needs his mother’s person. The mother meets the needs of her baby with her person. Suppose in a family there is only a father and no mother. A father can take care of the baby’s practical needs, but the baby will still suffer from not having a mother. The father can make sure the baby drinks milk, is dressed warmly, takes a bath, and goes to sleep. The father can provide all of these things. But there is one thing that the father cannot provide, and that is the person of the mother. The mother, by her person, meets all of the needs of the baby.

This illustration should cause you to realize what it means to be a helper to your husband. You were made to be a helper to meet all of your husband’s needs. If you are a single sister, then you were made to meet all of the needs of Christ, because Christ is your husband. If you are married, you were made to meet all of the needs of your husband. Being a helper to your husband is higher than you think. You do not need to be so concerned about being a good cook, knowing how to sew, cleaning the house well, or taking care of so many practical matters. A sister may not know how to cook. All of her dishes may taste the same. She may not be so capable at sewing or cleaning. Yet she as a person is fully able to meet all of the needs of her husband.

Sisters, you should have a wonderful realization: it is your person that meets all of your husband’s needs. Do not become frustrated by trying so hard to be a better cook or housewife. Cooking, sewing, and cleaning the house are actually miscellaneous items. If you do them well, it is a blessing. But not everyone can do them well. Not everyone can cook or sew. Do not let these items become a pressure to you. When you impose too many laws and standards on yourself, they will become an impossible demand. The reason you may feel pressured is because you have never realized that who you are as a person is precious enough. You as a person can meet all of your husband’s needs. But instead, you may try to meet your husband’s needs by taking care of so many practical items. Remember that the reason God

made the woman was because the man alone was “not good.” There is so much that God intends to accomplish through the man, but man alone cannot do it. The man must have a counterpart. He must have a “helper.” This helper to man is an all-inclusive help. This helper meets all of his needs. As a sister, you can meet all of your husband’s needs. You meet his needs not with a lot of activities, but with your very person.

Sisters should be bold to tell the Lord, “I know that You love my husband. I realize that You are his Savior and Redeemer. But Lord, even You cannot meet all of his needs. That is why You made me. I am here with this one purpose, to meet all of his needs with my person.” It is good to have this kind of confidence. If you say, “But I do not know how to cook,” then you should realize that your husband’s need is not necessarily good food. It is quite possible that if your cooking is too good, it will become a problem to your husband. Only the Lord knows. Perhaps you feel unskillful and incapable. Then that is what your husband needs. The needs of your husband are not according to what you think. In fact, his needs are not even according to what he thinks. But the Lord knows what he needs. What your husband really needs is *you*. Who you are is what he needs. His needs are met by you as a person, not by your person’s doing. It is your person that is precious. Adam’s need was met by Eve’s person, not by what Eve did for him. Eve as a person met all of the needs of Adam. In the same way, you as a person can meet all of the needs of your husband. This is a sweet and wonderful realization.

**THE SOURCE OF A SISTER’S EXISTENCE:  
THE LIFE OF HER HUSBAND**

After realizing that you were made as a “helper” to meet the need of your husband, you should also have a second realization. This realization is concerning the source of your existence. In Genesis chapter two, as we have already seen, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart.” After He said this, how did He create the woman?

He took the woman out of the man's side. While Adam slept, God took a rib out of his side and built a woman. This is also a picture of what happened to the Lord. Adam's being put to sleep is a figure of Christ being put to death on the cross. Adam slept, and his side was opened up, producing Eve. The Lord Jesus died on the cross, and His side was opened up, producing the church. We as the church were produced from the blood and the water that flowed from His side. The principle is the same for the man and his wife. The wife was taken out of her husband's side.

The woman was built while Adam slept. God took a rib out of Adam and built a woman. Specifically the woman was not "made" or "created." Rather, she was "built." Man was made, but the woman was built. This means that the existence and nature of a woman is more complicated than that of a man. The woman was built from a bone out of Adam's side. The bone here typifies life. Concerning the Lord Jesus it was said, "No bone of His shall be broken" (John 19:36). The bone of the Lord Jesus signifies His indestructible resurrection life, which cannot be broken. For Eve to be built from Adam's rib means that she was built with his life. On one hand, Adam needed to be put to sleep, which is a symbol of death. Then on the other hand, a bone needed to be taken from his side, which symbolizes his life. The life of the man is the source of the woman's existence. This requires spiritual insight to understand. The first realization a sister should have is that she meets all of her husband's needs. The second realization she should have is that the source of her existence is the life of her husband.

Dear married sisters, did you ever realize that your husband is your source? You may think, "If my husband had not been born, I would have just married someone else." That is not a spiritual realization. Even before the creation, God already prearranged and predestinated your existence for your husband. In God's prearranging, first the brother was designed, and then out of that brother a sister was built for him. God first saw your husband, and then He saw you. God would not say, "Here is a sister, so let Me make a brother for her." God would say, "Here

is a brother, so I must make a sister to be his helper.” It was not the other way around. All of us can say that as the church, Christ is the source of our existence. The Lord is our Husband, and without Him we would not have life. All of our life is from Christ. On the human level this principle is evident with a husband and wife. The source of a married sister’s existence is her husband.

### **A SISTER’S LIFE IS DEPENDENT ON HER HUSBAND**

According to the Bible, a sister’s life is dependent on her husband. Any time a sister struggles to have an independent life from her husband, she is violating a Biblical principle. The woman was built from her husband’s rib. She was built from the life of her husband. After Eve was built, Adam declared, “This time this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” In other words, Adam was saying, “This is me. She is the same as me.” Then Adam went on to say, “This one shall be called Woman because out of Man this one was taken.” This means that, in a sense, the wife is the same as her husband. She is out of him, and she is one with him. There is no possibility for the wife to be separated from her husband and to gain another life. A woman’s life comes from that of her husband. Her husband is the source of her existence.

Sisters, this means there is no reason for you to say, “I have my own life. I have my own desires, my own talents, my own career, and my own future.” Whatever you have is out from your husband. Apart from your husband’s life, you do not have another life. This may seem like an old-fashioned concept, but we must care for the word of God. Actually, many divorces and broken families come from the wife insisting on developing herself too much. The sisters should be careful. The more a sister develops her own taste, desire, ability, career, success, and future, the more she will lose the meaning of her existence. If she develops herself too much, she can no longer take her husband’s life as her own life. For a sister to try to gain a certain life of her own is not according to the Lord’s purpose or design. It is not healthy. The



more a sister develops this attitude, the more she loses the meaning of her existence.

This does not mean that it is wrong for a sister to work or get a good education. It is not a matter of work or education; it is a matter of life. When a sister tries to have a life apart from her husband, there can be no testimony according to God's purpose. Sisters, you were not only made to be a helper and to meet all of your husband's needs, but even more, your existence is dependent upon the life of your husband. This may sound peculiar in today's age, but it is very real, and it is Biblical. Your husband is the source of your existence. You are not healthy anytime your life is apart from your husband's life. Your husband and your family will not receive any help if you live independently. Furthermore, God will not be able to obtain His testimony with your family. God built you to be a helper to meet the need of your husband. How did God build you? He built you out of the life of your husband. Your husband is the very source of your existence.

Today's education and today's culture are doing their best to damage what God designed. Women are encouraged to be independent, to be "somebody." But eventually so many women suffer and are not happy. They are trying to live in a way that is not according to God's design. So many divorces and broken homes come from this. Even when a husband and wife stay together their family may still be broken, because the wife insists on living her own life independently from the life of her husband. Children raised in such an environment will go through a real suffering. Has the modern thought about women helped the human race? We would probably all confess that it has hurt the human race. This is because it is against God's original design.

Sisters, society does not teach you that your life is out from your husband's. Rather you were raised and educated to become your "own person." But once you are married, you are suddenly no longer your own person. This is hard to accept, but nevertheless your female nature tells you it is true. Your whole cultural background has shaped you to believe, "I must develop my own

person, my own individuality. I will not take my husband as my person.” But within you there is a God-created female nature that desires to be dependent on your husband and to be headed up by him.

Sisters, today’s society offers a harmful temptation to you. You were probably educated in a school that told you to develop your own person and live your own independent life. But when you are married, you must learn that your life is for your husband. In fact, your life *is* your husband. Your husband’s life produced your existence. This may be very hard for us to take, but this is God’s word, and we must be open to receive it. You may wonder, “How can I possibly take this? This is too much for me.” You should not be overly concerned. The best way to respond to this understanding is just to be alert and aware. If you have the awareness that you were taught by your education and by society to reject the life of your husband, then you will be protected. When you are developing yourself too much, then this awareness will cause you to have a certain sensitivity. You will realize that you are in danger of rejecting your husband’s life and losing the meaning and source of your existence.

**A PEACEFUL AND RESTFUL LIFE BASED  
ON TWO HEALTHY REALIZATIONS**

As a sister, you need to see two matters clearly. Firstly, you need to realize, “I was made as a person to meet all the needs of my husband. I am not here trying to meet his needs by doing outward activities. It is my person that can meet all of his needs.” The more you can learn this, the more you will be blessed. We have already seen that a sister may try to do a lot for her husband without realizing that the real help to her husband is her person. This first realization should cause you to avoid striving for outward activities that you think will help your husband according to your natural concepts. Instead it is better to pay attention to your person. It is your person that is so precious in meeting all of your husband’s needs. When you overdo things outwardly to try

and meet your husband's needs, that may take you away from the life and person of your husband. This will cause your marriage to suffer. Realizing that you as a person are already the best help to your husband will free you from unnecessary pressure.

Secondly, you need to realize, "My life is my husband. My existence is my husband. I must take my husband as my life and as my person." This second realization should make your daily life much more restful. It is very possible that you may be harboring some standards or expectations in your mind concerning your husband. This will bring you into frustration. Many sisters are pressured to the uttermost from this one thing. They have standards and expectations concerning their husbands which their husbands cannot meet. Some sisters even complain, "My husband cannot be a leading one. My husband cannot speak so well in the meetings." What does it matter if your husband is not a leading one, or if he cannot speak so well? In the church there is no one high or low. There is no such thing. Such considerations should be dropped. If you can learn not to have any expectations or standards concerning your husband, you will be very restful. If something bothers you today, it is because you have not learned this lesson. You have not learned, "My husband is my life. My husband is the source of my existence. Besides him, I have no existence. Without him, I have no life."

A sister often desires to be married to a prevailing or manifested brother. If her husband is not so prevailing she sometimes complains about him. "He is not so useful. He does not know how to testify. He cannot carry out his burden." Did you know that every time you think negatively about your husband, the church experiences frustration and difficulty? This kind of complaining weakens the church and even contradicts the meaning of your own existence. Try to learn what the story in Genesis shows us. First, the meaning of your existence is to be a helper to your husband and to meet all of his needs. Second, the source of your existence is the very life of your husband, so you must take him as your life and as your person. When you see these two matters, you will realize that to complain about your husband contradicts

how you were created. If you can just have these two realizations, you will be free from all the pressures and expectations, and your life will be peaceful and restful.

Sisters, if you try to overly influence your husband, if you try to manipulate your husband, or if you try to live aside from your husband and fight to develop yourself, then eventually you will cause yourself to suffer. You will pay a high price, and your life will not be happy. If you can learn the secret that your existence is out from your husband's, your daily life will become so peaceful. But if you try to manipulate your husband in order to exercise your own person, eventually you will be the one who will suffer the most. Some of you sisters are so capable and are able to handle many things. Eventually you are able to manipulate and handle your husband. You may do this for awhile, but you will suffer in the long run. Eventually the woman's nature within you will cry out, "Why can't my husband be stronger? Why can't he take the lead in our household?" The reason he cannot take the lead is because you have handled him too much. You have overcome him too often. This is not a small thing. You have to realize that within you there is a certain nature that was created by God. That very nature desires a headship. That very nature desires your husband's life to be your life, and even his person to be your person. To be capable is not wrong, but your capability is to meet your husband's need. When you are so capable and can do so much, still within you there will be a desire to be under the headship of your husband and to take him as your life and person.

It is a good exercise for sisters to tell the Lord, "Lord, I am so thankful for my husband. My life is dependent on him. He is the source and the meaning of my existence." Possibly many of you cannot pray this way. Sisters, if you are able to pray in this way, then your life will become so restful. Nothing will be able to pressure you. This is similar to becoming restful when you experience Christ in a situation. Christians in general only feel pressured when Christ is not with them. When we are experiencing Christ, what can pressure us? If we are pressured or bothered, it

is always because we are short of Christ. If we are gaining Christ, then nothing can bother us. But you dear sisters have a double blessing. Not only do you have Christ, but you also have your husband. Not only can you say, "Christ is here, so I am restful," but you can also say, "My husband is here, so I am restful. My husband is my life. He is my source. He is the meaning of my existence." If you can exercise according to this understanding, then you and your husband will surely be blessed.

### **THE WOMAN BEING UNDER THE HEADSHIP OF HER HUSBAND**

First Corinthians 11:3 gives us an important principle concerning God's government: "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." This means that if the husband does not take the lead in his household, it is easy for his wife to be out from under God's government. This is why it is very risky and unhealthy for a sister to have too much influence on her husband. A sister needs to realize that her husband's headship is according to God's government. When a husband knows how to take a stand for the Lord's interests, then he will know how to exercise his headship. His headship will be according to God's headship. Sisters, you should be thankful for the headship of your husband, because under his headship you are well-protected. You need to appreciate the headship of your husband just as much as you appreciate the headship of Christ. Do not despise your husband's exercise of his headship. If you can properly take the life and headship of your husband, then you can properly be under the headship of Christ and in the enjoyment of His life. The proper headship in a family is an honor to God and a shame to Satan.

In 1 Timothy 2:11-12, Paul said, "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." This means that a sister should not exercise authority over a brother. A sister

should have the realization that even if a brother is young, he is still a man. There can be a proper and healthy spiritual fellowship between sisters and brothers when it is needed, but a sister should still be careful about asserting authority over a man. Paul then gave the reason: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived; but the woman, having been quite deceived, has fallen into transgression” (v. 13-14). Sisters should realize that it was the woman who was first deceived. In making the decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Eve set aside her husband’s life and became independent. She was deceived into eating that fruit because she forgot that her life was dependent on her husband. In so doing she began to make decisions of her own, which eventually caused the fall of man.

According to God’s principle the sisters are under subjection. A sister should learn to be in subjection to her husband, and her husband must learn how to be the head of the household. The headship of the husband is according to God’s economy. Sisters, your husband’s headship is for the purpose of bringing you into the Lord’s presence. When you respect and appreciate your husband’s headship over you, this will lead you to the Lord. As you are learning to be under the headship of your husband, the church is learning to be under the headship of Christ. Being under the proper headship of your husband will cause you to love the Lord and to love the church, because it will bring you under the headship of Christ according to God’s economy.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

*Editor's note: The Old Testament quotations in this message are taken from the King James Version as it better suits particular utterances of the speaker.*

#### INTRODUCTORY WORD

One of the favorite portions of the Bible for sisters is Proverbs 31:10-31, which speaks of the “virtuous woman” or “woman of worth.” We will go through this portion verse by verse in order to understand what it means to be a virtuous woman. We will see that the virtuous woman is described in the context of the Lord’s kingship in the church life. She is also described in contrast to the “strange woman” who is referred to throughout the book of Proverbs. We will see that for a sister to become a virtuous woman there are three general principles and five daily exercises which she must practice. Eventually in her maturity the virtuous woman becomes a blessing to the Lord, to her family, and to the church life.

#### THE CONTEXT OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: THE EXERCISE OF THE KINGSHIP

First we must put this chapter in its proper context by understanding the book of Proverbs. The burden of the book of Proverbs is to teach us how to live a godly life until we exercise the Lord’s kingship. The book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom, and

through wisdom eventually there is a kind of kingship exercised. Usually we read Proverbs to pick up one or two verses to direct us in our behavior. Not many of us read Proverbs with the view that this book guides us into the full exercise of the Lord's kingship. The last chapter of Proverbs begins with words of wisdom on how to be a proper king. The name of the king in verse one is Lemuel, which in Hebrew means "toward or in God as the mighty One." But then this chapter concludes in a surprising way, with twenty-two verses describing a virtuous woman. This tells us how important and necessary a virtuous woman is to the Lord for the exercising of His kingship.

The kingship of the Lord is fully related to the church life. For the Lord to exercise His kingship in the church, both directly and through the brothers, there must be virtuous sisters. Without virtuous sisters there will be no prevailing or overcoming church. A virtuous woman is eventually the very element that allows her husband to exercise his kingship. Her husband's kingship is also the kingship of the Lord. We will see that because of the virtuous woman's exercise her husband is able to be among the royal and kingly ones, the "elders of the land." Even for the Lord to have the direct kingship in the church, He needs virtuous sisters. This is why it is so significant for a sister to become a virtuous woman.

### THE "STRANGE WOMAN"

When reading Proverbs it is easy to get bothered, because many verses about women are overly negative. The book of Proverbs speaks of the "strange woman," who is in contrast to the virtuous woman. We usually assume that a "strange woman" means an immoral woman. But in a much broader way, it means a woman without the knowledge of life. The strange woman does not know anything of life. She has no realization of God's work, God's dispensation, or God's economy. Therefore, she is a "strange woman."

The portions concerning the strange woman are usually related to her mouth. For example, Proverbs 2:16 says, "To deliver



thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words.” Proverbs 5:3 says, “For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil.” And Proverbs 22:14 states, “The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.” Everything the strange woman does is according to her mouth. Her words may be bitter or sweet, but eventually they lead to death. This shows us that we must know how to guard and take care of our mouth. Our mouth can be the source of so many problems. Whether the words we speak are good or bad, comforting or offensive, sweet or critical, they can all lead to death. But if a sister knows how to firstly take care of her mouth, then she will be in a proper position to learn how to be a virtuous woman. The virtuous woman uses her hands, not her mouth. When she does use her mouth, it is to speak words of wisdom and kindness.

Why are the words out of our mouth so significant? Because what comes out of our mouth is from our heart. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34b). Furthermore, when we speak too easily or too lightly it means we have a loose and undisciplined disposition. When our disposition is loose we can talk about many things, even things which are seemingly spiritual. Nothing requires less paying of a price than our speaking. There is no price involved to speak many words. Often our speaking is only for the entertainment of our soul. Sisters, you must learn that if you do not know how to use your hands you should avoid using your mouth. We will see that the virtuous woman eventually exercises her mouth a great deal, but she does not begin that way. Her exercise does not start with her mouth. Her exercise starts with her heart, with her desire, with her hands, and with her labor. Eventually a virtuous woman becomes a person who can exercise her mouth. But when she speaks, her voice is a voice of wisdom.

All of the basic requirements for a virtuous woman are contrary to the exercise of the mouth. We should realize that nothing is more significant than the mouth. The book of Proverbs shows

us that it is very easy for women to talk. They can talk about bitter things, and they can talk about sweet things. Sometimes their words are ugly, and sometimes their mouth is like a honeycomb. But eventually, according to Proverbs, it all leads to death. When a sister only exercises her mouth, it means that she is not exercising her person. Eventually such a sister will become a “strange woman.” This is not a matter of morality. This means that she does not know life. Sisters must be diligent to exercise to grow in life, so that they will not become a “strange woman,” but instead a “virtuous woman.” Even a strange woman can eventually become a virtuous woman.

### THE “VIRTUOUS WOMAN”

What is a virtuous woman? A virtuous woman is a woman who has genuine and real spiritual experiences. The basic requirement for the virtuous woman is to have a clear vision, and to have diligence in her exercise according to that vision. She must have a strong desire to pursue what God Himself is after. The Bible is very balanced. Proverbs first says many things concerning women that are hard to take. But eventually Proverbs concludes in such a marvelous and encouraging way. So many verses in the book of Proverbs deal with the strange woman, but then the book concludes with a description of the virtuous woman. This should be an encouragement to us. The last chapter of Proverbs fully describes how a sister can exercise to become a virtuous woman.

### THREE PRINCIPLES CONCERNING THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

#### **First Principle: “Her price is far above rubies”**

The portion concerning the virtuous woman begins with an introduction: “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (v. 10). In Hebrew, the word for “price” means “worth, value, i.e., that which is of merit according to a standard,

and so considered precious.” The Hebrew word for “ruby” is *paniyn*. This word comes from the Hebrew word *pen*, which means the corner of a house. One Bible dictionary indicates that the real significance of the Hebrew word *paniyn* is unclear. Both the Revised Standard Version and the Recovery Version translate *paniyn* as “jewel,” which may refer to any kind of precious stone. The footnote in the Recovery Version shows that the same Hebrew word can also be translated as “coral.” The other major versions, such as the King James Version, the American Standard Version, the New International Version, and Darby’s Version, all translate the same word as “ruby.” Therefore, this Hebrew word may primarily be translated as “ruby” and “coral.” Spiritually speaking, a ruby signifies the transformation of the Spirit; a coral signifies the growth in life; and *pen* (corner) signifies the connecting function in a local church.

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (v. 10). A ruby is a precious stone, which in the Bible signifies a person who has undergone the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. For a person to become a precious stone means that the Spirit has worked on this person time and time again. The person began as clay, but eventually became a precious stone. A virtuous woman is a woman who is mature in the experiences of life. This virtuous woman comes from the workmanship of the Holy Spirit. For a sister to be a virtuous woman means that she has been in the Lord’s hand for many years. She has allowed the Lord to abide in her, to grow in her, to work on her, to discipline her, to cross her out, and to transform her. These experiences enable her to become someone whose price is far above rubies.

However, based on the Hebrew word, the price of a virtuous woman is not only far above rubies, but also far above corals. The virtuous woman far exceeds the beauty and decoration of a coral. More importantly, she herself is like a living “coral” that lives under the sea yet cannot be polluted by the sea. In the Bible, the sea signifies both the world and the condition of death. The world and death try to destroy the spiritual testimony in the virtuous woman, but as a living “coral” she is not polluted by the

world, nor is she ruled by the condition of death.

In addition, as a living “coral” the virtuous woman is deeply rooted in the land under the sea, which makes her unshakable. This means that she is joined to Christ and living in the church life. (The “land” in which she is rooted is “the good land,” meaning Christ and the church.) Because of this, the virtuous woman continuously grows unto maturity. Although she is in the world, in a system of error controlled by Satan (Eph. 4:14), she is not of the world (John 16:19). Although death and the power of death constantly confront her, she still declares, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55). The virtuous woman is not affected by death, including so many negative persons and things, but rather she continues to grow unto maturity in the divine life.

Even more than this, the virtuous woman is the “corner” of a building, which means that she is the linking element in the local church. She has become a tall, pleasant, and valuable “corner” through her growth in life. What a wonderful description of the virtuous woman! The price of the virtuous woman is far above rubies and far above corals. As a ruby, she is someone transformed by the Spirit into a precious stone. She is also a living “coral,” a spiritual testimony in the midst of death and the world. Finally, she is the precious linking element in the local church. All of this comes out of her growth and maturity in life.

It is significant that the entire portion on the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is introduced in such a way. This one verse makes it clear that being a virtuous woman is not a matter of being gifted or talented. The virtue of such a sister does not come from her natural birth. We should not think that some sisters are born virtuous and others are not, because that is not according to the Bible. A virtuous woman is one who has learned how to live in the Lord’s presence and abide in the freshness of the Spirit. She has allowed the Lord to work on her, transform her, and deal with her. She has allowed the Lord to put her through all kinds of environments. She has allowed the Spirit to transform her unto maturity. Such a sister is a virtuous woman. She is a precious

stone that is more valuable than rubies. This verse tells us that if a sister desires to be a virtuous woman, she should realize that the price is going to be high. It is not something cheap. If a sister desires to be a virtuous woman, then she must go through many transforming experiences in the presence of the Lord.

**Second Principle: “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her”**

This portion continues, “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life” (vv. 11-12). The Hebrew word for “to trust in” is *batach*, which also means “to feel bold, safe, and free from cares.” The Hebrew word for “need” means “lack,” and the word for “spoil” means “booty, spoil, gain of the victory in war, of all kinds, including garments, gold and silver, ornaments, fabrics, flocks and herds, persons, food and drink; fig. of entire nation.” We have seen that a virtuous woman is firstly a spiritual person who has experienced the work of the Holy Spirit. Then this next verse shows us that a virtuous woman is one that her husband can rely on. “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her....” If a sister is virtuous it means that her husband can absolutely rely on her. This is a wonderful verse, but it is deeper than we may think. It does not say that a virtuous woman is able to supply all of her husband’s needs. It is not merely a matter of the husband relying on his wife for his needs in his living. Instead, it says that her husband’s heart can safely trust in her.

This verse speaks of the husband’s heart, and not of the wife’s capability. This verse does not necessarily mean that the wife is so capable. It simply means that the husband in his heart can safely rely on her. The virtuous woman may be very capable, but her capability is covered by her husband. There are some sisters who are so capable that their husbands do not need to worry about anything. But unfortunately many capable sisters dominate their husbands. To dominate your husband, even uncon-

sciously, means that you are not a virtuous sister. What this verse describes is a beautiful relationship between the wife and the husband. The wife is not dominating her husband, and at the same time the husband's heart fully trusts in her.

### **Third Principle: “She seeketh wool and flax”**

The first principle of a virtuous woman is concerning the Spirit's work. The second principle is concerning the husband's trust in his heart. Then the third principle speaks of the virtuous woman herself. “She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands” (v. 13). The virtuous woman is seeking after two items, wool and flax. Wool is related to the salvation of Christ (Isa. 1:18), and flax is related to a pure human life. The virtuous woman is a person who seeks after the spiritual riches from the life of Christ, and also seeks after a pure human living. On the one hand, this sister desires the spiritual things. On the other hand, she takes care of her humanity. A virtuous woman must be balanced. If a sister who is married and has children were to say, “I only care for Christ,” this is not so healthy. She should not neglect her husband and her children. Otherwise, where is the flax? Yet neither should she say, “I only care for my husband. I only care for my children.” Then where is the wool? A sister needs both. A sister cannot afford to be overly zealous spiritually, and neither should she only exercise her human nature and virtue. She should seek after both sides. A virtuous woman needs to pay attention to the wool and to the flax. She needs to pay attention to the riches of Christ, and she also needs to pay attention to the pure human life.

We have covered three principles concerning what it means for a sister to be a virtuous woman. Firstly, towards the Lord, a sister should realize, “I must cooperate with the Spirit's transforming work.” This is to become a precious stone. In order to become a precious stone a sister must have many experiences of the work of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, towards her husband, a sister should realize, “I must stand with my husband so that his

heart can trust in me.” In practicing her family life she should not dominate her husband, but rather she should cause his heart to trust in her. Thirdly, towards herself, she should realize, “I must seek after the spiritual riches, and I must also seek after the pure humanity.” Within her there should be a kind of searching. She should have a seeking, a longing, after both the spiritual riches and the pure humanity. This provides a general description of what it means to be a virtuous woman.

### THE FIVE EXERCISES OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Having seen what it means to a virtuous woman, we must now make it applicable in our experience. What does a sister need to do to become a virtuous woman? How can she become something more precious than rubies? How can she cause her husband to trust her in his heart? And how can she seek after both the riches of Christ and a proper humanity? The next section of this chapter, verses 14-21, describes how a sister should exercise in her daily life to become a virtuous woman.

#### **First Exercise: Bringing, Preparing, and Dispensing Food**

The first crucial exercise of a virtuous woman is related to food. “She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens” (vv.14-15). In the Old Testament, the word “ship” firstly refers to the ark of Noah, which signifies God’s salvation (Gen. 6:14). Secondly, it refers to a fleet for transporting goods, especially the building material for the temple under the reign of King Solomon (2 Chron. 9:21). Thirdly, it refers to the ship taken by Jonah, which signifies God’s testing and judgment (Jonah 1:3-6).

The virtuous woman is “like the merchant’s ships.” Furthermore, “she bringeth her food from afar.” The virtuous woman is not sailing away, but sailing back from afar with an abundant

supply of food. The principle in this verse can be applied both spiritually and practically. A family needs food practically, and the church life needs food spiritually. A virtuous woman is one who pays the price to labor and produce food, and to bring it back from afar.

Producing food is not a matter of excitement. It requires the paying of a price. If there are no sisters in the church life who act as merchants' ships to bring back food from afar, then where will the riches in the church life be? In our daily practice we need to be those who are willing to pay the price. A virtuous sister is willing to travel, to toil, and to labor to bring the food back. Does she bring the food back for herself? No, she prepares it for others. Verse 15 makes this clear: "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens." After she gets the food, she rises while it is yet night, and gives meat to her household. Not only does the sister have food, she knows how to dispense food. Both of these matters require the paying of a price. She first pays a price to travel and labor to get the food. Then she pays a price by giving up her sleep so that the food can be dispensed. She rises up early, while it is still night, so that she can dispense the food for which she has labored.

The dispensing of food is both a practical and spiritual matter. In a sister's family life it is a healthy practice to prepare breakfast for her husband and her children. To cook breakfast for the family is not stressed in the American culture, but it is still a healthy practice. However, it requires the paying of a price. To cook dinner is more according to our taste and convenience, but to make breakfast is not because we must sacrifice our sleep. If a sister wants to cook breakfast for her husband she needs to rise up early. Spiritually speaking, it is the same. We usually like to do the things that are easy and convenient. We like to labor in a convenient way that is according to our preference. In the church life, however, we need to pay a price. For us to rise up early means that we overcome our limitations. As a merchant's ship we need to pay the price to gain the spiritual food. Then we need



to rise up early so that this food can be dispensed into the church life.

The virtuous woman knows both how to obtain food and how to dispense food. These are two steps of one exercise. We should not just get the food and then think that we are done. We must be diligent to rise up early and pay the price so that the food can be dispensed. We may never have realized that to be a virtuous woman is not so easy. We are usually so excited about this portion on the virtuous woman, but after reading verses 14 and 15 we find out that it is more than we thought. We are not so qualified after all, because we are usually too lazy to be a virtuous woman. Either we are too lazy to get the food, or we are too lazy to dispense the food. Even when we dispense the food, we may dispense it in a sloppy way. Eventually we may lack the testimony of being virtuous because of this matter of food. A virtuous woman is one who pays the price. She is willing to travel and to labor to get food. Then she is willing to rise up early to prepare and dispense the food she has obtained. She prepares food for her family practically, and she dispenses food into the church life spiritually. The obtaining and dispensing of food is the first exercise of a virtuous woman.

Verse 15 says that not only does the virtuous woman give meat to her household, but she also gives a portion to her maidens. In Hebrew, the word “portion” also means “a governing rule or principle.” This is another element of the initial exercise of a virtuous woman. Some translations indicate that this is to help the maidens have a proper labor. A virtuous sister knows how to help the young ones. She knows how to help those who do not have so much. She obtains the food, dispenses the food, and then also helps those who are young have a proper labor to get food for themselves. This is the first practice in the daily life of a virtuous woman. Sisters, if you desire to be a virtuous woman you must know how to get food, both practically and spiritually. Then you must know how to rise up early to dispense the food. Finally you must know how to help the maidens, the young and inexperienced ones, have a proper labor to make food for themselves.

### **Second Exercise: Gaining a Field and Planting a Vineyard**

The second exercise of a virtuous woman goes further than buying or dispensing food. Now there is the need to grow some food in a vineyard. Verse 16 says, “She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.” In Hebrew, the word “considereth” means “plan and purpose.” The definition of the word “buyeth” includes the meaning “choose, acquire with a price and appropriate.” It is more precious to grow food than it is to gain food. When a sister first touches the Lord and practices the church life most of her experience is simply getting the food. But eventually she will realize that there is something more than being a merchant’s ship to bring food. She will see that there is the need for a field on which she can labor.

There are sisters in the church life who dispense food diligently. For example, they gain food during their morning watch, and they dispense the food by testifying in the meetings. However, they may not have a piece of land in their local church for them to labor on. Sisters need a piece of land to grow food. This requires the paying of a price. “She considereth a field, and buyeth it.” A field must be bought. We should ask ourselves, “Have I paid the price for a piece of land in my daily life? Do I have a field that I can labor on and grow food? Is there a place where I can sow and I can reap?” Without such a piece of land, you will become a “floating” sister, which means that there will be nothing solid in your daily life. Do you have a solid burden, a burden which causes you to sow the seed and cultivate the land for food to grow? Or is your church life just a “floating” life, like a ship on the sea that floats around? Having a piece of land is more solid than being a merchant’s ship.

Some of you may have a piece of land in your family life. You know exactly how to take care of your husband. You even know how to raise up your children according to the Lord’s wisdom. This means that you have a piece of land. But how about in the church life? Most sisters in the church life never pay the price to get a piece of land. The very best sisters among us are like the

merchants' ships, traveling, laboring, and toiling so that food can be brought in. They receive something from the Lord, they dispense it into the church life, and the saints get the nourishment. But how about a field to labor on? For us to have a piece of land on which we can grow food requires us to be burdened. It also requires us to pay the price so that our burden may be substantiated. This is the second exercise of a virtuous woman.

An example may make this more clear. Suppose a sister realizes that she must give life in the meetings. Therefore she prays in the morning. What is that prayer? That prayer is like a merchant's ship. The sister is laboring and toiling to bring back the food. She prays in the morning, and she labors in the Word, so that food will be stored within her. Then she comes to the meeting and exercises her spirit boldly to dispense food to the church. This can be likened to rising up early, because she overcomes her limitations. Out of her dispensing, everyone is satisfied. Even the maidens, those who are seemingly not qualified, receive some help. But where is her land? Where is her burden? What is her function? What is her portion in the church life? She does not know, because she does not have a piece of land. She does not have a field to labor on.

The lack of a piece of land has been the biggest frustration to many sisters. When they first came into the church life everything was wonderful. But after some time they began to feel frustrated. They felt that they were of the church, yet not of the church. They were of the church because they enjoyed life, received life, imparted life, and dispensed life. Yet they did not know where they belonged in the church life. They did not know how to find their place. This means that they did not have a field to labor on. How do we get a field? To get a field requires a burden, and it also requires the paying of a price to substantiate that burden. When it comes to the church life there is the need to pay the price. Sisters, these verses tell us that if you desire to have a field to labor on, then you must pay the price for it. The virtuous woman realizes that it is not enough to get food and dispense food. She realizes that she needs a piece of land. She considers a field, and

then buys it.

The verse says, "...with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." The Hebrew word for "fruit" can mean the fruit from a tree, or the fruit from the womb. Why does a sister need a piece of land? Because this land is where a vineyard can be planted. The Lord is the true vine (John 15:1), and a vineyard is a place where His life can grow. The virtuous woman uses her piece of land to produce life. She pays the price to get the field, and then she plants a vineyard with the fruit of her hands. The fruit of her hands is what she has experienced of life, which she then uses to cultivate the field. Then this cultivation produces more life. Eventually a vineyard is produced, which means that more life is brought forth. We need to see this progression. First there is a piece of land available, which we can buy. Then there is "the fruit of our hands," the fruit of life in us, which we can apply. When the fruit of life in us is properly applied to that piece of land, a vineyard is produced. The riches of life in us become something even more fruitful and abundant. This is a wonderful picture.

To summarize what we have covered so far, a sister who desires to become a virtuous woman must let the Spirit work on her so that she can become a precious stone. She then needs to be someone whom her husband trusts in his heart. Finally she needs to be someone who seeks after the Lord's salvation and the decent human living. These three principles define a virtuous woman. Then to become such a virtuous woman, the sister needs to exercise in the church life. Her first exercise is laboring to get food. Then she must dispense the food to her family and help the inexperienced ones (the maidens) learn how to get food for themselves. Her second exercise is to find a piece of land. Through fellowship with her husband, the older sisters, and the saints in the church, she should receive a burden. This burden is a piece of land. Once she sees this piece of land she must pay the price to obtain it. The name of her piece of land may be called "service office." It may be called "book service," or "love feast," or "children's service." But now this sister is no longer a floating sister. She has something solid in her exercise, because she has a

piece of land to labor on.

Then what should this sister do? With the fruit of her hands, she must plant a vineyard. The fruit of her hands is the fruit of her life experiences. With the experiences that she has from the Lord, and with the riches she has received from the Lord, she should begin to labor on the land. She may labor on children's service. She may labor on the service office. But once she has a solid piece of land she should labor until a vineyard is produced. "With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." With whatever has been produced in this sister as the fruit of life, she uses it for the field and begins to labor. Out of her labor, eventually a vineyard is produced. We may have never realized that a piece of land is so precious, and that we should pay a price for it. Once we have a piece of land we need to apply the fruit of our hands, the fruit of life from our experience. We need to cultivate the land, and labor on the land, until a vineyard can be produced. Then we will not only have the fruit of our hands, we will have even greater and richer life from the vineyard.

### **Third Exercise: Being Girded with Truth and Shining as a Lamp**

Now we come to the third exercise of a virtuous sister. "She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night" (vv. 17-18). To be girded is to be ready to do something, such as to walk or to fight. The New Testament tells us to gird our loins with truth. "Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14). For a sister to gird her loins with strength means that she has girded herself with truth. Her strength comes from the truth. The virtuous woman also strengthens her arms, which means that her arms are exercised. Even if a sister has the truth, she may still be short of exercise. Without the proper exercise the truth itself can be lost. But when a sister is girded with the truth and is exercised according to truth, she will become a

light shining in the darkness. The word “candle” here can be translated as “lamp.” Such a sister will be a shining lamp as a testimony, because she has the truth and she exercises according to the truth.

The most important aspect of these two verses is the lamp. After the virtuous woman purchases a field and produces a vineyard, she becomes a lamp. She becomes a shining person, a testimony that does not go out by night. With this virtuous woman, even though everything may be dark around her, there is a certain kind of shining. Why is there such a shining with this sister? Firstly, she was diligent and exercised in gaining the food. Secondly, she paid the price to purchase a field and grow a vineyard. Now thirdly, she has girded her loins with strength and truth. Then verse 18 says, “She also perceiveth that her merchandise is good.” “Merchandise” can be translated as “earnings.” When we are girded with truth and with strength, and when our arms are exercised, eventually there will be some “earnings.” Something visible will be produced. We will be able to see these earnings and perceive that they are good. Then this will give us the realization that our lamp has not gone out in the night, but is still shining.

#### **Fourth Exercise: Supplying and Caring for Others**

The fourth exercise of a virtuous woman is related to her care for others. Verses 19 and 20 say, “She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.” The word for “spindle” in Hebrew is related to skill, success, advantage, and even singing. The virtuous woman has a specific labor. She uses a spindle and distaff, meaning she produces materials with which she can care for others. Then she stretches out her hand to the poor. She is an open person. She is not stingy. Whenever there is a need, her hand is stretched out. This virtuous woman is a person who is filled with care. Who does she care for? Here it is not for her family, because her family has

already been cared for in the previous verses. The people she cares for in this verse are ones outside her family (both her practical family and her spiritual family). The virtuous woman cares for the poor and needy ones. These are people who are outside the rich enjoyment of the church life.

Very few sisters have the realization that their hands need to be stretched out. We need to practice the stretching out of our hands to the poor. If others are poor we should be willing to help. If others are needy we should be willing to impart something to them. This virtue is desperately needed for the church life, and even for the sake of our family life. Sometimes our family life becomes the biggest frustration to helping those who are poor and needy. The American culture is strong for having a good family life, yet there are so many divorces among American families. One reason for the high divorce rate in this country is that most husbands and wives are selfish. They try to enjoy each other too much and do not know how to stretch out their hands to the poor. When we practice the virtue of helping the poor and needy ones, our family life will become healthy and blessed. We should be endeavoring to meet the needs of others all the time. This is the fourth exercise of a virtuous sister. After she has the food, the land, and the lamp, she now has the supply to take care of the poor and the needy.

### **Fifth Exercise: Not Fearing Trials**

The fifth and last exercise of a virtuous woman is related to the matter of trials. Very few sisters get to this stage. “She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet” (v. 21). What does it mean that the virtuous woman is not afraid of snow? It means that she is not afraid of trials. She is not afraid of the dark, hard, or bitter times. Why? Because her household is clothed with scarlet. Scarlet is a red color that is related to the work of Christ. Scarlet signifies something kingly and implies kingship. In the *Life Study of Leviticus, Part 2*, Witness Lee states that “Scarlet...signifies that the Lord

lowered Himself to become a man that He might do the will of God and shed His blood on the cross for our redemption, thus becoming the honorable and high King. The color scarlet signifies the shedding of blood....Scarlet also implies kingship” (msg. 7, p. 58). The virtuous sister is not afraid of trials, because everyone in her household is kingly. Everyone in her household has some real experiences of Christ, so she has no reason to be afraid when trials come.

To get to this fifth stage, a sister must go through the previous experiences: the food, the land, the lamp, and the care for the needy. After reaching such a stage, the virtuous sister will not be afraid when trials come. When the church goes through trials, we find out who are the ones clothed in scarlet. Some saints do not know how to go through trials and get carried away by them. But some saints are so solid and so stable. When the “snow” comes, they know how to be firm. This proves that they are clothed in scarlet. The church life will often have snow. Even our family life will sometimes have snow. How can we go through the trials that come our way? It all depends on how much we know how to put on the scarlet. How much do we have of the experiences of Christ? These experiences are kingly and royal experiences that give us a stand before the Lord. When we are clothed in scarlet we are not afraid of anything. But if the snow comes and we do not have scarlet then we are in trouble. When trials come it does not matter how much food or land we have, because that will not protect us from the snow. But a virtuous woman, after all her previous experiences, is not afraid of the snow. She has nothing to fear, because she knows that her household is clothed with scarlet. A virtuous woman helps the saints to rest in the judicial redemption of Christ, and she also helps them to grow in the organic salvation of God. Through the virtuous woman’s serving, the saints enjoy the death of Christ and are able to reign in the life of Christ, even in the midst of trials.

We have seen that a virtuous woman must have five exercises in her daily life. First, she needs to bring back food from afar as a merchant’s ship, and then she must rise up early to dispense the



food to her house. Second, she needs to buy a piece of land so that she can apply the fruit of her hands and produce a vineyard. Third, she needs to have her loins girded and her arms exercised so that she can be a shining lamp as a testimony in the night. Fourth, she needs to work with the spindle and distaff to produce materials so that she can care for the needy ones. Finally, after all of these previous items, she must know how to put on the scarlet for herself and for her household, so that she will have no fear when the trials come. If a sister desires to become a virtuous woman as described in Proverbs 31, these five exercises should be her daily practice.

### THE MATURITY OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

The next section from this chapter of Proverbs, verses 22-31, concerns the virtuous woman's maturity. After showing us the general principles of the virtuous woman and the healthy exercises she needs in her daily life, this chapter shows us the manifestation of maturity. This maturity is only gained after much experience of what was described in the previous verses.

#### **Becoming a Pattern**

The first aspect of the virtuous woman's maturity is found in verse 22: "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple." Tapestry is fabric used for covering, and it is woven with a pattern or design. In this verse the tapestry has a pattern which can only be produced through the work of the Holy Spirit. For the virtuous woman to make "coverings of tapestry" for herself signifies that she is able to rest in the work of the Holy Spirit. Because she has experienced the Holy Spirit's workmanship, she herself has become a rich and beautiful pattern. In the church life there are many older sisters like this who are rich in the experiences of Christ. When you spend time with them you have the realization, "There is a beautiful pattern here," because the element of Christ has been "woven" into them.

In all of these verses on the virtuous woman, this is the first time that she has made something for herself. “She maketh herself coverings of tapestry.” She is finally qualified to make something for herself after everything she has experienced. Yet she does not purposely do so. It is while she is practicing the previous five exercises that she makes herself coverings of tapestry. Furthermore, this verse says that the virtuous woman’s clothing is “silk and purple.” The word for “silk” here can also be translated as “fine white linen,” which signifies a heavenly walk. The daily walk of the virtuous woman is heavenly, fine and clean. Her clothing is also “purple,” which in the Bible signifies royalty. In her maturity the virtuous woman is a heavenly and royal person.

Sisters, this means that you should not look down on all the things you go through. When you are going through something unpleasant, realize that the Lord is making a pattern with you. He is working Himself into you, like the pattern on a tapestry, and this process may take a long time. The best way to handle difficult experiences is to focus on the five exercises of a virtuous woman. Pay attention to getting and dispensing the food, purchasing the land and producing the vineyard, girding you loins and shining as a lamp, laboring to make material and stretching out your hand to the poor, and clothing your household with scarlet so that you are not afraid of trials. These five exercises produce a mature, spiritual, and virtuous woman. Then in that process you will give the Lord a way to make you into a pattern. You will have a rich and beautiful pattern from all your experiences of Christ, and you will have a fine, pure and heavenly living. This will be the manifestation of your maturity.

### **Becoming a Blessing to Her Husband and Laboring to Raise Up Younger Sisters**

Because the virtuous sister is living a life of maturity, her husband is blessed and is able to sit at the gate with the royal and kingly ones. “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth

it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant” (vv. 23-24). The virtuous woman is the one who labors, and she is the one who feeds. She is the one who “reigns,” and she is the one who stands. She is the one who helps, and she is the one who guides the saints unto maturity. Eventually the virtuous woman becomes the key factor to bless the church. Only through such hidden operations can her husband sit among the elders. The whole city, the whole church, is blessed by the virtuous woman, yet it is her husband who is known by all. How wonderful this is! The virtuous woman brings in the blessings to the church, and then her husband is known in the city.

Furthermore, the mature virtuous woman is a blessing to younger sisters. “She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.” The virtuous woman supplies the truth not only to individuals, but also to ones who themselves supply the truth to others. This is indeed wonderful! Paul charged Timothy to entrust the divine commitment to faithful men, who would be competent to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2), yet here is a sister who is able to supply the truth to those who themselves supply the truth to others. This means that the virtuous woman labors to raise up other sisters to be just like her.

Some younger sisters may appreciate the living of older sisters. However, the younger sisters must still pay a price for it. The older sisters could tell the younger ones, “The reason I have fine linen is because I have paid the price for it. I have made the fine linen myself. If you want it, you must buy it. I will sell it to you, but you must pay the price.” If an older sister has experienced something that is so rich, and a younger sister wants to take part in it, then that younger sister must pay the price just as the older sister has paid a price. We should realize that nothing that is spiritual comes cheaply and nothing of high virtue comes cheaply. We all must pay a price.

### **Using Her Mouth to Impart Life**

“Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (vv. 25-26). In Hebrew the word “honor” is a royal term which means “adornment, glory, majesty and splendor.” Now the virtuous woman is finally qualified to open her mouth. She is not someone who just speaks her opinions. Instead, she opens her mouth with wisdom. After everything she has experienced, the virtuous woman surely has wisdom. Now when she opens her mouth her words do not bring in death, like the words of the strange woman. Instead, her words become a comfort to the whole church, because in her tongue there is the law of kindness. Because of her maturity, there is kindness in her speaking. This is why the church needs mature sisters. A mature and virtuous sister is qualified to open her mouth. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. Her whole person imparts life. She imparts life not only by her hands, but also through her mouth.

This is the mature experience of the virtuous woman. Before she is mature, a sister should learn not to be opinionated, not to say too much, and not to speak too freely. Instead, she should labor to obtain the food, to buy the land, to produce the vineyard, to keep the lamp shining, to stretch out her hand to the poor, and to clothe her household with scarlet garments. Through all of these exercises the maturity of life will be produced. Then such a sister can exercise her mouth, because her words will impart life. In her maturity she will speak words of wisdom and kindness. This expression of maturity only comes after the accumulation of many experiences with the five exercises of the virtuous woman.

### **Exercising Her Being**

“She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness” (v. 27). The Hebrew word for “looketh well to” means “watch, observe,” and the Hebrew word for

“ways” means “steps or manners of life.” Even now, after the virtuous woman is exercising her mouth, she is still laboring. She not only exercises her mouth, but she exercises her eyes as well. She exercises her being. She watches over the ways of her household and does not eat the “bread of idleness.” Her mouth is exercised, her eyes are exercised, and her being is exercised. In her maturity the virtuous woman is still paying a price to labor.

### **Receiving Praise from Her Husband and Children**

“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all” (vv. 28-29). We would all agree that this is wonderful. What is better than the praise of your husband? Here the husband is not forced to praise his wife. The genuine praise from the husband is gained because his wife is so virtuous. “Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.” This means, “You are the best. You are wonderful.” This praise is surely precious to his wife. This is the result of the virtuous woman’s maturity.

### **Fearing the Lord**

Verse 30 begins the concluding word of this chapter: “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (v. 30). This means that favor and beauty are cheap things. A virtuous woman does not pay attention to cheap things, because her life is higher than this. She does not pay attention to making herself beautiful, or trying to find favor. This verse gives the secret of where the virtuous woman’s exercise comes from. “But a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” The virtuous woman’s exercise comes from fearing the Lord. If a sister does not fear the Lord, it is hard for her to have the riches and maturity of life. But once she fears the Lord, her exercise will become healthy and proper. Eventually such a sister will be praised.

### **Receiving Praise from Her Own Works**

The last verse on the virtuous woman is glorious. “Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates” (v. 31). Eventually the virtuous woman enjoys all of the fruit of her labor. In verse 30 we were told that a woman who fears the Lord will be praised, and verse 31 tells us how she will be praised. She will receive praise from her own works. Everything that she has given, everything that she has imparted, and every way that she has helped others will all come back to “praise her in the gates.” Now we see the result of a virtuous woman’s labor. None of her labor has been cheap. She has paid the price to gain life, dispense life, produce life, supply life, maintain a testimony of life, and even go through trials. In her maturity, she reaps the harvest. She receives the praise from her own husband and children. Even more, she receives the praise from all of her own works. She has become a blessing to the Lord, to her family, and to the church life. Now she herself is blessed with the fruit of her labor and the praise of her works. This is a glorious conclusion to this chapter. May the Lord inspire all of us to desire to become such a person, and may we diligently exercise until we reach such a stage of maturity. May the Lord have mercy.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### **THE WEAKER, FEMALE VESSEL AND THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART**

#### **THE HUSBANDS DWELLING WITH THEIR WIVES ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGE**

Now we come to the topic of “the weaker, female vessel.” These are the words Peter uses when he tells the husbands how they should care for their wives. However, it is also healthy for the sisters to have this realization about themselves. “Husbands, in like manner dwell together with them according to knowledge, as with the weaker, female vessel, assigning honor to them as also to fellow heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). All of the husbands have to realize that their wives are much different from themselves. A brother must dwell with his wife according to knowledge. He must realize that his wife is a weaker vessel.

Every husband desires that his wife would support him and stand with him. But a husband must learn to live with his wife according to knowledge. First Peter 3:7 seems to release the wife from all of her responsibilities. It says that the husbands should not expect anything from their wives. Instead, they should only love their wives. They should realize that their wives are weaker vessels. Husbands must live with their wives according to knowledge because the wives are a weaker vessel. This means that the husband should not expect so much from the wife, but the wife has the right to expect everything from her husband.

A husband has no right to require anything of his wife. He

must live with his wife together in the family according to knowledge. This means that he must have the best judgment in how to take care of her. Peter makes it clear that all the females are weaker vessels. Not only are the wives weaker, but every sister is weaker. As long as you are a sister, you are a weaker vessel. The term “weaker vessel” may seem offensive or even insulting. However, if the sisters realize what it really means, they will appreciate the Bible’s use of this term. Why does Peter have to stress that the female vessel is weaker? The reason is so that the sisters may be relieved from all the pressures they put upon themselves. We will come back to this understanding later in the chapter.

Peter then goes on to say to the husbands, “Assigning honor to them as also to fellow heirs of the grace of life.” All of the husbands must render their wives honor. “Honor” in the Bible is a very specific term. We think that as believers we must honor Christ, but here it tells us that the brothers need to honor their wives. For the husbands to honor their wives means that they respect and pay the proper attention to them. When a husband dishonors his wife he actually dishonors himself. Husbands must learn to honor their wives.

### **HUSBANDS AND WIVES ARE FELLOW HEIRS OF THE GRACE OF LIFE**

Peter calls the husbands and wives “fellow heirs of the grace of life.” The wives are fellow heirs of the grace of life with their husbands. According to this word, all the grace of life that the husband receives must be co-received with his wife. Every husband, when he experiences grace, must realize that the reason he can have the enjoyment of grace is because of the help of his dear wife. And the enjoyment of grace he receives is not for himself alone, but must be brought to his wife for her to share in it together. When a married brother receives some grace of life, he should not use it to exalt himself and think that he is more spiritual than his wife. The grace of life he receives must be shared with his wife. She is the fellow heir of the grace of life with her husband.



For the same reason, it is not healthy for a sister to be overly prevailing while her husband is weak. It is healthy for the wife to exercise to be in the Lord's presence, but it is not healthy for the wife to be overly prevailing. If she is too prevailing, she becomes a "star." If she is caring for many church things, yet her husband has nothing to do, this shows that her life does not come through her husband. In this case, her receiving of the grace of life is not through being a fellow heir, but rather through her individual laboring. According to the Bible, the sisters are the weaker vessel. When they receive the abundance of life, this life should be received through their dear husband.

Peter concludes this portion by saying, "that your prayers may not be hindered." If a husband does not share the grace of life that he enjoys with his wife, his prayers will be hindered. This word "hindered" is used in Galatians. "You were running well. Who hindered you that you would not believe and obey the truth?" (Gal. 5:7). In this section of Galatians, in the midst of all the positive things, there was one negative element. This negative element spoiled all the positive things. If a husband does not know how to be with his wife according to knowledge, how to treat her as the weaker vessel, how to render her honor, and how to receive the grace of life together with her as a joint heir, then his prayers will be hindered. All of the positive things in his pursuit of the Lord will not matter. The Lord will not answer his prayers. Any brother who has a proper understanding of this verse will be blessed, because he knows how to receive more life in the Lord's presence. This will uplift the family life.

We must pay our attention to how Peter talked about the sisters. Sisters, according to the Bible you are the "weaker, female vessel." This means that according to the Bible you are not supposed to be so prevailing, so strong, so high, or so wonderful. The term "weaker female" should completely overturn your concept of being a prevailing sister. Did you ever realize that the Bible has not required you to be prevailing? When you are prevailing, it should only be because you have received the grace of life. You are the fellow heir of the grace of life with your hus-

band. The Bible desires that you receive the grace of life with your husband or through your husband, and not by yourself. Your husband must be the source of the life you enjoy. The sisters must have this realization. They are the weaker, female vessel, and they are fellow heirs of the grace of life with their husbands.

### **SISTERS ARE “WEAKER” BECAUSE THEY ARE SO STRONG**

What does the Bible really mean when it says that the sisters are “weaker vessels”? The sisters are “weaker” because they are actually more than strong. Sisters can be strong to the point of dryness and deadness, but still think that they are strong. This is why they are “weak.” There are other aspects of being weak, but this is the primary one. Sisters are weak because they are actually more than strong.

### **THE EXAMPLE OF LEAH AND RACHEL**

We can see this from many examples in the Bible. One of the best examples of sisters being the weaker vessel is from the book of Genesis, in the portion concerning Jacob and his wives. This is a very interesting portion which we will examine verse by verse. Jacob was the most capable person in the whole Bible, but after he married his two wives, Leah and Rachel, he became incapable and powerless. He could not do anything except let his two wives toy with him. According to the Bible, Jacob planned to marry Rachel, but was tricked by his uncle Laban into marrying her sister Leah first. Eventually he had to work fourteen years for both wives, seven years for Leah and seven years for Rachel.

These two sisters were very different from one another. “And Leah’s eyes were dull, but Rachel was beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance. And Jacob loved Rachel...” (Gen. 29:17-18a). Some interpret Leah’s dull eyes to mean that she was not smart. Because her eyes were dull and did not show any life, it could mean that she did not have much wisdom. Rachel, on the other

hand, is described as a beautiful person. In the New Testament there is a verse which says, “A voice in Ramah was heard, weeping and great lamentation: Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be comforted, because they are no more” (Matt. 2:18). This indicates that Rachel was also a tender person in her humanity. If one wife was not so smart, and the other wife was so tender and affectionate, it does not seem like Jacob should have had so many problems. However, as we read through this portion, we will see how strong the sisters were.

“Now when Jehovah saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, Because Jehovah has looked upon my affliction, surely now my husband will love me” (Gen. 29:31-32). The name “Reuben” means “See! a son.” Here Jacob was fully controlled by Leah: he was not even allowed to name his own son. This was due to the fact that Leah was a weaker vessel. She was weak because of her strength. Every time she bore a child, we see how dominating she was. “And she conceived again and bore a son and said, Because Jehovah has heard that I am hated, He has therefore given me this son also; so she called his name Simeon” (v. 33). The name “Simeon” means “hearing.” Leah named her son based on her realization that Jacob preferred Rachel to her. With this verse we see the developing competition between Leah and Rachel in producing children.

“And she conceived again and bore a son and said, Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne three sons. Therefore his name was called Levi” (v. 34). “Levi” means “united.” “And she conceived again and bore a son and said, This time I will praise Jehovah. Therefore she called his name “Judah.” Then she ceased bearing” (v. 35). The name “Judah” means “praise.” Finally Leah was reminded that the Lord was there with her. She praised the Lord and called her son’s name Judah. After this Leah stopped bearing children. This may have been a discipline from the Lord, to see whether she could still praise Him if she bore no more children. It could also mean

that Leah had given up trying to win her husband by bearing children. Leah was brought to have the Lord alone. Because she ceased her effort and turned to the Lord, this issued in praise.

After Leah stopped bearing, Rachel entered into the competition. “And when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister and said to Jacob, Give me children, or else I die” (Gen. 30:1). Now we see what Peter meant when he said that sisters are the weaker vessel. “And Jacob’s anger burned against Rachel, and he said, Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (v. 2). In other words, Jacob was saying, “I’m not God. What can I do?” Sisters, consider how many times you have told your husband just about the same thing. How many times have you pushed your husband to the place where he had to tell you, “I am not God. What can I do?” Again, this is why the sisters are weaker. Here with Rachel and Leah, we see how strong they are. We can see their stubbornness, their competitiveness, and their envy.

“And she said, Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I also may have children through her. And she gave him Bilhah her female servant as a wife, and Jacob went in to her” (vv. 3-4). Rachel basically said to Jacob, “If you do not have a way, I have a way.” Jacob went along with it. What kind of Jacob is this? Jacob was so cunning and so capable. He knew how to cheat his brother and his father. He knew how to wrestle with God and prevail. He knew how to do everything except handle his wives. This shows that a sister is the weaker vessel by being so strong. Jacob himself was also strong, yet with his wives, he could not do anything. He did not even try to fight. In this case he just did what Rachel said and went to her servant Bilhah.

“And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son; therefore she called his name Dan” (vv. 5-6). The name “Dan” means “judge.” Rachel named her son “Dan” as if to say, “The Lord has heard *my* prayer.” “And Bilhah Rachel’s female servant conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. And Rachel

said, In wrestling with God, I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed; so she called his name Naphtali” (vv. 7-8). “Naphtali” means “my wrestling.” We can see how competitive and complicated these sisters were. Even the names of their children were chosen according to their competition with one another.

Eventually Leah came back into the competition. She picked up the idea of using her female servant the way Rachel was using hers. “Now when Leah saw that she ceased bearing, she took Zilpah her female servant and gave her to Jacob as a wife. And Zilpah Leah’s female servant bore Jacob a son” (vv. 9-10). Jacob never fought, he never argued, and he never said anything. He never even had the right to name one of his sons. The sisters did everything. “And Leah said, How fortunate! So she called his name Gad. And Zilpah Leah’s female servant bore Jacob a second son. And Leah said, Happy am I! For the daughters will call me blessed; so she called his name Asher” (vv. 11-13). “Gad” means “fortune,” while “Asher” means “happy” or “blessed.”

Now the story becomes even more peculiar. “And Reuben went out in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes. And she said to her, Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? And would you take away my son’s mandrakes also? So Rachel said, Then he may lie with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes” (vv. 14-15). Actually, Rachel was the wife that Jacob had wanted from the beginning. Rachel could have argued that she was Jacob’s legitimate wife. Jacob married Leah only because he was tricked by Laban. Jacob simply took Leah and worked another seven years for Rachel. For Leah to say to Rachel that she had taken her husband away was not quite accurate. But these two sisters never acknowledged their mistakes. They made many mistakes, but they never confessed, because they were so stubborn and competitive. With this story about the mandrakes they were fighting over such small issues. Rachel and Leah took any excuse to fight and compete with one another.

What use is it to fight over mandrakes? Yet these sisters made it such an issue. Of course, they did not really care so much about mandrakes. They were simply weaker vessels who liked to fight over small issues.

“So Rachel said, Then he may lie with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes” (v. 15b). Rachel promised a bribe to Leah. These sisters knew how to do things very skillfully. Rachel was smart. She wanted the mandrakes and knew how to manage the situation. She allowed Leah to be with Jacob that night. “And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him and said, You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes. So he lay with her that night” (v. 16). Jacob was such an unfortunate husband. He had worked all day, and when he came home he could have no rest. His wives had already decided everything for him. How can a husband be traded for some mandrakes? This was a cheap and peculiar trade. Jacob may have thought, “What are you talking about? If I want to come to you, I will. If I do not want to come to you, I won’t. What do you mean you have hired me with your son’s mandrakes?” Mandrakes are just a small thing. However, Jacob gave in to his wives.

### **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A WEAKER VESSEL**

This story shows us what it is for sisters to be the weaker vessel. What does it mean for a human vessel to be “weaker”? It includes being insistent, stubborn, competitive, dominating, and self-exalting. We can see this with Rachel and Leah. They never consulted their husband. They never prayed before the Lord. They were always declaring, “Now I got it!” Their competitiveness, stubbornness, manipulation, and self-exaltation proved that they were weaker vessels. Up to this point in the story Jacob did not even pick one name for any of his sons. Once they were born, even after they grew up, whenever Jacob would call one of his sons by name it would remind him of the difficulties he went

through with his wives. For instance, when Bilhah bore a son, Rachel named him “Naphtali” because she had prevailed over Leah. Every time Jacob would call for Naphtali he would be reminded of how his wives were wrestling with one another. We might ask how Jacob could go through such a thing. Jacob would probably tell us, “I dwelt with my wives according to knowledge. I learned that they were weaker vessels.”

When we read this portion about Jacob and his wives in Genesis, it almost makes us laugh. What kind of story is this? What kind of family life is this? And where was Jacob, the head of the household? All that we know about Jacob is that he was in the field working to support the family. But this portion surely tells us the real situation that all of us are facing. All of the sisters are just like what this story describes. It is hard for them to let go of things. Leah felt that Rachel had taken her husband. Rachel felt that Leah was not legally married to Jacob, because it was a trick from their father Laban. Leah felt that she could win by bearing a lot of sons. Rachel felt, “If I cannot have a son I’m going to die.” These two sisters never made peace with each other. They never had a truce. They were always competing, fighting, and struggling, and they never let go.

Now we can understand why Peter would say that sisters are weaker vessels. It is because they are so much stronger than all the brothers. Dear sisters, please take this word with grace. A sister may seem to be tender, but only time will tell. Sisters who are not married may behave so tenderly and sweetly. But once they are married they can “swallow up” their husbands. Very few wives are afraid of their husbands as much as their husbands are afraid of them. Why? Because the sisters are the weaker vessel. This means that they have to “make it.” If they do not make it, they will still do everything they can to make it. If they do everything they can and still do not make it, then they will force their husbands to be God so they can make it. This shows how weak sisters really are. They are weak to the point of no sensation, no consideration, no proper judgment, except to just do whatever they have in their heart. This is why the husbands need

knowledge in dwelling with them.

To be weak does not necessarily mean being unable to bear some weight or carry out a certain responsibility. If this were the case, then the brothers are also weak. In many ways a brother is weaker than a sister. For example, a brother usually cannot tolerate cooking three meals a day while simultaneously taking care of the children. It is too much for him. There are many things a male cannot do that a female can do. Men and women are different according to God's creation. The weakness of the sister is mainly with the female disposition. A sister has a very special female disposition. That disposition is what causes Peter to say that a sister is the "weaker, female vessel."

For example, suppose a sister has a beautiful and expensive diamond ring. This can easily cause other sisters to be jealous. Why would sisters care so much about a piece of diamond? Because of competition and self-exaltation. Sisters often desire to have the very best. This is true of such things as clothes and hairstyles. These things can bring the sisters into a kind of competition. Spiritually it is the same. It is much easier for a brother to appreciate the spiritual qualities of other brothers than for a sister to appreciate the spiritual qualities of other sisters. Suppose there is a service meeting with several brothers and sisters, and the meeting begins with some prayer. Then one of the leading brothers compliments a certain sister for her prayer and uses it as an example. It is likely that the other sisters will then have a difficult time for the rest of the meeting. The brothers will have no problem, but the sisters will be frustrated. This is what it means to be weaker. With this kind of competitive disposition it can be difficult for sisters to grow.

Sisters, do you realize that all this is within you? Not only is there the insisting, persisting, competing, self-exalting, and dominating nature. There is also the narrowness, the smallness, and the difficulty in forgiving offenses. Sisters get offended easily, and once they get offended they will not let it go. They will remember for months or even years. Being a weaker vessel greatly affects your following of the Lord. To be a weaker vessel means



that your growth in life may be limited. Sisters can only care for so much. Generally speaking, they are usually smaller than the brothers. To be small is to be narrow, and to be narrow causes a person to be occupied with many things. If you can only remember all the unpleasant things every day, then where is the place for Christ? Where is the enjoyment of the Lord? Where is the church life? Where are the riches of the word? There is little room for them, because your whole person is already occupied with the improper things. This is why being a weaker vessel can be a frustration in your following of the Lord.

**TOO MUCH PRESSURE CAN CAUSE  
THE SISTERS TO BECOME “IDLE”**

Now we will look at Paul's words concerning sisters in 1 Timothy. "But younger widows refuse; for when they follow their passions in disregard of Christ, they desire to marry, and thus have condemnation because they have set aside their first pledge. And at the same time they also learn to be idle, going around from house to house; and they are not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Tim. 5:11-13). Paul is talking about widows, but the principle of "learning to be idle" can be applied to the sisters in general. Whenever there is competition, some people prefer to be idle. Brothers have more ability to turn competition into something positive, but sisters usually have more difficulty doing this. If brothers compete to read the Bible three times in a year, then they will do their best to make it. But for sisters such competition can become a real pressure. When sisters start to think, "Can I make it? Can I do more?" then they become pressured. Once they get pressured, what can they do? They become idle, because the idleness relaxes them.

Yet when sisters become idle, they can wander from house to house. This is peculiar. We would think that when sisters are so competitive they would not visit each other. But sisters can be so close to each other, yet so competitive at the same time. When

sisters become competitive, they may even go to each other's homes more often. This is why Paul warns them about being idle. The reason sisters become idle is because they are pressured. By the Lord's mercy the sisters need to realize, "I'm a weaker vessel. I do not need to be so prevailing. Lord, I give up my desire for self-exaltation. I drop my complications." Then the idleness will be gone. We may think that it is when we are competitive that we will follow the Lord, but this is not the case. Being competitive causes us to be pressured, which in turn makes us idle.

We have seen that sisters can be saturated with complications, self-exaltation, and a desire to dominate. They can be saturated with the desire to win the victory over things, over persons, and over matters. At the same time they can be so narrow, so small, and so unforgiving. They cannot forget all the wrong things and all the wrongdoings, not only from others, but even from themselves. Yet they also desire to be so high and prevailing. In the church life this can cause them to be so pressured and complicated that the only way for them to survive is to become idle.

To be idle isn't necessarily healthy, but at least it relieves the anxiety sisters feel. Otherwise there might be no way to handle all the pressure. Many sisters come to the church life, and after a couple of years they do not know how to handle it anymore. It is just too much for them. Every time they hear about another sister bringing someone to the Lord or giving a good testimony or getting some light in the Bible, it becomes a pressure to them.

Dear sisters, you should realize that it is easy for you to be in anxiety. Brothers are better at handling tension. They can handle many, many things and still sleep well. But with sisters, when yet another thing comes it is easy to get bothered and frustrated. It is also easy to consider how to "win" in the situation, how to do something or say something, or even how to use the situation for self-gain. Then it is difficult to let it go. Your whole person can become consumed. Then will you still have any heart for the Lord, for the church, or for the real growth in life? It seems almost impossible.

**LETTING GO OF THE PRESSURE AND BEING  
OCCUPIED WITH POSITIVE THINGS**

Sisters, by the Lord's grace, try to let go of the pressure. Do not be competitive. If someone else brings people to Christ, be happy. If someone else gives a good testimony, then praise the Lord. If another sister grows, just enjoy it. Then you will not be in danger of what Paul is speaking of. You will not become idle. You will not become someone wandering from house to house, saying things you ought not to say. Once the pressure is gone, your whole person can be occupied with positive things, such as to pray and to serve.

In what way can the sisters be so healthy in the church life? Dear sisters, you just need to be before the Lord. Drop all the thoughts about being prevailing, such as, "I can be a certain kind of sister," "I can have a certain kind of usefulness," or "I can do a certain kind of thing for the Lord." On the contrary, just come to the Lord's presence. Simply tell the Lord, "Lord, have mercy on me, because I'm a weaker, female vessel. I realize that I am always trying to exalt myself. I am always competitive, I am always dominating, and I am always trying to gain something for myself. And because I'm a weaker vessel I can be so narrow and so small. I just can't forget or let go of certain things. Lord, I really need Your mercy. I want to let go of all the unnecessary pressure. I want to be free from all my complications. Lord, cause me to be occupied with only the healthy and positive things."

Realizing that you are the weaker vessel will cause you to be guarded. Whenever self-exaltation rises up within you, you should tell yourself, "Be careful." Whenever you begin to be skillful in trying to influence or dominate your husband, you should remind yourself, "I am a weaker vessel. Be careful." Suppose you often find out that you did something wrong, out of competition, envying, or jealousy. Then just realize, "I am a weaker vessel." You do not need to be pressured or feel condemned. Instead, learn to tell the Lord, "Lord, I realize that I am a weaker vessel. I need Your mercy to know how to exercise myself in the church life."

Being the weaker vessel does not legitimize your purposely exercising to be weak. It does not mean to go back to tell your husband, "Praise the Lord, I am weaker. Don't you know this? You need the grace of life." You cannot say this. On the contrary, you have to be very careful before the Lord. When you have such a guarding, then you will also have a proper exercise. You will exercise to pray, to serve, to love the Lord, and to care for the church.

**HUSBANDS BEING GAINED BY THE PURE  
MANNER OF LIFE OF THEIR WIVES**

After going through this section of verses from Paul in 1 Timothy, we should still come back to Peter for some encouragement. First Peter 3:1-2 says, "In like manner, wives, be subject to your own husbands, that even if any disobey the word, they will be gained without the word through the manner of life of their wives, seeing with their own eyes your pure manner of life in fear." In other words, if you have a husband who does not believe in the Lord or love the Lord, there is no need to worry. You should still learn to be subject to your husband. Of course, that is under the condition that your husband will not frustrate you from loving the Lord. If your husband tells you, "Be subject to me. Let's go to the gambling place," you have to say "no." This is not the proper headship, so you do not have to go along with it. Being subject is really a matter of attitude. Here, your attitude is to always respect your husband. Then even if your husband does not have the word, he will be gained by your conduct as his wife.

This is a very encouraging verse. Peter would say, "Sisters, I am telling the husbands that you are weaker vessels, but I am not telling that to you. Forget about whether you're a weaker vessel or not. To you, dear sisters, I only say, learn to be simple, and be subject to your husbands." The husbands will see with their own eyes the pure conduct of their wives. A husband can witness his wife's pure manner of life. Notice that Peter pays attention to a sister's daily life. He uses this illustration to say, "Even if your

husband is not saved, do not worry. He will witness how you live at home. Your conduct, your conversation, and your purity will eventually gain him.”

**THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART:  
THE INCORRUPTIBLE ADORNMENT OF  
A MEEK AND QUIET SPIRIT**

The next group of verses in this chapter is precious for the sisters. “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” (1 Pet. 3:3-4). Peter says that if you want to have a proper daily life, then do not be preoccupied with your hair, with gold, or with your apparel. Drop your consideration for all these things. Then Peter makes a statement which is simply not in our concept. “Let your adorning be the hidden man of the heart.” Sisters, do you realize that although you are the weaker, female vessel, yet within you there is a “hidden man”? This hidden man is the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit.

Consider all the things mentioned earlier concerning Leah and Rachel. What was lacking in these two sisters? They had no meekness. Both of them were filled with envying, jealousy, fighting, competition, and self-exaltation, but no meekness. Moreover, consider the things that Paul mentioned in 1 Timothy about idle sisters wandering from house to house. What was missing? Quietness. The idle sisters were gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. So here Peter says, “Do you realize, sisters, that although you are limited, within you is a hidden man? This hidden man is a meek and quiet spirit. Let your adornment be this hidden man.” In other words, let people see something come out of you. What should come out of you? A meek and quiet spirit. What is it to be meek? It is to be not offended and always receiving. What is it to be quiet? It is to have no complaining, no murmuring, and no gossiping. This very spirit is the

hidden man of the heart, which is incorruptible.

Peter would say to the sisters, “Stop paying your attention to the outward things, such as your hair, gold, and clothes. Stop paying attention to what fits you, what spoils you, what decorates you, and what exalts you. Drop these things, and just pay attention to what is inward. Within you there is a hidden man of the heart, a meek and quiet spirit. Let that inward person live out of you. Let that be your adornment, because such an adornment is incorruptible.”

Peter then concludes this portion by saying that a meek and quiet spirit is “very costly in the sight of God.” Such an adornment is of great price. Sisters should realize that they are so valuable and costly. But which sisters in particular? The sisters who know the hidden man of the heart, the sisters who have a meek and quiet spirit. This kind of sister, says Peter, is very costly in the sight of God. If you know how to exercise yourself according to the hidden man, then in this hidden man there is something incorruptible. There is meekness, and there is quietness. With this hidden man there is something of great price. Living out this hidden man makes you very precious in God’s sight.

After speaking to the sisters, Peter can speak to the husbands. We have already read verse seven at the beginning of the message, but now we can come back to it with a different understanding. “Husbands, in like manner dwell together with them according to knowledge, as with the weaker, female vessel, assigning honor to them as also to fellow heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” As the sisters are exercising to live out the hidden man of the heart, the husbands need knowledge. Verse seven is not for the sisters to read and then say to their husbands, “You see? I am a weaker vessel. I can do whatever I want. Just use your knowledge.” Instead, sisters should pay attention to their hidden man of the heart, which is a meek and quiet spirit. Then Peter can tell the husbands, “You must dwell with your wife according to knowledge. Why? Because your wife is so precious. She is of great value in the sight of God.”

**A CONCLUDING WORD**

Just as Peter said, the sisters are very costly. They are of great price. This is one of the highest utterances in the Bible. When sisters are guarded by the realization that they are the weaker vessel, and when they pay attention to the hidden man of the heart by adorning themselves with a meek and quiet spirit, they become very costly and valuable in the sight of God. Sisters, if you see these matters, you will be much more relaxed and less pressured in your Christian life. You will also have much more enjoyment before the Lord and will know how to walk and exercise properly in the church life. May the Lord have mercy!





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## CHAPTER TEN

### **MEETING THE LORD'S NEED IN SPECIAL AND IN NORMAL SITUATIONS**

#### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

In this message we come to the function of the sisters as a practical matter. The function of the sisters in the church life has two aspects. First, the sisters have a specific function when the church is going through a crucial time or a special situation. Second, the sisters have a normal function in the church life apart from any special circumstances. The Bible gives us examples concerning both aspects of the sisters' function.

#### **THE SPECIFIC FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS**

##### **Turning the Situation of God's People During Crucial Times of Need**

The function of the sisters is often to meet a very specific need. When we look at the examples of sisters in the Bible we may notice something unusual. On one hand many serious problems among God's people came from the sisters, yet on the other hand many negative situations were turned into something positive because of the sisters. This shows that sisters can cause serious problems and can also render great blessings. When the condition of God's people is at its worst, often a sister is raised up to turn the situation. We see this especially in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, when God's people were in a poor con-

dition, a sister was often raised up to turn the situation. Then when the condition of God's people became low again, another sister came and turned the situation. For example, when the Israelites were in Egypt and the situation was becoming so desperate, He raised up the mother and sister of Moses in order to save Moses' life. These two sisters saved and protected the life of the Lord's servant, which gave the Lord a way to turn the situation and deliver Israel. Then in the book of Judges, when the condition of Israel was so low and dark, the Lord raised up Deborah. She called for Barak to fight for Israel, and the situation was turned. Then in the book of Judges Israel continued to worsen until eventually the whole situation was utterly miserable. So the Lord raised up Ruth. Then after Ruth the situation was dark and confused again, so the Lord raised up Hannah, the mother of Samuel. In each case a sister was raised up to meet a specific need and to turn the situation of God's people.

This shows us that a sister has a very special function. A sister is able to turn the situation of God's people. We would think that turning a difficult situation would require the brothers, but this is only partially true. Before Moses could be used, two sisters were there. Before Barak could be used, Deborah was there. In the dark and confused situation of Israel, first Ruth was there, and then Hannah was there. In the New Testament, the most striking example is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary was used to bring the greatest turn at the most crucial time. The situation of God's people could not have been worse, yet because of this sister the Lord was able to have a way. Sisters are in a special place to respond to the Lord's burden to turn this kind of situation.

We should realize that a sister has a very specific function. This function is to turn a situation from degradation to healthiness. We can see this also in the history of the Lord's recovery. Brother Nee was saved through a sister and then was raised up by another sister. Brother Lee was also saved through a sister. When the Lord desires to do something to turn a situation, He uses the sisters. The Lord uses the sisters to do a very specific work for His burden, for His testimony, and for His people.

**THE NEGATIVE ASPECT OF  
THE SISTERS' FUNCTION**

There is also a negative aspect concerning the sisters' function. When a sister is used by the Lord to meet a specific need, there is sometimes an unpleasant result. The most obvious example is Miriam, the sister of Moses. Miriam was used by the Lord to meet a specific need by saving the life of her brother. Then when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, she took the lead to sing and dance before the Lord. But this same Miriam was the one who took the lead to rebel against Moses. Because of her rebellion, the children of Israel were hindered (Num. 12:1, 15). We need to learn that a sister who was used in such a positive way can still become a problem to God's people at a later time. Deborah from the book of Judges is also an example. She was raised up by the Lord to encourage the brothers to fight. But after Israel's victory she sang a song that glorified herself. "Until I, Deborah, rose up; until I rose up as a mother of Israel" (Judg. 5:7b). The Bible speaks of Deborah in a very positive way, but in reading these verses there is something bothersome. For a sister to declare, "I am the mother of Israel," seems to be self-exalting.

The Lord can use sisters to make a crucial turn, yet problems may still arise. As we have seen, when the Lord uses a sister, she may eventually become a problem. However, Ruth and Hannah were never a problem. Mary, the mother of Jesus, made some minor mistakes, but the Lord knew how to take care of her, and she was never a serious problem. These sisters are examples to encourage us. If a sister is careful before the Lord, then even after she is used, she can still remain healthy.

**THE SECRETS OF HOW A SISTER BECOMES  
QUALIFIED TO MEET THE LORD'S SPECIFIC NEED**

**Verses**

*And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior; because He has looked upon the*

*low estate of His slave. For behold, from now on all generations will count me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is unto generations and generations, unto those who fear Him. He has exercised might with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in the understanding of their heart. He has brought down potentates from thrones and has exalted the humble; the hungry He has filled with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has upheld Israel His servant to remember mercy, even as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.*

*Luke 1:46-55*

What qualifies a sister to be used by the Lord to meet His need in a specific situation? And what preserves a sister from becoming a problem after the Lord has used her? The answers are found in Luke 1:46-55. This is Mary's testimony after being greeted and blessed by her cousin Elizabeth. These verses contain four secrets of how a sister can be used by the Lord to meet His need in a special situation.

### **Keeping a Low Estate**

These verses are Mary's testimony. Everyone likes to memorize verses 46 and 47: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior." But why was Mary able to experience this? How did she become so useful? The answer is in verse 48: "Because He has looked upon the low estate of His slave." Sisters, it is always precious to keep a low estate. Whether the Lord can use you has so much to do with how high or how low you are. To keep yourself in a low estate is the secret for the Lord to use you. After Mary testified that she was in a low estate, she said, "For behold, from now on all generations will count me blessed" (v. 48b). How can a sister be blessed by the Lord? By being in a low estate.

For a sister to function in a healthy way, she must remain in

her low estate. Why did Miriam become a problem? The Bible first shows her to be a nice young girl. She went to the daughter of Pharaoh and asked her, "Do you want me to find a nursing mother for this little baby?" But then years later the Bible shows us another picture: "How can God speak through Moses, and not through me?" This is the same person. How did she become rebellious? Because the low estate disappeared. Sisters by nature can leave their low estate because of very small things. It is easy for sisters to come out of their low estate. This is why Mary's testimony is so precious: "He has looked upon the low estate of His slave." This is one secret for a sister's healthy function.

### **Fearing the Lord and Seeking His Mercy**

The next verses contain another secret for a sister to be used by the Lord. "Because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is unto generations and generations, unto those who fear Him" (vv. 49-50). For Mary to be used by the Lord, she had to realize that God's mercy is always unto those who fear Him. From our point of view, we should have a godly fear; from God's point of view, He has mercy. These are simple but crucial words, and they are more for the sisters than for the brothers. For a brother to be used prominently by the Lord is normal, while for a sister to be used prominently by the Lord is special. If a church is weak, then brothers can come and labor and in one year the church will become strong. But for sisters to turn a situation into life, they will realize that they need mercy. They cannot stand up and give a message to the brothers: "You brothers are so dead! You must be alive!" Sisters are not in the position to do such things. Within a sister there should be a fear towards the Lord, looking unto the Lord for mercy. A sister should realize, "Lord, if I can really do something as a blessing to the church, it is only because of You. I need to fear You, and You must have mercy."

Suppose a local church is in a weak and heavy condition. What should a sister do? She should go to the Lord with fear and look

unto Him for mercy. If such a sister prays for the situation, and then her prayer is answered, she must be careful. She should not boast and say, "I prayed for the situation, and now it's turned around. Now people are getting saved and coming to the meetings. I brought the church into life!" Once she says this, her low estate is gone. It is important to remember that for a sister to be used or take the lead in such a prominent way is special and for a particular situation. She must be in a low estate, have a godly fear, and look unto the Lord for mercy. This is not easy, but it is necessary. If a sister does not learn this, then the Lord cannot use her. Many crucial situations have been turned around by sisters. However, those sisters who were used by the Lord had a certain healthy realization: they were of low estate, they feared the Lord, and they looked to Him for mercy.

### **Keeping a Low Degree**

"He has exercised might with his arm; He has scattered those who are proud in the understanding of their heart. He has brought down potentates from thrones and has exalted the humble" (vv. 51-52). This last portion of the verse can also be translated, "and has exalted them of low degree." The third secret Mary learned was to be in a "low degree." This goes beyond the first secret of being in a low estate. For a sister to be in a low degree, she must realize, "If the Lord uses me, it is because of a special situation. I am not someone that the Lord must use." The Lord used Ruth and Hannah, but it was a special situation. This is true of all the sisters the Lord used in the Bible. They were used because a situation was somewhat unhealthy. If a sister is of a high degree, she cannot be used in a special situation. For a sister to be used by the Lord, she must be of a low degree.

Sisters should learn to be careful. When they are of high degree, even though they may see that the church is frustrated, they may actually add to that frustration. For example, if a sister is serving, it is not so healthy for her to rebuke the brothers. If a sister says to the brothers that a meeting was dead because of

something that she thinks was not right, this shows she does not have a low degree. On the other hand, a leading brother has the place to say something. A leading brother can stand up in a meeting and say, "The reason we are frustrated is because our prayers are too long." But a sister should not do this. However, it is easy for sisters to desire to function in this way. Ironically, because sisters are so fine and delicate, they often know what is wrong. Many times when the brothers do not realize something is wrong, the sisters know already. But if a sister sees that something is wrong and yet exercises beyond her place, it proves that she is not in a low degree. Instead she makes herself quite high. Mary was used by the Lord because she kept herself in a low degree.

### **Maintaining A Spiritual Hunger**

Then verse 53 says, "The hungry He has filled with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." Another secret for being used by the Lord is maintaining a spiritual hunger. The key to maintaining a spiritual hunger is not to be occupied with our experiences, especially our victories. When a sister has a victory, her victory often becomes self-enjoyment. If she enjoys the Lord for an hour in the morning, she may think about that one hour for the entire day. This means that she has lost her hunger. Our spiritual experiences can take our hunger away and make us feel content with what we have enjoyed. For a sister to be used by the Lord she must maintain her spiritual hunger.

In Mary we see someone with a soul that magnified the Lord and a spirit that rejoiced in Him. How could she be so healthy? Her testimony gives us four secrets. First, she was of low estate. Second, she feared God and looked unto Him for mercy. Third, she was of low degree. She was a simple "country woman" from Galilee who seemingly knew so little, yet she loved and desired the Lord. Fourth, she was spiritually hungry. She was not content with what she had experienced previously. These basic qualities allowed the Lord to use her in such a great way.

**THE NEED FOR “MARYS”—SISTERS WHO CAN  
RESCUE THE CHURCH FROM A DESPERATE SITUATION**

Whenever the church comes to a desperate situation, there is the need for some sisters that the Lord can use. There have been cases in the past where the prayer of a group of sisters helped save the church from disaster. The more desperate the situation of the church, the more the sisters' function is needed. We have already seen examples of this in the Old Testament. We need to be impressed that many times the church will come to a desperate situation. For several months the meetings may be dead, the gospel may be limited, or the church life in general may be frustrated. Even many saints may seem to get sick for no reason. This means that the church is confronting a special situation. This is when the sisters, more than the brothers, must rise up to rescue the church. What kind of sisters can rescue the church from its situation? Only sisters who are simple and lowly like Mary. Suppose a sister says, “I have been in the church many years. I know what to do, and I know what needs to be taken care of.” Then she is not a “Mary.” A sister who talks in this way is not of a low estate, she does not fear the Lord, she does not look for mercy, she is not of a low degree, and she is not spiritually hungry. She is just opinionated and therefore cannot be used by the Lord. When the church confronts a desperate situation, there is the need for many “Marys.” At such a time there is the need for many simple and lowly sisters whom the Lord can use to turn the situation.

**Functioning by the Imparting of Life**

When a sister applies a positive exercise in the proper way, she can bring the church into resurrection. There is a great need in the church life for sisters who have this ability. However, this kind of function is difficult to obtain, and sisters who have this function can easily become opinionated. The exercise of the sisters should not be through their opinions, but through the imparting of life.



Whenever the church is going through a difficult situation, the sisters should rise up to exercise a certain kind of function. This function must be by the imparting of life. The sisters do not need to wait for the brothers to announce something before they can begin to function. They should pick up the burden to pray and exercise. The brothers may do many things outwardly to save the situation, but the sisters' function is different. The sisters can function behind the scenes in a hidden way to impart life. The sisters need to tell the Lord, "Lord, we are here to stand with You when the church goes through a difficult time. We are not here to be opinionated. We are here to impart life and exercise in a positive way." This will save the church when it is going through a difficult situation.

### **THE NORMAL FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS**

#### **Loving the Lord: Giving to Him, Standing with Him, and Seeking Him**

Sisters also have a normal function when the situation of the church is normal. In the New Testament there are many sisters who can serve as illustrations. For example, there are several sisters named "Mary." In the Gospel of John there is one Mary who broke her alabaster flask of ointment and offered everything out of her love for the Lord (John 12:3). There is another Mary, the wife of Clopas, who stood by Jesus when He was on the cross (John 19:25). Then there is Mary the Magdalene, who was seeking for Jesus even after He was buried, until eventually she saw Him in resurrection (John 20:11-18). All three of these Marys were normal and healthy in their function. What was the source of their function? Their function came from their love for the Lord. Because they loved the Lord so much, they functioned in a healthy way. The first Mary functioned in the way of giving. She loved the Lord and gave herself to the Lord for His satisfaction. The second Mary functioned by standing with the Lord. She stood with the Lord even when He was on the cross. The third Mary

functioned in seeking the Lord until she was brought into resurrection. All of their functioning was from their love for the Lord.

These three Marys show us that the normal and healthy function of the sisters is simply a matter of love. When sisters love the Lord, they will have a normal function. First, they will offer to Him. They will give themselves to Him and offer whatever they have. Concerning the matter of financial and material offerings, we do not need to be so worried about how much we should give. We should just learn to give in a positive way and trust in the Lord for His supply. Whatever is most precious to us, whatever it is that we treasure the most, we should learn to give it to the Lord. Then the second aspect of the sisters' normal function is to stand with Him. Out of their love for the Lord the sisters should stand with Him in whatever He is going through. Thirdly, the sisters should seek after the Lord's presence. Because they enjoy meeting with the Lord, they should be seeking Him all the time, until they are brought into resurrection. Offering to the Lord, standing with the Lord, and seeking the Lord are normal functions of the sisters. These functions have their source in loving Him. A sister's love for the Lord will cause her to function in a normal and healthy way.

### **Opening Their Homes**

Another aspect of the sisters' normal function is the opening of their homes. We see this with another Mary in the New Testament, Mary the mother of Mark. When Peter was released from jail, he went to her home because the church was meeting there to pray (Acts 12:11-12). For a sister to open her home, especially for a meeting of the church, means that she will lose her privacy. Whenever there is a meeting at someone's home, it means that the privacy of that family has been lost. This is why many sisters do not want people to come into their homes. Sisters love their privacy. Sisters usually do not want their home environment to be "invaded." They worry about their house becoming disorganized or dirty, or they worry about not having enough time with

their husbands. However, sisters need to learn how to allow people into their homes. This is an important aspect of their normal and healthy function.

The more a sister can lose her privacy and allow her environment to be “invaded,” the more she can function. Mary is a good example to us. Because Mary allowed the saints into her home, there was a place for the church to pray and a place for Peter to go to. Sisters, to have someone over to your home means that you may lose your sense of control over your environment. Things may no longer be according to your way. But it is still a normal and necessary function. The more people you can welcome to your home, the better. If you are not able to open up your home, at least take the lead to go to someone else’s home. Try to get out of your “nest” and come into something more proper. In the church life we should not love our privacy too much. This is not an easy lesson to learn, but it is necessary for our normal function.

### **Laboring to Produce Life**

Another function of the sisters is seen in Romans 16. Here Paul greets “Mary, one who has labored much for us” (Rom. 16:6). We do not know how Mary labored or how she served Paul. But apparently Paul had needs which were taken care of by this sister. This Mary labored for the ones who served the Lord at that time. After loving the Lord, offering to Him, standing with Him, pursuing Him, and opening up their homes, sisters also must learn to labor for the Lord.

The healthiness of the church is related to how many in the church life are laboring. This is not easy for sisters, especially if they are married and have children. After just one or two children, a sister will feel so overwhelmed that to even consider laboring seems impossible. All she can think about is just having a few hours of rest by herself. But even so, here is a sister named Mary in the Bible who labored for Paul and his co-workers. Sisters must learn how to labor. The labor in this verse is related to producing life. This labor is not like the work at an office. This

labor is comparable to the work at a farm. Someone who works at a farm must handle something of life so that more life can be produced. To labor for the Lord is to produce life, and this is one function of the sisters.

How should a sister function in a normal way? Her first function is to love the Lord. She loves the Lord by giving to Him, standing with Him, and seeking after Him. Her second function is to allow her home to be invaded. She should open her home and lose her privacy so that people can be taken care of. Her third function is to labor. Sometimes we can have the first and the second without having the third. We love the Lord, we offer to Him, we stand with Him, we seek after Him, and then we open up our homes to the saints. Yet we lack the genuine labor that produces life. We may open up our homes, but the result is more of a social life than a labor. We end up talking about different things, but there is no life. The reason there is no life is because we do not know how to produce life. A proper labor is to handle the things of life and then to impart and produce life. Without life, it is difficult to labor. Sisters, for you to labor you must be a person who has a certain amount of life. You must know how to handle and impart life. When you invest your person into such a labor, that labor will become effective. This is another normal function of the sisters.

### **The Example of Priscilla and Aquila**

Another example of a sister from the New Testament who functioned in a normal way is Priscilla, the wife of Aquila. As a couple, Priscilla and Aquila were very much used by the Lord. When they were first mentioned in the book of Acts, they were called "Aquila and Priscilla." But in Romans 16:3 Paul calls them "Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila." It is very unusual for Paul to mention a sister before her husband. In a sense, for Paul to say such a thing was to deny the proper order. We may assume that for Priscilla to be named before her husband indicates that her function was special. Actually, her function was quite normal.

When a sister knows how to stand with her husband and how to support her husband's burden, then eventually the sister will be manifested. She will become a rich blessing to the church. Priscilla paid the price to stand with her husband Aquila when he desired to go to another place and raise up a testimony. The husband took the lead, and his wife stood with him. Through this process she had the growth and manifestation in life. Eventually when the couple was in Rome, Paul greeted them as "Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 16:3). This means that Priscilla had an effective operation as a sister. This example shows us that a sister should not despise herself or treat herself as nothing. She should learn to respect her portion. A sister should realize that the Lord has given her a tremendous opportunity to grow in the church life. Eventually when a sister goes through the process of growth by functioning in a normal way, she can become a great blessing to the church.



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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Question:** *Much of the sharing in these messages has been about the function of married sisters in the church life. What is the function of the single sisters?*

**Answer:** If a sister is not yet married she must realize that Christ is her husband. In other words, a single sister should not have the perspective “I am single.” Rather she should have the perspective “I am married to Christ.” There is a big difference. A single sister usually has the thought that she is *only* a single sister. She should try not to see it this way. Instead she should realize, “I have been betrothed to Christ. He is my real husband.” This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:2: “For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” A single sister should realize that she is married to Christ. Christ is her husband and her head.

Then the question is, who will be the shadow of Christ to that sister? Every husband is just a shadow of Christ. If the Lord has prepared a “shadow” for a sister, then that person will come in due time. Before the shadow comes, there is only Christ. Many times the biggest frustration to a single sister is cultural pressure. This cultural pressure makes the sister feel that she has to be a certain way. It tells her, “You’re in your late 20’s, and you’re still not married,” or, “You’re in your 30’s, and you’re still not married. Something is wrong.” When a sister does not have the realization that the Lord is her husband, then many things from the culture of this age will rise up to frustrate her going on with the

Lord. A sister does not need to worry so much. The shadow will come if the Lord desires it. When the Lord comes back, all the husbands and wives will be gone. When the reality comes, all the shadows will disappear. We will all become the bride of Christ. So today while we are waiting for the Lord's return, we should realize that the Lord is our husband. He is the reality.

A single sister should have the understanding, "Lord, You are my husband, so I am responsible to You. You are my head, so I submit myself to You." Then a lot of unnecessary frustrations will be taken away. The best advice is not to analyze too much. If you are a single sister, then just realize that Christ is your husband and be restful. This will relieve you from many frustrations and allow you to have a positive exercise in the church life.

However, sisters, once you are married, then your husband really is your husband. In other words, once you are married you should not be so spiritual and say, "Only the Lord is my husband." Even though your husband is only a shadow of Christ, you must still learn to take him as your head and as your husband.

**Question:** *Sometimes I feel that I limit the Lord by how I handle our budget. I keep a budget in order to help my husband, but I always feel like I am boxing him in so that he cannot even follow the Lord. What is the proper way to handle our finances?*

**Answer:** It is very good to have a budget, especially for all the young couples. We all need a budget. But it is a good practice to firstly budget a portion to the Lord. To budget is not wrong, but the problem is that we budget our needs first. Then we find out we have nothing left to offer to the Lord. This is where the frustration comes in. We should practice every month to have a certain amount that goes to the Lord. This should be something definite. In other words, we designate a certain amount or a certain percentage from our income to go to the Lord, and then we offer this amount in a definite way. If we have less income than usual, that same amount should still go to the Lord. Whether we have more or less, a certain amount is always offered. This is a healthy practice.



Then after we offer to the Lord, having a budget for our expenses is very healthy. All the young couples who have not been married too long should practice to have a budget every month, under the condition that they offer to the Lord first. Some saints do not offer regularly because they think, “If we budget something to offer to the Lord, then we won’t have enough left over.” But the Biblical principle is that if you give, it will be given to you. In what way will it be given to you? We do not know. We never know in what way the Lord will give to us if we give to Him, but the principle is there. When we learn to give, then it will be given to us. Only the Lord is the One who knows how it will be given to us. On our part, we just learn to give. Some may give a large percentage of their income. Others may give a very small percentage. Either can be fine. It is our desire before the Lord that counts, and not how much we offer. Some saints may only be able to offer two dollars a week. That is precious. As far as the Lord is concerned, what is the difference between two dollars and two thousand? In the sight of the Lord, what matters is *you*. What matters is the person, and not the amount of the offering.

We should learn to trust the Lord. We can tell the Lord, “I have a desire to give something to You. How much should I offer? What should I give to You?” This is actually a way of telling the Lord, “I love You.” It is good to pray to the Lord and allow Him to lead us in this way. Then even if we only offer one percent of our income, it will be precious to Him.

Once we are clear before the Lord about how much should be offered to Him, we should budget what is remaining. A proper budget can help us in the management of our finances. If a sister knows, “I only have this much to buy food,” then she will not spend her money on products that are too expensive. If a brother knows that he only has a certain amount of money to spend on a particular item, he will realize, “I have to save over the next few months, or I won’t be able to afford this.” This practice will cause us to learn whether we are mishandling our finances. It is good for us to know, “I only have this amount to spend.”

Eventually we may realize that many items in our house we

do not really need. Saints who have a very good income do not necessarily have many items in their homes, but the items they do have are usually of high quality. But some saints, especially younger couples, have their homes filled with things that are cheap or unnecessary. When we budget our money, we will find out what robs it away. We may think that we are only spending one or two dollars here and there, and to us it is nothing. But eventually thirty or forty dollars is gone and we are not sure where it went. A budget controls this kind of spending. Then when we do not have enough money to spend on certain items, we will realize it. This is why it is very good, especially for young couples, to budget their finances.

We may also have the experience of sensing there is a certain need with some brother or sister. It is always good to watch and see if saints have special needs. This does not mean we should write a check every time we see a need. The Lord must still be involved with the process. But when there is a kind of sensation from the Lord about meeting a certain need, it is healthy to offer for it. If we give, it will also be given to us. The Lord is faithful to provide. When we are aware of a need and sense a leading from the Lord to meet that need, then we should offer accordingly.

**Question:** *Concerning our finances, is there anything in the Scripture that makes it clear we are supposed to give a certain amount regardless of our burden? Or can we just be before the Lord about it? Can we decide one week to offer for a particular brother's need because the Lord told us to, and another week decide to use our money for having someone over for dinner every night?*

**Answer:** The matter of offering is mentioned in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. "But take note of this: He who sows sparingly shall also sparingly reap; and he who sows with blessings shall also with blessings reap. Each one as he has purposed in his heart, not out of sorrow or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:6-7). The main realization we get from these verses is that we should not take the matter of

offering in an inspirational way. We should treat it quite seriously and soberly. The Bible also touches on this matter in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3. "On the first day of the week each one of you should lay aside in store to himself whatever he may have prospered, that no collections be made when I come" (1 Cor. 16:2). The principle here is that we lay aside a certain amount on the first day of every week. According to our income we should set aside a portion and offer it on the Lord's day. These verses make it clear that we should learn to offer a specific amount to the church.

Concerning whether we should offer to the church or use our offering to meet other needs, we must be balanced. We do have the liberty to offer according to the needs that we observe. Suppose a brother offers two hundred dollars every month. Every month he is faithful to give this amount to the church. Then he realizes a certain saint has a need. He then has the freedom to designate his monthly offering to meet that saint's need. It is still an offering to the Lord. However, we should not overly exercise in this way. If we are only looking to meet the needs that we observe, we may lose our trust to the church. Many times when we see a need, the church also sees that need. It is good for us to care for a need, but we should also learn to trust the church to take care of that same need.

For example, there are cases in which a church has many saints who offer faithfully. Yet when the elders come together to handle the finances they find out that everything has been designated already. The saints were generous in their giving, and their offering was substantial. But most of their offerings were already designated to meet certain needs. Some envelopes were designated to take care of a certain meeting hall, or to help with the young people's work, or to meet the need of a certain brother. This is an unhealthy situation. This means that the elders have almost nothing left over to meet the needs that they observe. This includes the practical needs of the church, such as the electric, water, and utility bills. Such a situation happens when saints do not learn to trust the church. Often we do not trust that the church has the ability to care for all the needs we observe. Instead, we trust

ourselves. We think that we see a need and the church does not see it. Sometimes this may be true. It is healthy once in a while to care for a certain brother because the Lord gives us such a sensation. But this should not be our habit. We should not just look around every week and wonder who needs our help and our money. Instead, we should offer in a proper way. This means that we must learn to trust the church.

**Question:** *Is it appropriate for a sister to preach the gospel to a male, or a brother to preach the gospel to a female? I have heard someone suggest it, and it made me uncomfortable.*

**Answer:** This is a very practical question. There are two ways to preach the gospel. One is to preach the gospel in a general way, and the other is to preach to particular persons. In general, it is healthy to have a gospel exercise. This means that when we are walking on the street or shopping in a store, we speak to whomever we see. If we see a young man, we preach the gospel. If we see a young woman, we also preach the gospel. This can be a healthy exercise. When we have a chance to preach to a man, we do so. When we have a chance to preach to a woman, we do so. When we are on the street or in a public place, we do not have to be so confined.

In particular, however, it should not be our practice to preach the gospel to someone of the opposite sex. Concerning this matter we need to be very careful, especially young brothers and young sisters. If we are always burdened for those of the opposite sex, that is not healthy. Even when we ourselves are pure, the other party may not be so pure. For example, if a sister invites a young man to a gospel meeting or a love-feast, he may not have any idea what he is being invited to. He is just a worldly person, so he does not relate it to the pure gospel. If he comes, his motive may not be so healthy, and this can even frustrate his salvation. The same is true when a brother invites a young woman. Because she is a worldly person, her understanding will be different.

Suppose there is a young brother who has a real burden from the Lord for one of his female schoolmates. There is nothing im-

pure involved; it is just a genuine burden. The best way for him to carry out that burden is to have another brother with him for his protection. Then this girl will know that the brother's motive is purely for the gospel. She will even have a better chance to be saved.

We must be careful in our contact with the opposite sex, especially those among us who are single. We are all human beings. No matter how spiritual we are, we are still fallen. We need to learn to keep a certain kind of distance between male and female. We must be careful about this matter even when preaching the gospel.

***Question:** I realize we should respect the brothers simply because they are brothers. But my husband and I have a few young brothers living in our house who do not clean up after themselves. I've been tempted to become quite angry with them. What is the proper way to handle this situation?*

***Answer:*** The best way to handle this kind of situation is through your husband. But it definitely needs to be handled. To respect people is not the same as to overly tolerate people. If a brother stays with you for a few days as a guest, that is one thing. It may not be so good to say anything to him because he is simply there for hospitality. However, once a brother is actually living in your house it is sometimes necessary to be rigid. It is *your* house. If a brother wants to live in your house but refuses to cooperate with you, he should find another place to live. If you ask your husband to take care of it, and the brother who lives with you will not listen to your husband, he should be told to move out tomorrow. It does not matter whether he is in the church or not. It is your house, and things must be done a certain way. Otherwise the brother will stay there and not get any help, and meanwhile you will be frustrated. If a loose and sloppy brother insists on staying loose and sloppy, he will have no growth in life. If he will not learn to take care of himself properly, then his stay there has no value. A brother who lives at your home should experience a positive benefit. He should learn something of life.

When the brothers who live in a couple's home do not clean up after themselves, the sister should just tell her husband what she observes. She should let him know what is going on, because she probably sees more than her husband does about the situation. She should tell him, "Here are the matters that need to be taken care of with these brothers." The wife has the right, in a good spirit, to tell her husband, "My tolerance can only go so far. My ability to cope with this is only so much." Then the husband can properly take care of the situation by addressing it with the brothers. If the wife tries to handle the situation directly, she will often become frustrated. This is why it is better for the husband to take care of it.

Sisters, when saints live with you, or if you take care of a brothers' house or a sisters' house, there has to be some regulation. If you have opened up your home for someone to live with you, at times you will need to be quite rigid in your exercise. If they are not willing to abide by your regulations, they should simply move to another house or get their own apartment. If they do not want the regulations, that is up to them. They should leave. We have to bear our responsibility. We are not here for social things. We are here for something quite serious. We cannot afford a situation where we are frustrated, the ones who live with us are frustrated, and no one gets the real help or the proper growth in life.

In caring for a person and raising him up, tolerating him usually does not help. However, to stand with him in his weakness is healthy. If a young brother is living in a couple's home and is unmanageable, to tolerate him will not help. If the brother and sister go along with him and are nice to him despite the way he behaves, this is toleration. This will not work. However, if a brother grew up in a certain way and never learned to clean up after himself, that may just be his weakness. Suppose a brother never makes his bed and forgets to put his clothes away. We should not expect him to change overnight. In such a case we may make his bed for him. Then we will let him know, "Please put your clothes away and make your bed before you leave in the morning." He

may try to do this for three days, but then he will forget all about it. This is his weakness. It is good to stand with him in his weakness. We can address it with him in a proper and caring way. Eventually he will learn. But to merely tolerate it will not help him and may cause us to become frustrated. We should stand with a brother in his weakness, but we should also know when there is a need for discipline.





PART III

THE HEALTHY  
PATTERN OF  
THE SISTERS IN  
THE CHURCH LIFE



THE CHAPTERS IN THIS SECTION WERE ORIGINALLY  
GIVEN AS MESSAGES DURING A CONFERENCE  
FOR SISTERS IN TOLEDO, OHIO, IN OCTOBER OF 1985



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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### **LIVING ACCORDING TO A HEALTHY PATTERN**

#### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

By the Lord's mercy He has gained many precious sisters for His recovery. However, most local churches are short of the sisters' function to uphold the Lord's testimony. Many sisters have asked, "What is our function in the church life? What should we do?" When they desire to function, they are not sure whether it is something from the Lord or something from themselves. When they try to function, they often become overly pressured and frustrated. They also become concerned about "overstepping their place" as they function. What is the proper function of the sisters, and how should they operate in their local church? We will address these issues in these messages

#### **SISTERS SHOULD FUNCTION ACCORDING TO THE OPERATION OF LIFE**

In the Lord's recovery, being a sister should not be made an issue. Sisters should just function in a normal and healthy way. Sisters are simply female believers. Brothers are male believers, and sisters are female believers. All of us are saints who were purchased by the Lord's precious blood and regenerated with His life. This means that all of us are operating members in the Body of Christ. The difference between the operation of the brothers and the operation of the sisters is something that is very natu-

ral and spontaneous according to how God made us. Brothers and sisters should simply operate according to who they are. It is not necessary for us to dictate, "A sister should function in this way, and a brother should function in that way." The first thing we should realize is that there is no need for us to make an issue concerning the sisters' function.

The sisters have been a crucial strength and blessing to the Lord's recovery. The church reaps a great benefit when they operate in a healthy way. However, many sisters consider themselves as "nobody." Because they feel defeated, their function is not as healthy as it could be. Sisters, when you do not function in a healthy and normal way, the church will suffer. You should not think, "I'm just a sister, so what can I do?" If you think about yourself in this way, you will lose the purity and genuineness of the operation of life within you. The operation of the Lord's life within all of us is higher than our considerations. It is higher than, "Should I function or not? How should I function? Is this me or the Lord? Am I going too far?" Our function in the church life should be in a very high realm. We should not be so concerned about whether we are qualified or not, or whether we are going too far or holding back too much. The operation of life is higher than these matters.

Sisters, your function should be according to the Lord's life, and this is higher than any doctrinal understanding. As an example, both Watchman Nee and Witness Lee were saved through the preaching of sisters. Does this not seem to be against the Bible? According to the Bible, women are not supposed to preach. Yet if sisters cannot preach, then how could Brother Nee and Brother Lee be saved? The Bible also says that a sister should not exercise authority over a man. Yet if a sister cannot oversee a man, how could M.E. Barber raise up Watchman Nee? But after hearing this, a sister may say, "Then the next time the church has a gospel meeting, I want to give the message!" Is there not something wrong with such an attitude? We can see that there are actually two extremes. If we overly stress that a sister must keep her place and be limited in her function, we will severely frus-

trate the Lord's move. At the same time we cannot ignore the truth of the Bible. The Bible does give certain principles that should govern a sister's function. If we do not walk according to the truth, then we will lose our testimony. What we should realize is that there is something higher than doctrinal matters. A sister's exercise according to the operation of life is higher than our common and doctrinal understanding.

For this reason, sisters, you should be encouraged to be bold and strong. You should function and exercise as much as possible in your locality, because the church will suffer when your operation is ineffective or too limited. However, as you function you must have the understanding, "I am a sister, and this is just my learning process. I am learning to operate according to the life within me." You do not need to make your function an issue, but you must still respect your place as a sister. There is a proper balance between over-functioning and not functioning at all. In the church life we must live by something higher than a doctrinal understanding. We must live and function according to the operation of life within us.

### **OUR PATTERN IS MORE CRUCIAL THAN OUR DEEDS**

There is an important principle in our learning how to function in the church life. We must learn that living according to a proper pattern is more crucial than having the proper deeds in our behavior. For example, we all have particular deeds. In the morning we may read the Bible, sing a song in the Lord's presence, and fully enjoy our spirit. Then later in the day we may take a nap, read the newspaper, and eventually be fully out of our spirit. These are our deeds. What we must pay attention to in our living is the pattern and not the deeds. What is this pattern? The pattern is that every morning we spend time before the Lord. We pray, we read some verses, or we sing a song. This is a proper pattern. But suppose one morning we are in our flesh and not in our spirit. We should still read the Bible, because the pattern is

healthy. Even if we read the Bible in our flesh, or pray to the Lord in our flesh, the pattern is still healthy. Our pattern is more crucial than our deeds.

In some families the children have the pattern of washing the dishes. This pattern is more important than their deeds. Suppose a teenage son is washing the dishes with an improper attitude. Should the parents stop him or let him finish? It is unlikely that the parents would say to their son, "You are in your flesh, not in your spirit. Go away. This doesn't count." Instead they would just tell him to finish the job. When he is in a proper pattern, there is no need to analyze his deeds. The pattern is that every night the children must wash the dishes after dinner. It makes no difference whether they are in a good mood or a bad mood. Everyone must do his job. This is an example of being in the right pattern. Suppose one of the children gets inspired and washes the dishes on his own at another time. Then his deeds are correct, but that may not be his pattern. When he washes the dishes every night after dinner whether he feels like it or not, that is a healthy pattern.

We should not overly pay attention to our deeds. We should pay attention to our pattern. We do not need to ask ourselves, "Should I function in the meetings? Should I function in the church life? What if my function is not according to my spirit?" The only question that matters is, "According to the divine pattern of the church life, should I function?" The answer is obviously "yes." This means that we do not need to analyze ourselves so much. We should follow the pattern and not focus on the deeds. Sisters, it is very normal and healthy for you to learn how to function in the church life. In this pattern of functioning, there are many deeds that come with the pattern. Even though you desire to carry out these deeds in your spirit, you may find yourself carrying out some of the deeds far away from your spirit. You do not need to be overly concerned, because the pattern that you are following is healthy. This is what it means to take care of our pattern more than our deeds. We must pay attention to our pattern of life.

When we are in the right pattern, this pattern will generate the

proper deeds. Even when we make mistakes and the deeds are not proper, we do not need to worry. That is how we learn. The next time, our deeds will be proper. For instance, to open up our homes should be our pattern. It is healthy for a sister to decide with her husband, "At least once every week we must have our home open in some way." To have that realization is to set up a proper pattern. Once this pattern is set up, there is no need to analyze whether or not we are in our spirit. If we have the healthy pattern of consistently opening up our homes, there may be times when we feel that we were in spirit, and there may be times when we feel that we were not in spirit. If we have people over and then later realize that we were not in spirit or were lacking in some way, that experience is equal to breaking a few plates while we are washing the dishes. There is no need for us to be condemned, because it is all part of the learning process. The next time we will do better. The next time we have people over, we will try to be in our spirit. This exercise will keep us in a healthy pattern.

**BEING PROTECTED FROM OVER-SENSITIVITY  
BY KEEPING A HEALTHY PATTERN**

Sisters, when you begin to operate and function in the church life, you have to be very careful. You should not let your sensitivity take over your behavior. If you are always asking, "Am I qualified? Am I in the Lord's presence? Am I worthy to pray? Am I proper?" that is to be too sensitive. Many sisters have confronted the question, "When I function, how can I tell whether it is in my flesh or in my spirit?" We should realize that there is not one person who can know what it is to be in spirit unless they have also learned what it is to be in their flesh. We should not overly analyze ourselves. Even if we are in our flesh when we function, it is always better to be living than to be dead. There is no need to be overly conscious about whether we are functioning according to Christ or just by our natural ability. Sisters in principle are very sensitive, which is why it is so easy for sisters to be under

condemnation. Once we get ourselves involved in this realm, we open a large door for the enemy. Satan is the accuser, and he will come in to accuse us about everything. Sisters in particular should therefore be very careful about being over-sensitive. They should simply function as best they can according to the operation of life within them.

Sisters, because you are very sensitive by nature, you should remember the principle of caring for your pattern and not caring so much for your deeds. This does not mean that you should completely forget about your deeds. It simply means you should be more concerned and careful about your pattern than your deeds. It is your pattern that is crucial. When you have the right pattern, then even when your deeds are “off” it will make no difference. What matters is that your pattern is healthy. To open up your home is a healthy pattern. In the process of living according to this pattern, you may unintentionally do something that is not according to Christ. If you accidentally do something according to your flesh, you can just let it go. You do not need to make it an issue. You should still have an open home. You should still follow the same pattern, because your pattern is healthy. This will bring in the Lord’s blessing.

When you first came into the church life, you may have had no considerations about how you should function. You just functioned normally and spontaneously, because you were in the enjoyment of life. But perhaps after some time, you ceased to function in the church life. You may have become overly sensitive and even condemned yourself. Then the enemy may have told you that you had failed, that your functioning was lost, and that you could no longer be used by the Lord. This is what it means to be too sensitive. We should remember that the enemy is an accuser who will take advantage of our sensitivity. We should just hold to the proper, healthy pattern. If we failed in some way, we should still just go on. Our deeds may sometimes be wrong, but the pattern we live by is right. We should remain in the enjoyment of life and be free from condemnation.

Suppose you have a pattern of attending a small group meet-



ing. Perhaps one morning you fought with your husband and disagreed about everything. Then the rest of the day you felt inwardly condemned. In such a situation it is likely that you will skip the meeting because you no longer feel qualified. But when you open up to the Lord, even if you are still angry, you can touch something higher. You can even pray honestly to the Lord, “Lord, I’m just in my flesh. I’m a mess. But I’m still going to my small group meeting.” When you do this, you are living according to a pattern, and not according to your deeds. When you go to the meeting, you will be saved. It may not seem to be something so high or so glorious. But because you lived according to a healthy pattern, you will be saved in a normal way.

Often in the church life we function sporadically according to our condition. We analyze ourselves too much. If we feel we have been “good,” then we function. If we have not been “good,” then we do not function. Instead we should establish the healthy pattern of functioning. For example, it is a good pattern to speak in the church meetings. Whether we speak things rightly or wrongly does not matter as much as establishing the pattern. If we speak and make a mistake, at least we are not just sitting there dead. The Lord will honor our keeping this pattern. We will learn how to speak in the meetings, and we will enjoy the church life much more. We should just set a healthy pattern. We do not need to ask whether we are right or wrong. Once we follow a healthy pattern, everything else will fall into place.

### **MAINTAINING A PATTERN OF LIFE, NOT OF LAW**

Maintaining a healthy pattern is different from keeping a schedule. Keeping a schedule can become a matter of law. We should not consider a healthy pattern to be the same as living by a schedule. The healthy pattern must be a pattern of life, not of law. When we exercise according to a pattern of life, we pay attention to the basic operations of life. For example, we may have a pattern of morning revival. Our pattern is to wake up at seven in the

morning and to have a few minutes to pray. But suppose one morning we do not wake up until nine. If we live only according to a schedule, our prayer time is already over. Should we have a pattern of praying at seven in the morning, or should we have a pattern of praying once we wake up? When we are too concerned about keeping a schedule, we are no longer maintaining a pattern of life.

This does not mean we should be loose and undisciplined. It is healthy to be consistent every morning in our prayer time. However, whether we are able to wake up at a certain time is largely dependent on the previous night. If our children keep us awake all night so that in the morning we sleep until nine, does that mean we can no longer pray? It is not a matter of waking up at seven or nine, it is a matter of having a healthy pattern. Our pattern is to be in the Lord's presence in the morning. To do this at seven is very good, but it does not have to become a law. Instead of paying our attention to what time we must get up, we should pay attention to the pattern. Our attitude should be, "I do not know if I can get up at the same time every morning, but I will learn to be in the Lord's presence whenever I get up. This is my pattern." This pattern is very different from a demanding law.

It is a good pattern to have a morning time with the Lord. But if we wake up late, we should still abide in the same pattern. When we wake up, we should think to ourselves, "Even though I got up late, I will still have my time with the Lord." This will keep us from being condemned according to a legal demand. Sometimes when we sleep too late we think, "I didn't get up at seven. I broke my vow. I'm not qualified to come to the Lord's presence." Then we put ourselves under condemnation the rest of the day. It is a healthy pattern to come to the Lord in the morning. It is very good to keep a set time, but when we fail, the pattern remains the same. Our pattern is not, "I must do a certain thing at a certain time." That is to keep a schedule according to the law. We should try to be disciplined, but we must also take care of our healthy pattern more than our deeds. When we take care of our pattern we will be kept from condemnation.

We are usually in one of two extremes. Either we love the law too much, or we live without the law. Either we put ourselves under a high demand, or we are very loose and do whatever we like. Both are incorrect. On one hand we need the law, yet on the other hand we should not be under the law. For example, eating is a law, yet it is not a law. Sleeping is a law, yet it is not a law. These can be considered laws, yet they are in the principle of life. When we fulfill the law according to life, then we are not under the law. To follow the Lord is to live a balanced life. The Lord would tell us, "You should not be under the law." Then the Lord would also tell us, "If you are without the law you will become too loose. You will become a lawless person." This is why we should be disciplined in keeping a certain kind of practice, such as morning revival. We should not be so relaxed as to think, "I'll just pray whenever I get up." Neither should we be so legal as to think, "Since I didn't get up on time, I won't pray today." Both thoughts are incorrect. We must be balanced. Our attitude should be, "I will try to get up on time, so that I can be in the Lord's presence. But if something happens and I cannot get up on time, I will still learn how to be in the Lord's presence." Then we will be keeping a proper pattern. This will save us from being too loose or too legal. Instead, we will be regulated by life.

The sisters who have children must learn this. Sisters, if you have children, try not to require anything that is too regular from yourself. This is the secret of being a happy mother. Your children's schedule is irregular, and even your husband's schedule is sometimes irregular. You may want to get up in the morning at a certain time to be with the Lord, but when your kids wake you up several times in the night, you may think to yourself, "I can't do it. It's over." Many mothers do not have morning revival because they cannot wake up early enough. But if you get up later in the morning, you can still have morning revival. Sometimes you may set goals for yourself that are too high. You may think, "I must get up at seven, whether or not I get any sleep." How many days can that last? Eventually you will become frustrated. It is better for mothers, especially those with younger children, to learn not

to pay so much attention to keeping a regular schedule. Instead, pay attention to the proper pattern. What is the proper pattern? When you wake up, you come to the Lord. You may try to keep a specific time, but when circumstances affect your schedule, you still come to the Lord. You maintain the pattern of praying or singing a song as soon as you wake up. Even when you have a very good morning revival, something can happen a few hours later to frustrate you. Perhaps after you pray your children will irritate you, causing you to lose your temper. But after you have lost your temper, you can still go back to enjoying the Lord's presence. That is your healthy pattern. Sisters, you will be blessed if you can learn this.

**WORKING OUT THE DESIRE IN OUR HEART  
VERSUS PUTTING OURSELVES UNDER A DEMAND**

We all desire a proper, decent humanity. There is nothing wrong with desiring our life to be virtuous and healthy. However, it is a mistake for us to allow our desire to become a demand that we place on ourselves. What is the difference between a desire and a demand? A desire is something in our heart, while a demand is a legal requirement. When something we desire becomes a demand upon ourselves, there is something wrong. This is true even with the most spiritual things. For example, we should desire to pray in every meeting. This is a healthy desire. However, if we become overwhelmed with condemnation when we do not pray in a meeting, that is a demand. Sisters, you should have proper and healthy desires in your heart. But if these desires bring you under condemnation, then they have become demands which are no longer healthy.

In our experience we may start out with a very healthy desire, but then it becomes a demand. Once our desire turns into a demand, it can no longer be effective. The Lord does not give us demands. He gives us a life supply so that we can fulfill the proper desires in our heart. But often in our experience a desire and a demand are the same. We may desire something healthy, but then

we put ourselves under a demand to carry it out. That is where we can get trapped. Sisters, it is good for you to learn how to have proper desires. As you abide in the Lord's life, you will desire the things that are healthy, virtuous, and pure. But by no means should you put a demand on yourself in order to become what you desire. Eventually such demands can become asceticism, in which you are actually hurting yourself. When a desire in our heart becomes a demand, it is no longer healthy. We must learn how to discern between a demand and a healthy desire.

All of the sisters should learn to be much more restful. Sisters, learn to honor the desire in your heart, but do not let that desire become a demand to you. Do not allow your conscience to become bothered all the time because you are not meeting your self-imposed standards. Learn how to abide in your desire without letting it become a demand. Let the desire gradually develop until it becomes your reality. Do this without putting yourself under pressure. Live out your desire very normally. These are secrets that we all must learn. Do not let your desire become a demand. If you put too much demand on yourself, it will frustrate and even kill your growth. When you abide in your desire for the godly things without putting yourself under pressure, it will allow you to have the healthy growth in life.



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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### **THE CONTENT OF THE HEALTHY PATTERN**

#### **THE HEALTHY PATTERN BEING A DIVINE AND SPIRITUAL PATTERN**

We have seen that sisters should pay more attention to their pattern than to their deeds. The word “pattern” is used several times in the Bible, especially in regard to the design of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was built according to a divine and heavenly pattern. “Even as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to complete the tabernacle; for, ‘See,’ He said, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern that was shown to you in the mountain’” (Heb. 8:5). The most important principle concerning the matter of a “pattern” in the Bible is that it is something divine. When the Israelites built the tabernacle, they built it according to a divine and heavenly pattern. God instructed His people to “make all things according to the pattern that was shown to [them] in the mountain.” This shows us that the pattern is something divine and heavenly. When we speak of a pattern in our own daily life, we would probably say, “My pattern is not heavenly. My pattern is comparatively earthly.” The pattern that we live by must be a divine pattern, not an earthly pattern. For us to live by a pattern means that something divine is involved.

In the first message we realized that we should not pay attention to our deeds, but pay attention to our pattern. As we practice to live a life according to a healthy pattern we should tell the Lord, “I will not try to take care of my deeds. Rather, I will pay attention to my pattern.” When we pay too much attention to our

deeds, we will feel that everything about us is a mess. All that we will be able to see about ourselves is our mistakes. Instead, we should look at our life from another angle, according to the healthy pattern. A healthy pattern is a spiritual matter. We must realize that a pattern does not mean a routine. We cannot live a routine life and call that our pattern. We need to live by a pattern that is divine and spiritual.

The spiritual reality of our pattern is based on our growth in life. Suppose a new sister has been in the church life for a few months. If she knows how to make one or two meetings a week, or if she knows how to exercise her spirit and pray just a little, the Lord will surely be satisfied. According to our personal observation, this sister may be young and shallow, and her prayer may not have much content. She may exercise her voice without using her spirit. But from the Lord's perspective, for this sister to exercise her voice without her spirit is exactly what He desires. If a sister is new, what kind of request can the Lord make of her? The most He might ask is that she preach the gospel a little or read the Bible a little and go to a few meetings. Based upon her growth in life, she is living according to a divine and spiritual pattern. The pattern we live by must be spiritual, and it is therefore according to our growth in life.

### THE ELEMENTS OF THE HEALTHY PATTERN

#### **The First Element: Struggling to Be in the Lord's Presence**

The healthy pattern that we live by has three elements. Each of these elements is actually a spiritual exercise. First, in our daily life we must exercise to be in the Lord's presence. Second, we must exercise to have the church life in our daily life, which is especially related to the matter of companionship. Third, we must exercise to have the corporate church life, which means that we should not neglect the assembling of ourselves together. All of these elements must be the pattern of our existence.



The first element in our healthy pattern is that we struggle every day to be in the Lord's presence. We must exercise ourselves unto godliness. The sisters should learn, "In the pattern of my life, I struggle to be in the Lord's presence." This will bring in the Lord's blessing. When a sister pays attention to her deeds she will often be under condemnation. If she loses her temper at her husband, she will not be able to sleep. She will think, "I've loved the Lord for so many years. How can a sister like me still have this kind of temper? How can I still get so angry at my husband?" We must realize that sometimes our deeds will be improper. We should not be encouraged to have improper deeds, but they will still sometimes come. When our deeds are improper, we should simply and quickly take the Lord's precious blood. We should try again to be in the Lord's presence. Then we should just forget about where we have been and struggle to go forward in the Lord's life. This is to come back to the healthy pattern. In this pattern, when we have deeds that are not so healthy, we just learn to let them go. We still struggle to be in the Lord's presence. Our pattern is that wherever we are, we love to be in His presence. Once we learn this, we will receive so much blessing in our daily life, our family life, and our church life.

We all have our weaknesses, but what matters the most is that we have a pattern. What should be our pattern? When we are driving, we struggle to be in the Lord's presence. In our reading of the word, we struggle to be in the Lord's presence. When we are praying with other saints, we struggle to be in the Lord's presence. Even when we are in our weaknesses, we still struggle to be in the Lord's presence. Whether we are victorious or defeated, we do not care. We just love to be in the Lord's presence. This is the healthy pattern of our life. When we exercise this way, we receive the effectiveness of the Lord's redemption and salvation. We can tell the Lord, "Lord, my deeds are sometimes not so healthy, but I am paying my attention to a proper and healthy pattern. This means that in my daily life, all the time I am struggling to be in Your presence." This is the divine and spiritual pattern we should live by in our daily life.

### **The Second Element: Exercising the Church Life in Our Daily Life**

Sisters, in your daily life outside of the regular church meetings, you should be exercised to be with other sisters. You must pay attention to your daily church life. Treasure the times when you are able to be together with other sisters. Unfortunately, we are somewhat short of this exercise in the church life. It seems that no sister wants to take the lead to initiate a gathering with other sisters. You may be concerned about making the function of sisters an issue. The fact is that it is a healthy pattern to be with other sisters in your daily life. When sisters come together to pray, to fellowship, and to enjoy the riches of the truth, that is a healthy pattern. This pattern will cause you to grow, because your exercise is healthy. You may pray for specific saints, for the elders, for the new ones, for the needs of the church, for the gospel, for the Lord's move, or for however the Lord has burdened your hearts. You may come together to labor in the word and in all the riches of the truth. This is a healthy pattern. Struggle not only to be in the Lord's presence individually, but to have the church life in your daily life.

Sisters, you should not just have your own private daily life. You should struggle to be in the church life in your daily life. You may visit a few saints, you may labor in the word with one sister, you may have some prayer with another sister, and you may gather with a group of sisters together. The more you can exercise in this way, the more the church life will be healthy. If a group of sisters comes together consistently to pray, it does not matter whether their prayer is "spiritual" or not. The church will still receive the benefit. Sisters, learn to have the church life in your daily life. Exercise to be with other sisters. This should be your pattern. Try not just to live your life at home. If the Lord gives you time, learn to spend that time with other saints. Exercise to pray and labor together with other sisters. Such a positive exercise will give you the healthy growth in life. It will also strengthen the church as you pray for and stand with the burden of the lead-

ing ones and elders. Again, do not just have your own private daily life, but have your daily life in the church life. This is part of your healthy pattern. All of the sisters should be encouraged to exercise in this way.

In a local church, the decisions the elders make need much prayer. What the church is burdened for needs much prayer. When the elders begin to share with the church concerning a certain need, there must be adequate prayer to support it. Too often we treat the matters that the elders fellowship with us merely as things we must do. We forget that we need to support such matters with prayer. We should realize that no decision works without prayer. Any decision is dead if there is no struggle to support it spiritually. The only way life can come in is through prayer. There must be a lot of struggling in cooperation with the Lord. There must be a lot of prayer to uphold the situation. The more we pray for the church in this way, the more something will be burning within us. We will be on fire for the Lord's interests. We will even bring this fire to the meetings, and the meetings will be made alive.

Sisters, try to use whatever time you have to come together and support the church with prayer. It is not necessary to make it too organized. You can be flexible regarding what day you meet or whose home you go to. But you should exercise to pray together before the Lord. Sometimes you may review what the leading ones have fellowshiped, so that you can stand with their burden. You may consider the church's situation and pray to strengthen the church. You may pray and fellowship concerning some new ones who need to be properly cared for. Exercising in this way will bring in the Lord's blessing. This should be your healthy pattern.

### **The Desperate Need for Sisters to Have Companionship**

We must learn to produce the healthy companionship in the church life. Many sisters in the church life are lonely. They feel that very few sisters are attached to them, and very few are their

companions. Some sisters have no one to fellowship with. When a sister goes through something, she struggles by herself. When her husband goes through something difficult, she has no one to pray with. She may have been in the church life for several years, but she is still an individual. In the church life many sisters are by themselves. Why do so many sisters among us survive by themselves? Simply because there is a lack of companionship. It seems to be very difficult for sisters to have genuine companions. Often sisters only know each other through the church meetings. They are not with each other in their daily lives. Perhaps they may have a certain kind of friendship with other sisters, but for some reason they cannot come together to be in their spirit. They have not exercised to have the church life in their daily life. When sisters exercise the pattern of a healthy companionship they will not be so individual or so lonely.

Sometimes when the Lord moves in the church, a brother may try to respond, but his wife is unable to respond. This is not the fault of the wife. This just means that she has been lonely. She may love the church, but she does not have the boldness to love the church to the extent where she can respond to the Lord's move. In her daily life, no one has nurtured the positive burden within her. Her church life is not a healthy pattern that she exercises. Instead, it is merely a routine in which she goes to meetings. When this is the case her operation in the church life will be very limited. She will not be able to respond to the Lord's move in the church, because she does not have spiritual companions. If there are a few sisters who are her companions in the church life, then when the Lord moves it will be easier for her to respond. She will also be strengthened to stand with her husband's following of the Lord.

We need spiritual companionship for our own protection. When we make an important decision, we should have a sister with whom we can fellowship. When we experience a difficult stage in our spiritual growth, we should have a sister who can pray with us and help us through. This is companionship. If a group of sisters is often together, but all they do is talk and joke about

different things, this is not a true companionship. Suppose one sister among them is going through a serious problem. When she brings it up with this group of sisters for fellowship, another sister might laugh and say, “Don’t be so spiritual.” The sister who is in need did not receive help, and the opportunity for the other sisters to give her help has been lost. This shows that all the time these sisters were together, they did not generate the real companionship.

Our companionships should not be based on natural affection or on mutual interests. Our companionships should be spiritual. It is very easy for those who have many things in common to have a soulish kind of companionship. Sisters who are close may even produce a small faction in the church life. We should not let our companionships become a faction. This does not mean that we should avoid other sisters whom we feel close to, or that we should be cold and official in our contact with one another. It just means that we should learn to be with sisters in our spirit. We should be very intimate and close, yet this is different from a worldly friendship. Our companionship is not based on soulish affection or worldly interests. Instead, we are together mutually struggling for the Lord and for His testimony. The sisters should learn to tell the Lord, “Lord, I need a few sisters who are my companions. When the difficult times come, I must have sisters who can pray with me and bring me into Your presence. I need to be with sisters who can pray together with me in spirit, so that we can seek You together.” This is the healthy companionship which can bring in the real blessing from the Lord.

Sisters, learn to exercise the church life in your daily life. Do not allow yourself to be alone. Do not be a lonely sister in the church life. Develop the healthy spiritual companionships. When you have some sisters as your spiritual companions, it does not mean that they are merely your friends. It means that you can pray with them, fellowship with them, labor in the word with them, and struggle together with them for the mutual growth in life. Then when you or your husband are going through something difficult, you have sisters who are your companions to help

you through. Learn to pray with one another. Learn to be together. Learn to allow other sisters to “invade” your daily life, and even learn how to do the same for them in a positive way. You should not be a lonely sister in the church life. You should find some sisters to be your spiritual companions.

### **The Third Element: Treasuring the Corporate Church Life**

In our spiritual exercise we must treasure the corporate church life, which includes being in all of the meetings and gatherings with the saints. This should be our healthy pattern. According to the Bible, we should never despise or neglect our meeting together: “Not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:25). Whether it is a large church meeting or a small home meeting, this should be our pattern. In principle, we cannot neglect our gathering together. We must treasure the meeting life, which is to treasure the church life corporately.

In our experience we may have picked up an unhealthy thought from Christianity. That thought is, “I only need to make a certain number of meetings a week.” Some saints might even think, “I only need to come to the Lord’s Table.” This thought matches our fallen nature. Sisters, we need to treasure the corporate church life. This should be our pattern. We should treasure all of the gatherings, whether it is the whole church coming together or only a few saints coming together. It does not make a difference whether it is the elders who make the decision to call a meeting, or whether we ourselves pick up the burden to have a meeting in our home. We simply cannot ignore the gatherings of the church. If someone is not living according to this pattern, they cannot be spiritually healthy. No matter how spiritual someone is, eventually they will be dead in their spiritual experience if they abandon their assembling together with the church. They may read the Bible at home, but they will still be spiritually dead. We must see

that there is a healthy pattern described in the Bible. That pattern is to assemble together with the saints in the church life. When we are not exercised properly by treasuring the corporate church life, then our pattern is not healthy. We are living according to an earthly, human standard, rather than a divine and spiritual pattern.

When we attend the meetings of the church and exercise together with other saints, we are in the healthy pattern. We should not despise or look down on the meetings of the church. When we say that we do not have time for church meetings because we are too busy, we are out of the healthy pattern. The missing of meetings can itself become a pattern, an unhealthy one, which is why Hebrews 10:25 says, “Not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is.” A custom is similar to a pattern. When the book of Hebrews was written, there were some saints who were in the pattern of missing meetings. They chose not to go to all the meetings or not to be together with the saints, and eventually that became their pattern. We must realize that when our pattern is wrong, even if all of our deeds are right, we ourselves are still wrong. This pattern is more important than our deeds. For example, to lose our temper is not so serious, but to miss a meeting of the church is very serious. A sister may never lose her temper, but if she does not make the church meetings, the Lord would say, “Your good behavior doesn’t mean anything.” Another sister may lose her temper once in a while, yet if this sister attends all the church meetings, the Lord would say, “This is right.” We should not pay attention to our deeds, but to the matter of a healthy pattern. An important part of that healthy pattern is to be together with the saints in the corporate church life.

### A CONCLUDING WORD

The pattern that we live by is a divine and spiritual pattern, not an earthly and human routine. With this pattern there are three spiritual exercises we must learn. Firstly, we must struggle in our daily life, wherever we are and in whatever condition we are in, to be in the Lord’s presence. Secondly, we must be exercised

to have the church life in our daily life. We should build up spiritual companionships and treasure the times we can be together with other sisters. Thirdly, we must pay attention to the corporate church life. We should exercise to be in all of the meetings and gatherings of the church. These three elements are the content of the divine, heavenly, and spiritual pattern that we must live by. Paying attention to this healthy pattern will bring in the real spiritual blessing.



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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION— CONCERNING DESIRES AND DEMANDS

*Question:* How can we keep our desires from becoming demands?

*Answer:* A desire is something for which we have an expectation. A demand is something that we feel is absolutely necessary. For example, the Bible encourages us to consider the things that are proper and virtuous (Phil. 4:8). This means that we should always nurture the healthy desires. Our heart should be a nurturing place of these desires. The good desires and proper virtues are nurtured in our heart. But at the same time we must be careful. We should not make an issue out of our desires. We must remember that we are fallen. We all are limited. Once we make our desires an issue, something that we *must* do, we will be brought under condemnation.

For instance, suppose you desire to live out Christ. This is obviously very good, because the Bible says that “for me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). But often when you desire to live out Christ, you find that you are living out Adam. You failed in carrying out your desire. When you fail, your response will show whether you are in the realm of desire or in the realm of demand. If you are under a demand, you will be so bothered. You will be accused, depressed, and disappointed in yourself. You will feel that you have no way to go on. You may even tell the Lord, “It’s Your fault for not creating me right. And it’s the church’s fault for speaking things that are not real.” However, if you are simply carrying out the desire in your heart, then when you fail, you will

still be restful. You will realize that you just need to turn back to the Lord and rely on Him once more.

It is because we are regenerated that we have healthy desires. If a person has never had a positive desire, this shows that he is unregenerated. If a person has never cared about the things of the Lord or of the church, or has never desired the things that are pure and virtuous, then he must be a Gentile. What is the problem with those who are unregenerated? They have no desire for anything that is virtuous or godly. They do not care about behaving improperly. When we became Christians, our conscience became sensitive and our mind began to be renewed. Because we have a renewed mind, we desire the things that are virtuous and godly. We desire to live out Christ. But we can never fulfill this desire by ourselves. Either we are in the Lord's presence, and so we live out Christ, or we are not in the Lord's presence, and so we live out the fallen Adamic nature. There is no middle ground. This is why if our desires become demands we will be under accusation all the time. If we have a proper desire, then we will realize that we need to constantly turn back to the Lord. Either we depend on the Lord and live out Christ, or we depend on Satan and live out the flesh.

It is serious for Christians to make their desire a demand. Even the apostle Paul would not do this. Paul was very simple. "I desire to live out Christ. I forget what is behind, and I pursue what is before." We should always desire to be one with the Lord. At the same time we should realize who we really are. Because we are fallen, we should not put ourselves under a demand. Instead we should nurture the healthy desires in our heart and learn to rely on the Lord Himself.

***Question:** When we see so many needs among the saints in the church life, we cannot help but desire to meet those needs. How do we respond to that desire without having it become a demand?*

***Answer:** Your thought is, "Because I see a need, I try to meet that need. Then the meeting of that need becomes a demand."*

But what we see may not be what the Lord sees. All the needs that we see are only according to what *we* see. In the practical church life, we have to realize that the Lord is very high. His view of a situation is much higher than our view. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways, declares Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9).

For instance, we may wonder why a certain brother has to go through a difficult and frustrating situation. We may not realize that this is exactly what the Lord wants him to go through. The Lord sees things very clearly. He knows that without a frustrating situation this brother will never grow. In fact, the difficulties this brother is experiencing are actually the Lord’s work. Our view may not be so high or spiritual. All we see is that the brother has certain needs. We have to realize that the Lord is watching the whole situation. He is the Lord over everything. We may see all of the needs and problems, but the Lord knows what He is trying to do.

How should we cooperate with the Lord and exercise properly in these situations? The answer is not to say, “Since the Lord sees everything, I’ll just forget about the whole situation and let Him handle it.” When someone is in a difficult situation or has a certain need, we still have to learn how to be with them in that situation. For all of us who love the Lord, this is a hard lesson to learn. To be with someone in a situation and to correct the situation are two different things. What we must learn is to put ourselves into a situation and help the person grow out of that situation. No situation is hard to solve, but every situation is hard to grow out of. We do not need to be those who solve problems and give advice. We need to be those who put ourselves with other saints to help them grow out of their limitations and problems. Our attitude should be, “I will grow with this person. As I grow, they will grow. I will invest myself and labor for their growth. I won’t try to change them. I will just grow with them.”

For instance, suppose there is a young sister who helps take

care of the service office. As she takes care of the service office, she messes up everything. Then suppose the brothers decide to move her to a different service. They ask her not to take care of the service office anymore, but to be involved in cleaning the hall. This means that they have handled the situation and solved it very easily, but they have not really helped the sister. If a sister has a certain problem in one place, she will have the same problem in another place. This is why we should seldom move people, try to change people, or try to solve a situation. Once a situation is there, it is simply there. We have to realize that a person who cannot handle the service office also cannot handle the cleaning of the hall. A person who cannot handle the cleaning of the hall also cannot handle preaching the gospel. What such a person needs is not for us to solve her situation. She does not need to be handled as a problem. What she needs is someone to come into her situation and help her grow out of her limitations. She needs intimacy from some saints who are seeking the Lord's wisdom in helping her to grow. In that intimacy there can be fellowship, comforting, or even rebuking. When some saints have invested themselves with this sister, they can grow out of the problem together with her. This is the genuine service to the Lord.

This kind of care is the care of a parent towards his child. For example, a son may come to his father and be upset because he does not have any friends at school. What would the father do? Would the father correct him and say, "Grow up! What do you mean you do not have any friends? Just go make a few!" Obviously if the father were to place such a demand on his son, it would never work. Instead, if a son comes to his father with such a need, surely the father would be tender and reassuring. The father might say, "Even if no one else is your friend, I'm your friend. Don't worry. Just keep going back to school, and the Lord will give you friends." Then the father would purposely go to his son many times, give him a hug, and remind him, "I'm your friend." He would ask his son once in a while, "Are you making friends at school?" Eventually his son will say, "Yes, now I have some friends!" Then the father can ask him who the friends are,

and they will keep talking intimately. The whole atmosphere is one of love and support. When we take care of the saints, it should be the same. We must grow with them and not put demands on them. We should come alongside them and grow up with them. If they have a certain problem, we should grow with them out of that problem.

The way to care for someone is to put yourself at their level. Even if you are much more mature than they are, you should put yourself with them and grow with them. This is actually a very healthy pattern. We do not need to be problem-solvers. We need to be those who can invest ourselves with the saints who have needs and grow with them until they overcome their problem or limitation. If we try to solve problems, more problems will keep appearing. When we solve one, another will appear, and when we solve that one, yet another will appear. Instead, we should learn to be with saints at their level and grow with them. When we see a situation that discourages us, instead of trying to solve the problem and correct the situation, we should put ourselves into that situation with the saints and grow with them until they are out of the situation.

This kind of care will cause the churches to be built up. When we have more brothers and sisters who practice the church life in this way, the churches will be prevailing. Instead, we are often just the opposite. We become like teachers and not like parents. We look around and see all the problems, and then we try to solve them. Instead of growing with the saints, we correct them. In the church life there are not enough brothers and sisters who are willing to lower themselves to come down from who they are, to put themselves with the needy saints, and to grow with them out of their problems. Sisters, when you see that there is something wrong with a situation involving another sister, do not make it an issue. It is better not even to talk about it. Instead, put yourself with the sister and step into her limitations. Then begin to grow up with her. Fellowship with her, pray with her, uplift her, and bring her out of her limitations. This is to have the genuine service. In the recovery we do not need brothers and sisters

who tell people what is right and what is wrong. We need brothers and sisters who know how to step into other saints' situations and grow with them out of their limitations.

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### **SPENDING OUR TIME FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

#### **OUR TIME IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR SPIRIT**

In keeping a healthy pattern, we must learn to spend our time for the church life. We have seen that to struggle to be in the Lord's presence, to exercise the church life in our daily life, and to treasure the corporate church life are the basic elements of a healthy pattern. Each of these elements requires our time. In practicing to love the Lord and to serve in the church life, nothing is more crucial than our time. The Bible says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." From our experience we have also learned, "Where your time is, there will your heart be also." This phrase is not biblical, but according to our experience there is such a fact. We must realize that to serve in the church life, nothing counts more than our time.

We could even say that time is more important than our spirit. This may sound surprising, because we always emphasize the human spirit. For us to experience the Lord, surely our spirit is the most crucial thing. But for us to operate in the church life, our time is the most crucial thing. For example, sisters may come together without being in their spirit. However, eventually their time together brings them to their spirit. Suppose four sisters come together. One sister is angry at her children, another sister is angry at her husband, the third sister is angry at her colleagues, and the fourth sister is angry at the elders. Not one of them is in their spirit. Yet as they spend their time together, it does not take

long for them to begin to pray. As they touch the Lord they may even be brought to tears. Because they have learned to spend time together, their time becomes the means for the Lord to bring them to their spirit.

Our serving life is made up of two different items: our exercise and our labor. Our exercise is towards ourselves, and our labor is towards others. For both our exercise and our labor we must spend our time. When there is no time, there is no reality of the serving life. We should tell ourselves, "I need to spend time with the saints in my locality. I need to spend time to serve and to pray with other sisters." Eventually only those who know how to handle their time can be useful.

#### **NURTURING CARE REQUIRES OUR TIME**

The way we should spend our time can be compared to a family raising up their children. Usually a father and mother raise up their children with two different lines, from two different angles. In principle, the father raises up the children in the line of developing their personality. The mother raises up the children in the line of developing their heart. A good father raises up the children to have a strong, independent, useful, and solid personality. A good mother raises up the children to have a healthy, tender, and sweet heart. When a person has both a proper heart and a proper personality, he will be very useful. Furthermore, sometimes the father pays more attention to the children's education, while the mother pays more attention to their health. For a father to take care of a child's personality and education, the time required is not so demanding. But for a mother to develop the heart and to care for the health of her child, she needs to spend all of her time.

We realize that this is true in the family life, yet for some reason we do not apply it to the Body life. The church, which is the Body of Christ, is a big family in the sight of God. In the church life, we do seem to have some fathers. However, we do not have an adequate number of saints who exercise as mothers



to raise up spiritual children with a proper heart. For someone to become so healthy, so tender, so sweet, and so pure in their heart will need a lot of nurturing. This requires some saints to exercise as mothers, which in turn demands a lot of their time. The recovery needs people who know how to spend their time. The more time we spend with the saints the better, because that is how they will grow.

We should not be satisfied just with having a few enjoyable times with the saints. Often a sister may say, “Let me tell you about last Friday night. I was at a sister’s home and we had some cookies and coffee. Then we began to pray. Oh, that was good!” We usually treasure these times too much. After such a time, we think we do not need to do anything more. Sisters, instead of dwelling on times that you have enjoyed in the past, you should be asking yourselves, “How can I have more time with the sisters today?” Then you will spend your time in a more specific and consistent way. This practice of spending your time will bring you into the reality of a healthy pattern.

### **NOURISHING ONE ANOTHER**

Once you are with other sisters, what should you do? In what way should you spend your time with them? Firstly, you must learn the principle of nourishment. When you are together with the sisters, learn to nourish one another. Nourishment should be very normal. You do not need to make issues by insisting on a certain way to spend your time together. For example, you do not need to insist on reading the Bible or a spiritual book, although that may be helpful. Your time should just be normal. You may pray, pray-read, or fellowship with one another. You may cover whatever material the church is covering. As long as you touch the things of life, you will gain life. When you are together with the saints, life is already there. There does not need to be any pressure or expectation. As you are together, simply nourish one another.

When you exercise this way, you should not make yourselves

special. You should not think, “We sisters are the only ones who are together. How come the other sisters aren’t practicing this?” You do not need to regard yourselves as a special group of sisters. If there are only five of you, there is no need for you to insist that others join you. Simply go ahead and practice being together. Eventually, others will learn from you and want to join in. But if you make being together a great demand, it will scare other sisters away. If you practice being together with the sisters who have the time and the burden to do so, then the church will be blessed. Put yourselves with those who are willing, but do not demand that other sisters join you or practice the same thing. Eventually what you are enjoying will affect other sisters, and your labor will be profitable to the entire church.

#### **CARRYING THE CHURCH LIFE PRACTICALLY**

You may also spend your time with the other sisters to carry the church life practically. Some sisters need to develop the habit of noticing the practical needs in the church life. It would be very good to have a set time to work together with other sisters in taking care of these needs. This may include children’s service, cleaning the meeting hall, or any number of matters. This can be done in coordination with the service office or in fellowship with the local elders. However, in carrying the church life practically, you must be careful not to have any opinions. It is easy to become opinionated about what the church should do or in what direction the church should go. Remember that the elders are the ones who lead the church. They are the ones who have a particular view and burden for the church. Even if you are very capable, you must still learn to trust the elders in your local church. Whatever the elders suggest regarding practical service, try to practice it together.

### **GENERATING LIFE FOR THE BODY**

When you are together with other sisters, learn to generate life for the Body. The church life can sometimes become like an old family life in which everything has become stale and routine. The church needs fresh life to be generated. For example, suppose there is an older couple who have a child later than usual. Even though they are older, the fresh life will make them younger. The whole person of the mother and the father will become younger because a new life has come into the family. When your church life seems old and stale, then learn to generate some life to make it young again. Do not live in a routine. Do not think to yourself, "The church life here has always been this way. What can I do?" Learn to generate some life. This could mean reaching out to your neighbors, preaching the gospel to some friends, or having a sweet home meeting to care for the saints. You could pray for these matters with your companions. You may feel that this is only generating life for you and your companions, but actually this life will affect the whole church.

Now we see a picture of living by a healthy pattern. As we have covered before, we should not pay attention to our deeds, but pay attention to our pattern. This pattern consists of three elements. Firstly, we should struggle to be in our spirit, which is to be in the Lord's presence. Secondly, we should exercise to have the church life in our daily life, which includes the matter of companionship. Thirdly, we should treasure the corporate church life, which includes the meetings of the church. These are the basic elements of the healthy pattern. With each of these elements, we need to spend our time. Sisters, learn to designate a specific time to be with one another. If you do not commit yourself to a certain time to come together with other sisters, nothing else will work. Spend your time to nourish one another, to carry the church life practically, and to generate some life for the Body. This is the healthy way to spend your time. If you practice this, it will be a real blessing to the church.

### MUTUALITY

When we are together with the saints, it must be in the principle of mutuality. In the early years of the church, if five sisters were together, they would look to see who had been in the church life the longest. Then that sister would take the lead. For a sister who has the most “seniority” to take the lead is not mutuality. What is mutuality? Mutuality is the Lord Himself taking the lead. When a small group of sisters comes together, they should practice mutuality. Everyone participates, everyone exercises her spirit, everyone is in the Lord’s presence, and everyone is looking to the Lord for His speaking. Then the Lord is the one who takes the lead among them. If the sisters are together, and they pray and exercise before the Lord with everyone participating and with everyone seeking the Lord’s leading, this is mutuality. This does not mean that no sister should take the lead. The Lord may take the lead through someone. Yet everyone functions, everyone operates, everyone has input, and everyone is exercised. This should be our practice.

### THE NEED TO LIVE IN SIMPLICITY

If we desire to practice the church life in this way, then our living has to be simple. If we have not yet learned the secret of living a simple life, then we will not have enough time. Our time will be used up with unnecessary things. We need to learn how to have a simple life. The United States, on one hand, is a very blessed country. It is very easy to be wealthy, compared to the rest of the world. Yet because of all the wealth and riches, in a sense this country is not blessed. If we had only enough money to buy some simple foods, what a blessing that would be to the church life. That would free up some of our time. Instead, we have so much extra food in our refrigerator and freezer; we even throw some of it out. This is a small example of why the church life suffers from the American life-style.

We need to learn how to live simply. Our food should be simple.

We do not need to make too many things, and our cooking does not need to be so complicated. We can cook something that takes longer on special occasions, especially when we have the saints over. When new ones come, that is very special, and we can spend the whole day cooking if we want to. But for our regular family life, we should make it as simple as possible.

The more simply we live, the better. If we have too many clothes or too many pairs of shoes, this shows we are not simple in our living. Sometimes we hear about a sale and get all stirred up. If that is our habit, then how can we live the church life? How will we spend our time? A simple life will give us time and even a heart for the church life. We should live simply, eat simply, and dress simply. We should not always compare ourselves with others. Just because one sister has a certain item in her home does not mean that we also need to have it. We do not need to look around to see if we meet some standard. Everyone is different in the way they handle things. We need to be before the Lord about how to live a simple life. The more simply we live, the more time we will have for the church life.

Once we learn to live simply, we will find out that a lot of things we think we need for the so-called American life-style are unnecessary. We should not always desire or expect to have more. We should not fall into the habit of always buying things that are more expensive. However, this is not a legal matter. We do not need to judge anyone for how they live. We may go to a saint's home and be surprised at how many things they have in their kitchen. But maybe they are able to handle owning these things, while we ourselves could not. If we look around in the church life to pick up ideas about what we should have from other saints, this will make our life too complicated. We should strive to be simple. Simplicity in our living is the secret of having more time for the church.



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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION— CONCERNING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

*Question:* How does Satan attack us, and how should we respond? Is it really true that “all the enemy can do is just release the flow”?

*Answer:* In principle, the work of the evil one comes from two directions. Firstly, Satan’s work is through corruption. Secondly, his work is through suffering and persecution. When Satan first comes to a person, he tries to corrupt and ruin that person. If this does not work, he persecutes that person and makes him suffer. Even though we are in the Lord’s recovery, we can still be tempted by Satan and fall into corruption. However, we usually are rescued very easily because our conscience is sensitive to corruption. When we touch something corrupting, something not so pure and holy, our conscience reacts very strongly. In principle, this strategy of Satan does not accomplish too much in the church life. Therefore, Satan does a lot to bother us, frustrate us, persecute us, and cause us to suffer.

Suffering can produce two results, based on how we handle it. Suffering can break us, which is the positive result. Suffering can also harden us, which is the negative result. The same suffering or difficulty can produce a brokenness in one person and a hardening in another. Some people go through a suffering and become so broken and tender. Another person goes through the same suffering and becomes hard. Sometimes a brother may speak about his sufferings, and while you realize the work of the Lord is there, you also have the feeling that this person has become

hard. He is not broken.

There was one brother in mainland China who went through severe sufferings under the Communists. Yet all of these sufferings made him a hard person. Eventually he joined in with the Communists to persecute the churches in China. Then there was another brother who cooperated with the Communists from the beginning to investigate and persecute the saints. Yet eventually he received some light from the Lord on his person. Out of his realization concerning his failure, he became tender, soft, and broken. Eventually he himself was persecuted and put in prison for the Lord's sake. This teaches us not to trust in what we see. We see things today, but we never know how they will turn out. We must learn to trust the Lord. He knows everything. Whether the suffering we go through eventually releases the flow of life or not is based on whether we become hardened or broken.

What determines whether we become hardened or broken? It is determined by whether we find the Lord in the midst of our suffering. When we are going through something difficult, do we see the Lord's hand? Do we know how to find the Lord and cooperate with Him as we go through the situation? If not, then even though we may say that the Lord is involved, in actuality the suffering will harden us. Whether or not the flow of life is released is based on how we take the suffering. Even when we are under the enemy's attack, if we experience the Lord in our suffering, we will become soft, tender, and broken. This will help release the flow of life.

***Question:** What if we make a mistake that seems too serious for us to go on?*

***Answer:*** Suppose Satan tempts us into making a serious mistake. Is any mistake too large? The answer is no. There is no mistake that is too large or too serious. There is not one sin that the Lord cannot forgive. There is not one failure that He cannot restore us from. Many times a sister will fellowship in tears that she cannot go on with the Lord. She feels that she is no longer qualified to meet with the saints ever again, because she made a



big mistake. Such a sister needs to hear, “Whatever you have done, dear sister, it is over. Just take the precious blood of Jesus. Come back to the church life.” There is no mistake that is too big or too serious. If you have made a serious mistake, simply take the Lord’s precious blood and pursue Him again with all the saints.

**Question:** *Should we sometimes fast when we pray?*

**Answer:** Fasting has value, but it should not be taken as a ritual. The reason we fast is because we are so burdened or concerned about something that we no longer have any appetite. Many times this is not only physical but also psychological. For example, if our loved one is dying, would we still desire food? We would have no appetite for food. In such a situation we may still eat something for our health and for our body’s sake. But we are not eating for the sake of food. This is what it means to fast. Even we may eat something, but because we are so burdened, we are actually fasting. It is not healthy to have been in the church life for many years without fasting. This indicates we have never been overly burdened for a person or a situation. Every once in a while, something should burden us to the degree that we fast as we pray.

**Question:** *What is the secret to having an enlarged heart?*

**Answer:** Actually, there is no secret. However, there are some helpful practices. For example, learn to “swallow” things. The more you learn to swallow things, the more your heart will be enlarged. If you are misunderstood or wrongfully accused, try to swallow it rather than getting upset. Realize that things can be seen from many different angles. Try to find reasons and excuses for others, but do not try to find them for yourself. This will enlarge your heart.

**Question:** *How should a sister decide whether to serve the Lord full-time?*

**Answer:** If the Lord leads you to serve full-time, this is very good. You should also fellowship with the elders in your locality.

To be full-time means that all your time is used for the Lord. There are two different kinds of full-timers. One serves full-time as a learner, the other serves full-time as a commitment. In principle, you first serve full-time as a learner. You give yourself simply to learn. This is why Brother Lee encouraged all the college students to spend two years to read the Life-Studies, read the word, get into the truth, and preach the gospel. After this they can decide to get a job or continue serving. There are many among us who were full-time for two years. They knew it was not something life-long. They desired to spend two years to be in the word and in the truth. This is very healthy.

To be full-time as a matter of commitment requires the Lord's calling. The Lord must really call you. Then after you have the Lord's calling, there should also be some manifestation of your operation. When you desire to be full-time as a learner, you are not concerned about your operation. You are simply learning for two years. But when you desire to serve full-time as a commitment, it is crucial to ask whether you have an operation. Can you operate and function as a full-timer? If you cannot, then to serve full-time will probably frustrate you. You will not even know what to do with all of your time. Operation is a crucial matter. To serve full-time as a commitment, your operation needs to be manifested.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

**QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION—  
CONCERNING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SISTERS**

*Question:* What should we do when one sister is constantly rejecting and refusing to get along with another sister?

*Answer:* This is a typical situation in the church life. It is not really a great problem. It is typical for two sisters to fight with one another. This is also true of a husband and wife. A husband and wife will sometimes fight with each other. This is not so peculiar. When we see that a husband and wife are fighting, we should not get involved. That would only make matters worse. This is also true with these two sisters. There is no need to make it an issue, and we should avoid getting involved. It is certainly not a healthy situation, but it is a typical one.

The church is a large family with hundreds and even thousands of saints. This means that anything can happen. We should not be too bothered by any situation in the church life. If a large family has eight children, this means that the family has eight very different types of people. Yet these eight children are all from the same parents. We should not be surprised if the first child behaves one way and the second child behaves another. This is normal. It is the same with the church life. All of us are very different. We should not be surprised by anything. Nor should we say, “How can this person be a saint in the church life and still behave this way?” For us to say this shows that we do not yet see the Body.

When we talk about the Body, we are usually concerned with the spiritual side. Yet with every brother and sister there is some-

thing that does not belong to the Body. For example, these two sisters who cannot get along with each other both have something of Christ, and they are both members of the Body. Praise the Lord for this. But at the same time, they both have some things that are not of the Body. When these things come out in their relationship it can be very difficult. When the things that are not of the Body come out from so many different individuals, surely it will be messy. In the church life we will see many things which may surprise us. We should realize that anything can happen, and we do not need to get too excited when it does happen.

The sister who is being rejected has a wonderful opportunity. Praise the Lord, she has a sister to “grind” her. In the church life, we should not only appreciate the saints in their spirit. We should also appreciate the Lord’s arrangement of the saints. We even should appreciate what the Lord allows in His government, even allowing the saints to be in their flesh. Why does the Lord often put us with someone who is so difficult? Because we need it. Here is a sister who is not so smooth. Instead, she is filled with “knives.” Whenever you contact her you will get cut. You should not only appreciate her spirit. You should also learn to appreciate all of her “knives” which cut you so deeply. This does not mean that the flesh is good. It means that we have to say, “Lord, thank You for Your government. You did not give me a sister who fits me or matches me. You gave me a sister full of knives to cut me. Lord, because of Your arrangement, this must be what I need.” This is a secret of the church life.

When we see two sisters who cannot get along, there is no need to make them a big issue. We should not even try to make peace between them. Our trying to solve their problem will not work. We should just help them grow. Eventually they will grow out of their situation. The more they can grow, the more their frustrations will diminish. A sister who goes through this kind of situation with another sister and learns how to grow out of it will become very easy to be with. It will allow the Lord to do a deep work in her. When we can help these two sisters to grow, eventually we will accomplish the genuine peacemaking. Our serving

life is to help people be in Christ, not to solve their problems.

If there is a sister in the church life who does nothing but reject you and put you down, learn to praise the Lord for her. Even tell the Lord, “Lord, do not make her too much of a sacrifice on my account.” If she is only putting you down all the time, that means the Lord is sacrificing her for your sake. Learn to pray for her. If she is constantly rejecting you and treating you this way, she will not grow in a healthy way. Therefore you should pray, “Lord, for her sake, I pray that You give her life. Please help her to grow more. Meanwhile, Lord, I take this situation from You.”

Sometimes the reason saints do not get along is because they are competing with one another. We should try not to compete. There is nothing in the church life called competition. For example, we each have ten fingers. Which finger is more crucial? The fingers are all different, but they are all needed. One cannot compete with another. In the same way, we should not compete with anyone in the church life.

***Question:** How should sisters spend their time and fellowship together?*

***Answer:*** To desire to be with sisters is different from desiring to be with sisters to gain Christ. Even people who are without Christ like to be together. They like to be together not with Christ in view, but with an enjoyable time in view. As saints in the church life, we should try to avoid merely having a good time together. Try not only to enjoy a good time, but enjoy a good time in Christ. Fellowship and talk about the Lord. This does not mean we should feel condemned if we talk about our families or about our children’s education and so forth. This is very normal. But it is healthy to also try to fellowship about Christ.

Sisters are very fine. Because they have feelings about everything, they often talk about how they feel. But it is good to realize, “We are not just coming together to talk; we are coming together to gain Christ. Every time we are together, we try to spend time in the Lord’s presence.” This does not need to be

formal. If we make it too formal, it will not last very long. The times when we are together should simply be as needed. It is good to come together on a regular basis to pray and fellowship. If these times are not too formal, they can be consistent over many years.

**Question:** *I work full-time, so I do not have enough time to be with the sisters. What should I do?*

**Answer:** All the spiritual things are based on desire. For that desire to be realized is a matter of time. Of course, when you are short of desire, then how much time you have does not matter. But once you do have a proper desire, you must know how to struggle for time. Learn to squeeze out time. If you work full-time and desire to be with other sisters, then treasure that desire. It will cause you to consider, "Maybe during my lunch break I can visit a sister close by. Maybe after I get home I can take a few minutes to call a sister and read a verse with her over the phone." Eventually you will find a way to have fellowship with the sisters. Your time is in your hands. If you want something enough, you can make the time for it.

Dating is a good illustration. When a young brother and young sister are in love, they always have time for each other. If their time is very limited, they know how to squeeze out ten minutes and go for a walk together. When you consider things in too organized a way, trying to make everything fit a certain format, then you may not have time. But when the desire is there strongly enough, the time is also there. If you strongly desire fellowship with other sisters, you will always have time. You may arrange to drive to work with some sisters in a car-pool, or to take the bus together, and then have fellowship on the way. When you have the desire, you can always work out the time.

**Question:** *In our locality there are many married sisters who are very lonely. As single sisters, how can we be built up with them practically?*

**Answer:** Simply go ahead and be built up with them practi-

cally. If the Lord leads you and burdens you, just go ahead and do it. If the Lord leads you to be with a sister, whether she is married or not married, go and be with her. If the Lord encourages you to have fellowship with a certain sister, then fellowship with her. Our function is a matter of life. We do not need to consider so much or be so legal. We do not need to make an issue about being built up with sisters who are married or who are not married. We should just be simple and realize, “It is life that leads me.”





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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### **GOD'S GOVERNMENTAL PROTECTION OF THE SISTERS**

#### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

In both our family life and the church life God has a divine, governmental arrangement. Concerning our family life, the Bible says, "For a husband is head of the wife as also Christ is Head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the Body" (Eph. 5:23). Concerning the church life, the Bible tells us, "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). First, in practicing the family life, the husband is the head of the wife. Second, in practicing the church life, the brothers are the head of the sisters. This puts sisters in a very difficult place.

#### **THE DIFFICULTY OF THE LORD'S ARRANGEMENT**

Very few husbands understand their wives, and very few brothers understand the sisters. Yet they all act as the "head" of the sisters. For this reason it is much more difficult to be a sister than to be a brother. The husbands tell their wives what to do, and the brothers tell the sisters what to do. This may be completely biblical, but it seems to be an unfair arrangement. For the Lord to be the head of all the brothers makes sense, because the Lord understands them. The Lord can tell the brothers, "I know who you are. I know your situation. I understand you." But the brothers cannot say to the sisters, "I understand you." On the contrary, the

brothers do not know or understand the sisters' situation. Nor can a husband tell his wife, "I understand you," because very few husbands truly know their wives. It is easy for the brothers to submit to the Lord, but it is not so easy for sisters to submit to the brothers or to their husbands. This divine arrangement causes sisters to confront some difficult matters.

This is a practical problem in the family life and in the church life. The sisters are sometimes very spiritual, while the brothers are not so spiritual. After a sister gets married, all of a sudden a non-spiritual brother is her head. How can she then submit to her husband? Even we would ask the Lord, "Why is this so? Why have you arranged it this way?" In the church life it is the same. It seems that if sisters could be elders, they would make fewer mistakes in handling the church. The brothers make big mistakes, but the sisters make minor mistakes. The mistakes that sisters make are not crucial. When a brother makes a mistake, it causes the whole church to do something peculiar, and the brother does not even realize it. We might think that if the sisters could be the leading ones, the church life would be a better place. However, the Lord never ordained it this way. The Lord would tell us, "It is very simple. Sisters, in your family, your husband is your head. And in the church life, the brothers are your head." A sister might want to argue: "But Lord, my husband doesn't take You as his head." The Lord would reply, "That's your husband's business, not your business. Your business is to take him as your head."

**THE REASON FOR THE LORD'S CONCERN  
ABOUT HEADSHIP: THE EGO**

Why is the Lord so concerned about the matter of headship? When we are dealing with the matter of headship, we are also dealing with the matter of ego. If a person's ego is strong, it is difficult for that person to be under someone's headship. The stronger the person's ego, the harder it is for him to take anyone as his head. Why is a woman under the man, and why is a wife under her husband? Why in His government did God ordain things

this way? God ordained things in this way because almost all of the sisters have a strong ego. Sisters can be very egocentric. Furthermore, the ego of sisters is different from the ego of brothers. A brother's ego is easier to handle. For example, when a husband and wife argue, in most cases who wins? Outwardly the husband wins, but in reality the wife wins. The wife wins secretly, while the husband wins openly. In other words, the wife is wise and clever in the way that she handles her husband. She knows how to win. Wives usually know how to handle their husbands, but not many husbands know how to handle their wives. This is because the sisters' ego is stronger. Therefore in His government the Lord stresses the matter of headship with the sisters.

Why does the Bible say that the husband is the head of the wife, and the man is the head of the woman? When we come to the root of the matter, it is not only because the woman has to be under something. It is because there is something particular in a woman's disposition that is very difficult to counteract. The sisters' ego can come out in almost any situation they are involved in. This is why they must be under the proper headship.

A sister may look at her husband and think, "He is my head? Who is he, anyway? He is not so spiritual." This is not a light matter. In looking at their husbands sisters will often consider a few items. "In reading the Bible, my husband is better than I am. In preaching the gospel, no doubt he is effective. With praying in the meetings, he receives a lot of 'amens.' And with his practical serving, he is capable. The only thing is, he doesn't know what is going on. And I do know." This last item becomes the sisters' argument. "Out of all these items, I have the one thing that is the most crucial: my husband doesn't see what he should see, but I see things clearly." A sister may insist on this and talk about this with her husband until he submits. Then she feels that she "made it." After this, she may even tell her husband, "You are the head." Very often sisters tell their husbands, "Why aren't you being the head?" When a sister says this, who is really the head? This reveals that she is actually very opinionated. If she were not opinionated, if she were not so strong, wouldn't her husband natu-

rally take the lead? The reason why he is not the head is because his wife has already subdued him. This kind of interaction may be difficult to speak about, but it is very realistic. It shows that basically the sisters have a stronger, more stubborn ego.

### **HEADSHIP IS FOR THE SISTERS' PROTECTION**

The reason why the Lord ordained that the sisters submit to their husbands in their family and submit to the brothers in the church life is not for the sake of order alone. It is more for the sake of the sisters themselves. We could say that from one angle, the submission of the sisters is for a testimony of God's governmental arrangement. But from another angle, and more importantly, this is the Lord's protection to the sisters. For example, Christ is the head of every man. When brothers exercise in the church life, they must learn to say, "We are under the headship of Christ." When they say they are under the headship of Christ, is that just a matter of order, or is that for their protection? If all the brothers learned the lesson that they are under the headship of Christ, wouldn't they be well-protected? Wouldn't the brothers grow well, and wouldn't the church life become healthy? When God in His governmental arrangement has an order, it is not for the sake of order alone. His arrangement is for our protection.

Many times a sister will complain to the Lord, "I do not believe this is right. I'm much more capable than my husband. Why should I be under him?" Often a sister truly is more capable and more knowledgeable than her husband. Yet the Lord would say very simply, "As a wife, your husband is your head. In the church life, the brothers are your head." If a sister argues back, "Lord, how can this be?" the Lord will say, "Because of you. This is for your sake. This is for your protection." We must realize that God's divine governmental arrangement is not just for the sake of order. His arrangement is for the sake of protection.

Dear sisters, it is good to realize that the Lord has done everything to protect you. Try to have this realization in your family life. As you observe your husband, realize that whether he is ca-

pable or not, whether he is spiritual or not, he is for your protection. The reason he is there is to protect you. Then also have this realization in the church life. You may see elders who to your observation do not know what they are doing. It may seem to you that every time the Lord is doing something, the elders are a frustration. But this is the Lord's arrangement for your protection. The Lord knows the situation better than you do, and He sees everything from a much higher view. Whatever you may think about them, the elders are there for your protection.

### **PROTECTION RESULTS IN BOTH FREEDOM AND LIMITATION**

Sisters, as you are exercising in your family life and church life, you should have a deep sensation, "I need this arrangement for my protection. I do not need what I consider to be freedom." When you are under the proper protection, you do have genuine freedom. The freedom and liberty you have in your spirit comes from the healthy protection. You should realize, "I'm free before the Lord, and I can function so freely in my spirit, but I also remember that I need the protection. When I make a decision, I can fellowship with my husband, and I can fellowship with the brothers. This is for my protection."

Do you realize that protection and limitation are the same thing? At the same time the brothers protect you, they also limit you. It is impossible to be protected and yet not limited. When you desire the healthy protection, you must also take the limitation. Sisters, this is the Lord's arrangement for your sake. Because your ego is so strong, He limits you and protects you by His governmental arrangement. If you realize this, you will be blessed.

### **PROTECTION IS CRUCIAL FOR HEALTHY GROWTH**

The Lord would say, "I know how sisters are built. Because sisters are built with such a strong ego, I desire to render them the proper protection." Sisters, once you see this, you will appre-

ciate your husband, and you will appreciate the brothers in the church life. You will say, “Praise the Lord for my husband. He doesn’t always fit my taste, but he’s my husband, and he is my protection. And praise the Lord that I’m in the church life. I have all these brothers. They may not always seem to be that spiritual, but they are for my protection.” This is the protection that the Lord has given the sisters. You should treasure this protection and realize how crucial it is for your healthy growth. For any sister to grow, for any sister to follow the Lord properly, she must have this protection. The more protection she has, the better.

**HEADSHIP IS A LIVING MATTER,  
NOT A DOCTRINAL ONE**

Sisters, when you consider your family life and the church life, you have to realize that God has no intention just to put you under something. No, God desires to protect you so that you can become normal, healthy, and useful. He desires to protect you so that you can grow well, function well, and become a blessing to the church life. Do not take the matter of headship in a doctrinal way. Take headship in a living way. Realize that in the church life, you are under the brothers. However, the Lord Jesus is also here with you. You can be so free. You can exercise, pray, gather together, and preach the gospel. You can even start home meetings and ask your husbands to support you. By no means is this wrong, and by no means is this “not taking the headship.” However, if at some point your husband tells you, “You probably should not do this right now,” then you must know how to stop. That is to be under the headship. Your exercise can be so free and living, but you realize that you need the protection of your husband’s headship. This is to take the matter of headship in a living way.

**A SISTER SHOULD BE CAREFUL—HER EGO  
MAY GROW TO INCLUDE HER HUSBAND**

We have seen that headship is a protection from our ego. The ego can grow and develop over time, and this is true especially

after marriage. A woman's ego can grow to include her husband. If a woman is not in the church life, after she is married she may force her husband to live the way she wants. She will try to force her husband to be successful and make a great deal of money. In the church life, the ego is more dangerous. When a sister gets married, she wants her husband to become, if not an apostle, at least an elder. Sisters desire to marry spiritual brothers. But after they get married, they find out that their husbands are not spiritual. Which person is most aware that a brother is not spiritual? It is his wife. His wife sees everything in his daily life, and she will eventually question his spirituality. Yet at the same time a wife can push her husband. A married sister will push her husband because she wants him to be more manifested and more useful. A sister can easily demand that her husband become a certain kind of person. It even seems that she did not marry a man, she married her idea of that man. She married her hopes about that man, and she utilizes him to attain her hopes. This shows the strength of her ego. Her husband becomes a utensil for her to attain something. Sisters may feel, "I was born a sister. I cannot be an elder, but I can at least make my husband an elder."

Sisters, how many of you hope that your husband eventually will not be what he is now? How many of you wish that your husband were more prevailing and more useful? You may want your husband to be an elder. If he already is an elder, you may want him to be more manifested. You may unconsciously hope your husband would be like "brother so-and-so" and would give messages, but your husband cannot. In your thoughts, you and your husband are one person. When your husband has a certain kind of attainment, you also have the same attainment. If your husband becomes an elder, you become an "elderess." You may even try to maneuver behind the scenes. Be very careful of this. Do not be condemned by this word, but realize that it is a common psychology. You should expect your husband to grow, love the Lord, and even be manifested and useful to a certain degree. But if you expect him to have a specific place or manifestation in the church life, this shows you have something within you that is

not so pure. Instead of your husband becoming your protection, you will become a frustration to the church.

Sisters, you must be careful. This is why the Lord says that your husband is your head. Do not push your husband. Do not try to reform him or transform him. Do not try to make him into someone or something he is not. You married *him*. You did not marry a hope. You did not marry an idea. Again, you must be careful. You need to see the Lord's arrangement. If you have wisdom from the Lord, you will say, "Lord, thank you. You gave me this husband. If someday by Your mercy he becomes a leading one, then I am thankful. But if he is never that manifested, Lord, I'm just as thankful. If he gives life in the meetings, Lord, I thank You. But even if he never seems to give life, Lord, I still thank You. This is the brother I married. Thank You for giving him to me."

This does not mean that you do not care about your husband's growth or usefulness. Surely you should stand with him, encourage him, and help him grow and be manifested. But you must realize you are not pushing him. You can grow with him and encourage him, but do not handle him. He is your head, and you are not his head. Sisters, be peaceful. As a sister, you are not only under the protection of your husband, but you are also under the protection of the brothers and the protection of the Lord. It is marvelous to be a sister. There is no need for you to struggle. Rather, pay attention to life. Pay attention to being in the Lord's presence. If you learn to be in life and in the Lord's presence, your husband will gain the spiritual profit from you. Then your family will become a real blessing to the church life.

### A CONCLUDING WORD

Now we can understand God's divine, governmental arrangement. Why does God arrange things for you dear sisters to be under the headship of your husband and the brothers? For your protection. Sisters, take the protection. Your operation in the church life needs to be under this protection. Learn to stand with



the brothers in the church. Learn to stand with your husband, whether you think he is spiritual or not. Do not try to force or manipulate your husband. Realize that he is for your protection, and all the brothers are for your protection. For this, may we all receive the Lord's mercy.



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CHAPTER NINETEEN

**QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION—  
CONCERNING OUR FAMILY LIFE**

***Question:** My husband is always busy with the church life. He works all day, spends time with the brothers, goes to the meetings, and brings the church matters home with him. He has no time for his family or for a spiritual relationship with me. What should my attitude be in such a situation?*

***Answer:*** Actually, it is not so bad to have a husband who is like this. Many sisters in the church life are looking for this kind of husband. By the Lord's mercy, you have him. Usually a wife gets quite bothered when her husband is not spiritually manifested. You can be thankful that your husband loves the Lord, is always going to the meetings, and cares so much for the church and for the saints.

However, when your husband is so busy with the church life that he has no time for you, should you be restful? This is very hard to answer. The answer is "yes" and "no." First, you must realize that your husband is, in a sense, your "product." He is the way he is at least partially through your influence. On one hand, you should not try to maneuver your husband. On the other hand, you cannot help but have an effect on his life. Much of your husband's behavior is closely related to how you are yourself. So if your husband is so busy with the church life that he seems to ignore the family, do not put all the blame on him. Take at least half of the blame yourself.

A wife may struggle because her husband does not want to pray with her. For the husband and wife to pray together is diffi-

cult. Often they do not understand each other. What concerns him and what he wants to pray for she does not understand, and vice-versa. As we have said, a man has his pride, and a woman has her ego. For a sister, the most proud person on earth is her husband. This is why sometimes young married sisters need to be cautioned. When a recently married sister says some insulting words to or about her husband, this is a cause for concern. After a sister marries her husband, she may find out that he has certain defects, so she is anxious to try and change him. She may not realize that she is using insulting words. She thinks that she is only giving proper advice, but she is actually insulting his dignity. All the young wives need to be warned never to do this. Be careful. Do not say words that insult your husband. In the long run, to insult your husband will hurt your family life. To everyone else, your husband is humble, but to you he is proud. This is the reason that it is easier for a wife to ask her husband to pray than it is for the husband to ask his wife. It is because he is proud. He may not be proud to anyone else, but he is proud to his wife.

It also helps to remember that sisters are more emotional, so it is harder for the husband to request something from his wife. If a husband says to his wife, "Let's pray," and she is not in a good mood, she may say, "No!" After a few times the husband is not likely to ask again. But in principle, brothers are not as emotional. They live more by their reasoning. So if a sisters asks her husband to pray with her, he is not as likely to say "no." Sisters, if you have not prayed enough with your husband, then simply go to him and ask him to pray with you. See how he responds. It is very unlikely your husband will say "no." At most he might say, "Not now." That is good enough. If he says this, then later you can ask him, "Are you ready to pray?" Eventually he will be ready.

Sisters, learn to fellowship with your husband. Talk with your husband. Encourage him to do spiritual things with you. As your husband becomes more manifested and exercised in the church life, learn to uphold him spiritually. If you learn to practice this, then even when your husband is occupied with the church life, you can still be restful.

**Question:** *To what extent should a sister be exercised in the church life if her husband is not clear about the church? Should she still exercise to her fullest capacity?*

**Answer:** To answer this we need to see that there are four aspects to our operation in the church life. Firstly, our operation is a matter of life. Secondly, it is a matter of knowledge and truth. Thirdly, it is a matter of burden. And fourthly, it is a matter of the divine arrangement. To have a healthy operation in the church life we need each of these four aspects. For example, we may desire to help someone, but if we cannot sense life in our spirit, our operation is over. Then if we desire to help someone and we know the sense of life, but we have never read the Bible, we will still have no operation. Without the sense of life and the equipping of truth, we cannot help anyone. Furthermore, if we are rich in the experience of life and also rich in truth, then when we operate in the church life we still must have a fresh burden. If we are not freshly burdened, our operation will not be effective.

When a sister has a husband who is not clear concerning the church, she must realize that her operation does not depend on the condition of her husband. Her operation depends upon her burden. Perhaps her husband does not love the Lord. She should realize that only the Lord can make people love Him. Whatever situation she is in, she should be filled with the desire to exercise and function. Her fresh burden will cause her to be buoyant and joyful.

Sisters, when you are freshly burdened, you will forget about your situation. You will forget about your husband's condition, and you will even forget about your own condition. The more you are burdened, the more you will capitalize on the life and the knowledge that you have. When you are not freshly burdened, then all of the life and knowledge that you possess is like money in a bank account that just sits there. The money is in the account, but it cannot be utilized because the account is frozen. Sisters, whatever you have, even if it seems like only a little, it needs to be utilized. Do not let your riches become a frozen account. A fresh burden will cause your riches to become a living invest-

ment. You should forget about whether your husband is clear or not so clear. This is not so crucial. What matters is, do you have life, do you have knowledge, and most of all, are you freshly burdened? If you are freshly burdened, then whatever you have of life and truth becomes useful.

Sisters, learn to be burdened. Let whatever you have become a rich investment. Learn to utilize and capitalize on whatever the Lord has given to you. This will make your serving life so useful. When you realize that your capital is frozen, then you need to invest yourself again and again. Before you even begin to get profits from your first investment, invest yourself into something else as well. To constantly invest yourself shows that you are burdened. You do not need to consider, "How about my husband?" Leave that to the Lord. Instead, consider, "Am I freshly burdened?" This is what will build up the church.

There is also a fourth aspect to our operation, which is the divine arrangement. Suppose you have the life and truth to a certain degree, and you are freshly burdened. Then you must also see that there is a divine arrangement. This means that you do not need to hunt for your function. You do not need to think, "No one is giving me the opportunity to function, so I will have to maneuver something." You should learn to trust in the Lord. The Lord has His arrangement. Once you touch the divine arrangement it seems that the whole earth is under you. When you are according to the Lord's arrangement, you will always find a place for your operation. With this arrangement, there may be some limitation which comes from the Lord Himself. You do not need to fight against the Lord's divine arrangement. Perhaps your husband's situation bothers your conscience, so you feel you had better not do too much. But what can prevent you from preaching the gospel? What can stop you from praying with a weaker sister so that she is brought into the Lord's presence? What can hinder you from displaying Christ at your job or in your family? All of these are included in your operation. Therefore once we have life, truth, and a fresh burden, we should also learn to trust the divine arrangement.

**Question:** *As a sister, how can I enable my husband to fully give himself to the church life when this means that he will be gone most of the time?*

**Answer:** To word the question in this way makes it sound as though you do not want your husband to be fully given to the church life, because you think he will be gone most of the time. It should be very normal and healthy to be with your husband and help him give himself to the Lord's recovery. What will be the result? You do not know. You cannot say, "If my husband loves the Lord, that means he will be gone most of the time." It is not accurate or fair to come to this conclusion, so it should not be an issue. Consider the worldly people. How many unregenerated husbands stay at home with their wives? Many worldly families have husbands who are also gone most of the time. How can you know that if your husband loves the Lord and gives himself to the church life, he will be gone most of the time? You do not know this. Maybe your husband will go out a lot, but he will bring you with him. Isn't it possible for the husband and wife to go out and serve together? There is no need to have these considerations. We should just be simple.

This brings us to a difficult lesson. How can you help your husband to love the Lord, yet not maneuver him into loving the Lord? If you love the Lord but your husband does not, you should not try to force him. Instead, your husband will be helped the most by two things: your firmness in loving the Lord, and your godly rest. In the principle of a testimony, you must be firm. To be firm is to be absolute in your love for the Lord, for the church, for the Lord's recovery, and for what the Lord is doing. Then at the same time you should have a godly rest. You should not say to your husband, "If you are against me, you are against God!" To say this shows you are not restful. It will only make your husband angry. If you are firm in your stand, yet always anxious, your husband will not be helped. And if you are restful, but not so firm, he will also not be helped.

Be firm in your stand for the Lord, and at the same time show your husband that you love him. Perhaps on a meeting night, you

can cook him a good meal. Then after dinner you can ask him, "Would you like to go to the meeting with me?" If he says no, you should be restful. After you come home from the meeting, you do not need to say, "The meeting was so good! You shouldn't have missed it!" You do not need to be anxious or nervous. Just be restful. Come home in a very nice way. Maybe you can wash the dishes or do something nice for your husband. Eventually he will realize that you are firm in your stand, yet you are so restful. You are not forcing him to do anything. He will realize that there is something genuine about you that must be from God. Then you are not forcing or manipulating your husband, but you are living in the principle of a testimony. This will make it easier for him to be gained by the Lord.

***Question:** What is the best way to raise up our children?*

***Answer:*** We have to realize that in principle not one of us raises up our children. Not one of us can. We can do our best, but only the Lord can actually raise them up. This is based on the fact of the Lord's predestination. The Lord's predestination is not according to our selection. His predestination is only according to Himself. It is according to His choosing, His selection, and His good pleasure. We have to realize that eventually not one person raises his children. If we do not damage our children, then we have done well enough. We cannot do better. We cannot say, "If I raise up my children in a particular way, then they will love the Lord." If we could do this, then there would be no need for the Lord's grace. We must give the Lord a chance to exercise His grace and mercy.

This does not mean that we do not care for our children. We must care for them. However, we must also realize that we should trust them to the Lord. Within us, we should pray for our children and look unto the Lord's mercy so that they all can be gained by the Lord when they grow up. But we need to learn to trust in the Lord more than we trust in our own labor. We must realize that it is the Lord who raises them up. We should do our best to raise them up to be healthy, but we should not take our children into



our own hands. We must learn to entrust them to the Lord's hands. We must keep reminding ourselves that it is the Lord who raises them up.

Parents should pay attention to being in the Lord's presence while entrusting their children to the Lord's hands. They should also not be overly encouraged or discouraged by their children. When they are young, children will try their best to please their parents. They may even do a lot of spiritual things for the sake of their parents. The parents should not be too excited, because only the Lord knows whether it is real or not. The children may make the parents happy, but after a few years they will try to find out who they really are. When they are behaving spiritually, we should not be too happy. When they are not acting spiritually, we should not be too bothered. We can only pray to the Lord, "Lord, I entrust them into Your hands. I know You are their Lord. Now they are experiencing spiritual things in their childhood. I pray that You would remind them of these little experiences as they grow older."

If a child seems to go into the world, the parents should not be condemned. Sometimes our children may need to experience something which will be good for them in the long run. It is the Lord who will raise them up. This does not mean that we should encourage them to be in the world. We should not tell them, "Go watch a few movies." At the same time, we cannot be overly protective. Our children cannot just grow up as if in a monastery and be separated from society. It is not a matter of telling them to go into the world, nor to avoid the world altogether. As a parent, we just do not know what they need and how they will turn out in the long run. Only the Lord knows this. Parents need to learn this lesson. "Lord, I just do not know. Only You know."

Sisters, be encouraged that your children are the Lord's children. You must know that the Lord loved them from eternity. In fact, from the standpoint of eternity, He loved them more than we did. We would say, "How can someone love the children more than their parents?" But the Lord said in eternity, "I will die for them." The greatest love is that of the Lord. Concerning our chil-

dren, we should try to do our best. Yet we should also speak to the Lord all the time, “Thank You, Lord Jesus. My children are Yours. They’re not mine. You love my son more than I do. Lord, still I pray, make my son useless in the world. Make him only useful in Your recovery. Make him good for nothing but Your testimony.” We can pray for our children this way again and again. Eventually we will realize that we cannot raise our children. Only the Lord can raise our children.

We must learn this one lesson. The Lord is the one who cares for our children. If we overly protect our children, the day will come when we have no more chance to protect them. Then they may have a hard time, because they only know the church life. They do not know how to confront all kinds of people and situations in the real world. Brothers and sisters, eventually we have to learn to trust our young generation to the Lord. We have no choice. We have to learn to pray, “Lord, I entrust my children to You. Please take care of them.”

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

### QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION— CONCERNING THE CHURCH LIFE

*Question:* During the sisters' meetings, the sisters often become critical of each other and of other saints. They sometimes express this through their prayer or through their talk about each other after the meetings. This has caused me to avoid these meetings. What should I do?

*Answer:* When the sisters come together and are critical of one another, it is actually somewhat typical. It is not unusual, so we should try not to be too bothered. Actually, we are all like this. Sometimes in our prayer we may have the realization, "I'm not really praying. I'm actually accusing someone because I'm bothered by them." As we are telling the Lord about it in prayer, we may not have enough love to match our concern, and so it becomes an accusation. Many times in our prayer, when we are praying, we are actually accusing other saints. We have to realize that in the church life, although this is unhealthy, it is typical. It is also typical when we are praying together to be bothered by the prayers of other saints, because their prayers do not seem to be so pure. Not many of us can get away from this. One of the hardest lessons for us to learn is not to make an issue about other people. What is the secret of dealing with such a situation? Firstly, we have to realize that it is typical.

We could even say that in the church life, unhealthiness is typical. For example, in the entire Bible, which church is healthy? Was Jerusalem healthy? The situation there was a mess. Eventually the Lord had to come in and clear up that situation. When

Paul wrote his epistle to the Ephesians, the church seemed to be quite healthy. But in the book of Revelation the church in Ephesus had lost its first love. Of the seven churches in Revelation, which church is entirely healthy? In a sense, we have to realize that when we step into the church life, we are stepping into something that is not completely healthy. This may be quite different from our expectations. It seems that in the church life there are all kinds of problems. If we have been in the church life many years, how many things are truly encouraging? Not only the prayers of the saints, but many things that we do in the church life may not be so proper. As long as we are human beings, everything will have its problems. When we see saints accusing other saints in their prayers, or when some sisters criticize each other after the meetings, we should treat that as something typical. We may be concerned about it, but we should not be overly bothered. We should realize that in the church life it is typical for things to be unhealthy.

While we are treating these situations as typical, we must also pay attention to our stand. Our stand is crucial. Our stand should not be, "Because this is unhealthy, I will try to get away from this situation. I will try to get away from the saints who have this problem." Such a stand will cause us to miss the Body life. In the Body life we should not escape from the weaker ones. Instead, we should spend more time with the weaker ones. This is to have the proper and healthy stand.

For instance, suppose a mother and father have several children, and one of their children has a medical condition. In that case, which child will the parents love the most? Their love for all their children will be the same. But who will the parents care for the most? The child with the medical problem will receive the most care, not the children who are healthy. The parents love all of their children, but they will care the most for the weaker one. Because one child has a certain limitation, that child will occupy more of the parents' care and concern.

In the same manner, when we see some saints with problems, we should not try to get away from them. Instead, we should go

to them. Our stand should be, “There is something lacking with them, so therefore I want to spend more time with them.” This stand is a blessing. We should go to the saints who are in need. We should go to the saints who are “headaches.” We should go to the saints who do not have the adequate spiritual understanding. That is where we will learn how to serve the Lord and strengthen the church.

When there is a lack of Christ, how can a situation be healthy? When saints do not have the adequate experience and maturity of life, what else can they do but fight and struggle with one another? Yet what should be our stand? Our stand is that we go where the problems are. We should remember that it is typical for saints to accuse one another in their prayer. It is typical for saints to refuse to speak to one another. It is typical for saints to not make the meetings. These are not great problems. Then what is our stand? We are those who desire to love the Lord and love the church. Because we are learning to serve the Lord, our stand is to go directly into the unhealthy situations. For example, the more someone prays without being in spirit, the more we will pray with them until they learn how to pray in their spirit. Then the accusations in their prayers will not last. The more someone is a problem, the more we want to spend our time with them. That is our proper and healthy stand.

As we are taking this proper stand, we do need wisdom. To handle all of the matters in the church requires wisdom. We need wisdom to know when we should fellowship, when we should wait for awhile, when we should talk about something, and when we should not make something an issue. We need this wisdom from the Lord. As we take the proper stand, we need wisdom in our exercise. Wisdom is generally related to our experience. When we first begin to help the saints, our wisdom could be quite shallow. Eventually we will learn that in caring for one person we have to be firm and direct, and with another person we just have to let their situation go. With some, we have to confront their situation. With others, we need to be blind to their situation. We need wisdom to handle all of the different situations.

This wisdom in caring for people requires us to be in the Lord's presence. No one has wisdom except the Lord. Wisdom is actually a virtue that comes out of the life of Christ. A person who is in the life of Christ is a person who is in the wisdom of Christ. We need to be very wise. How should we help one sister? How should we fellowship with another sister? We need wisdom in our exercise. We do not need to treat a particular situation as a problem. We should treat it as something typical. Then we should step into the situation and begin to be with the sisters. We will not give them up. Therefore we need the proper stand, and we need wisdom.

There is one further item that we need. We need trust. We must trust in the Lord, and we must trust that the Lord is working and operating in every saint. We can never serve effectively if we do not trust that the Lord is working in the saints we are with. We have to trust that the Lord is able to do whatever He needs to do in them. When we look at the sisters with us, we should be full of hope. We should even see them as transformed and glorious sisters. This means that we do not just see today, but we look forward to the result of the Lord's work. This is something more than hope. This is trust. We should trust in the marvelous work that the Lord is doing in the saints we serve. In the church life, we need to practice this. We should have trust in our brothers and sisters, because we trust that the Lord is doing something in them. We know that no matter what situation they are in, they can be helped, rescued, and restored. We are willing to pay the price for them, because we know that in the long run they will be useful to the Lord and His recovery.

To summarize, as long as there is a church life, there will be all kinds of problems. We should realize that this is typical. When the problems do come, we should have a proper stand. We should not avoid the problems, but enter into the situation so that the saints can be helped. With that proper stand, we need wisdom. This means that we must spend time in the Lord's presence. And as we exercise according to our wisdom from the Lord, we should trust in what the Lord is doing. We should refuse to give up on

anyone. We must learn to trust the Lord's work. We should have the view that every sister we are with can become the most useful sister in the Lord's recovery. This should be our practice with all the saints.

**Question:** *How should sisters who are students function properly in the church life?*

**Answer:** Sisters who are students should just function normally. One helpful thing to realize, however, is that as a student you have more time and flexibility. You may feel that you are busy, but you actually have more time as a student than you will at any other time in your life. How should you function in the church life? Just function normally, but treasure your time. Also, treasure where the Lord put you. Use your time to labor on the campus where the Lord put you.

**Question:** *There are some young sisters in my locality that I'm very burdened for. Lately I've been somewhat discouraged, because it seems they are still attracted by so many things in the world, and they do not have much of a heart to love the Lord and go on in the church life. How can I help them practically without judging or condemning them?*

**Answer:** To bring a person to love the Lord and give himself to the church life requires us to pay a very high price. To get a person to become a member of a denomination or a Christian group requires no price. This is the difference between the church and a denomination. Both the church and the denominations are trying their best to help people. But the principle the denominations use is, "What can we give you so that you will become a member of our group?" A pastor's job is to do his best to please his members. He has to generate all sorts of programs to satisfy their needs. He learns never to give a message on Sunday morning that is longer than fifteen minutes. People are not there for truth. They do not care so much about Christ. They only care about the program that fits them.

In a sense, you can even say that a denomination purchases its

members. There is a mutual profit involved between the pastor and the members of his congregation. A pastor could say, "I will give something to you, and you will give something to me. In eternity, I will give you heaven. Today, I will give you a social life, entertainment, and consolation. In return, you will become my members, and you must also occasionally offer your money." This is a mutual exchange.

In contrast to a denomination, the church life does not give you anything, but asks you to give everything. Once you are in the church life, you do not get anything, but everything goes to the Lord. This is a big difference between us and the denominations. But many times in the church life, we practice what the denominations practice. We care for people and try to gain members in a similar way. We do not purposely do this, but we do it unconsciously.

For example, we invite people for dinner to spend time with them, which is right. But then we assume they will give themselves to the church life. No one is going to give their whole life to the Lord because our food tastes good. We should invite people to our home, but not in the way of bribing them. We must realize that a dinner alone will not work. Why? Because we are not a denomination. A denomination has something mutual. "I fit you, and you fit me. I will work out a program for you, and you will come to my service." But when you come to the church life, you realize, "This is God's divine economy! This is God's eternal purpose!" All of a sudden, everything becomes so high. You realize this demands your whole life. This demands all your time, this demands all your being, and this demands all your person. You have no more future, no more world, and no more entertainment. You only have Christ.

Of course, we would all say, "Amen! This is so good!" But those who have not really touched life will not know what we are talking about. For a sister to say, "I have a burden for young people," is very healthy. But sister, you must realize that these young people will not necessarily give themselves to the Lord just because you are burdened for them and take good care of



them. They know that to be in the church life is not a small thing.

Many who were in Christianity and came into the church life had to decide, "Should we go this way or not? Once we go this way, everything is over. Once we come here, we are not going to have anything left for ourselves. Everything belongs to the Lord." Many people see this before they come into the church. In this modern age, if a young woman comes to our meetings just a few times, she knows what will happen if she goes this way. All she has to do is look at the sisters and she knows that she will have to pay a price. If she goes the way of the church, her life will be simple. No one has to explain to her, "Once you come to the church life, everything else is over." She knows that just by looking at the sisters' faces. Then no matter how much she may enjoy your love and care, and no matter how many times you may have her over for dinner, she still has to consider: "Is this worth it? Is this worth my whole life?" She knows that for her to be in the church life requires a great price.

Since this is the actual situation, how should we help the ones we are burdened for? We must help them know the enjoyment of the Lord in their spirit. For us to be fruitful, whether with our neighbors, our colleagues, or the young people in the church, we must realize, "If I cannot help them to have the inward enjoyment of Christ, they are not going to come this way." They may try to be your good friends, but they know that you are for the Lord. After they have been your friends for awhile, they will realize that even friendship with you is not so easy. Even without making any issues, your person convicts them. This is why we must learn to help people enjoy the Lord. If you have a burden for some young sisters, then you must help them touch their spirit. The reason people give themselves to the Lord is that they have touched the Lord in their spirit. They have tasted something so good and so divine. They have tasted God Himself. This will cause them to be willing to give up the world and come into the church life. They need an enjoyment that is higher than all the enjoyments in the world. Then they will give up everything.

If we desire to be fruitful, it is not a matter of inviting people

over and having a good time with them. We need to help people touch the highest enjoyment in their spirit. From that enjoyment they are willing to pay any price. For this labor with people, we must have consistency. If you are with young sisters, you should realize, "I am with these young sisters because I am burdened for them. They still love the world, but I'm not discouraged. As long as I'm with them, I will help them have the highest enjoyment. Maybe they are not ready now, but sooner or later I will pray with them. I will enjoy the Bible with them. In the Lord's timing, I will help them touch the highest enjoyment in the universe. Then they will love the Lord and be willing to pay any price for the Lord's sake."

When we love the Lord, we do not feel that we are actually paying a price. We feel that to love and serve the Lord is so glorious. We do not feel that we are sacrificing anything, because we are enjoying something so high. We are with the brothers and sisters living the highest life God has given to human beings. In our caring for people, we should bring them to the same enjoyment. Good relationships with them are needed, but that alone will not work. Good relationships are a means to know people so that they are open to us and can be brought into this enjoyment. Eventually what brings people to follow the Lord and give up the world is the enjoyment in their spirit. We should not trust in other things. We must bring them to this enjoyment.

When some new ones come to a meeting, we should not be too excited. Meetings alone do not mean so much. What matters is that outside of the meetings someone is able to help bring these new ones into the experience of Christ. If no one can do that, then these new ones will eventually look for a place that fits them. We must help the ones for whom we are burdened to know the highest enjoyment in their spirit. This will cause them to drop everything for the church life.

PART IV

THE EFFECTIVE  
OPERATION OF  
THE SISTERS IN  
THE CHURCH LIFE



THE CHAPTERS IN THIS SECTION WERE ORIGINALLY  
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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### **THE PURPOSE OF WOMAN ACCORDING TO GOD'S CREATION**

#### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

In this section we will cover the effective operation of the sisters in the church life. We will firstly look at what the Bible says about the meaning and purpose of the sisters' existence. Then we will cover how the sisters should operate in their human relationships, particularly as wives and mothers. Thirdly, we will see how sisters can become pillars in the church life. The last message consists of questions and answers. We look unto the Lord that He would give us an encouraging word to strengthen all of us in our following of Him. We also pray that this word would enable us all to become a real blessing to the church life in our localities.

#### **GOD'S CREATION OF MAN: MALE AND FEMALE**

What is the purpose of woman according to the Bible? For our basic understanding we must come to the beginning of the Bible to see God's creation of man and woman. Genesis 1:26-27 says, "And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion.... And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." There are two different verbs used in the creation of man: "make" and "created." First God

said, "Let us *make* man." Then the Bible continues, "And God *created* man." The word "created" was used when woman was involved. "And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." When God created man, He created them male and female.

Sisters, we need to realize that in the sight of God, it takes a male and a female together to compose the unit called "man." When God created man, He did not just create one man. He created the male and the female, and together they were called "man." These verses show us that by ourselves we are not complete. If a brother is by himself he is not complete, and if a sister is by herself she is not complete. The only exceptions are with a special arrangement and calling under God's divine government. In principle, God always looks at two as one unit. When God sees a brother, He spontaneously and automatically sees the brother's wife. When God sees a sister, He also sees the sister's husband. For this reason a brother can never say, "I am prevailing, but my wife is defeated," or, "My wife is prevailing, but I am defeated." This kind of speaking is not healthy, because from God's perspective there is no such thing. God only sees one unit made up of male and female. If one half of the unit is prevailing, the other half is also prevailing. If one half is defeated, the other is also defeated. This is not according to our concept. We do not usually realize that this kind of oneness exists between a husband and a wife. But God sees this oneness absolutely and completely. The husband and wife are inseparably and totally one in God's sight. When we have such a high realization, we will understand that a sister alone is not complete in herself.

**MAN'S NEED FOR A WOMAN  
TO BE HIS HELPER**

Genesis 2:18 describes in detail how the woman came into existence: "And Jehovah God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart." A wife should learn to speak to her dear husband in this way: "It is not

good for you to be alone.” This principle is lost in today’s culture. In today’s culture and society, a wife is supposed to be struggling for her “rights” as a woman. There is no view or realization that man is alone and needs a counterpart. But what does God say? “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper as his counterpart.” When the Lord speaks of woman, He speaks of her as a helper. This means that a sister’s existence is with a specific goal. A man might be able to come into existence in a seemingly random way, as if he were born without a goal. But a woman can never come into existence this way. Why? Because man was simply made, but woman came into existence with a specific purpose in view.

Genesis 2:19-20 says, “And Jehovah God formed from the ground every animal of the field and every bird of heaven, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called any living animal, that was its name. And the man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of heaven and to every animal of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper as his counterpart.” God brought all the animals to Adam, but Adam did not find a helper. In other words, there was a kind of “dating” going on here. God was basically telling Adam, “Pick one of these animals as your wife. Would you like to marry a lion? Would you like to marry a dog?” And Adam was so brilliant that he was able to name all of these creatures. But eventually he said, “Not one of these animals matches me. Not one of them can become my wife.” Adam was just not able to find any creature who could meet his need.

After Adam named all of the animals and also realized that none of them matched him, the Bible continues the story: “And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. And Jehovah God built the rib, which He had taken from the man, into a woman and brought her to the man” (Gen. 2:21-22). Although this story seems so simple, it is actually an exact picture of what happened as a result of the Lord’s death. In Genesis, Adam slept; on the cross, the Lord also “slept.” As

Adam slept, his side was opened; while the Lord was on the cross, His side was pierced (John 19:34). Jehovah God took something out of Adam and used it to build a woman. In like manner something came out of our Lord Jesus, the blood and water which flowed from His side, and God used this to produce the church as His counterpart. In the same way that God sees a man and his wife as one entity, God also sees Christ and the church as one entity.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WOMAN BEING “BUILT”**

There are three different words we have to pay attention to: “made,” “created,” and “built.” “Made” refers to something produced from something else already in existence. Man was made out of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). He was made not out of something precious, but rather out of something base and common. However, God made man according to His likeness. Man appears just like God. So on one hand, man is precious, having been made according to God’s appearance. But on the other hand, man is corruptible and base, having been made of the dust.

Then for God to accomplish His purpose with man, there was the need of something created. The word “created” refers to something produced out of nothing. We were created in God’s image, and this refers to our spirit. Our body was made out of the dust, but our spirit was created out of God’s breath of life. Our created part is much more precious than the part of us which was made. Furthermore, when God’s breath of life came into contact with man’s physical body, a third part of man was produced; man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Therefore, from God’s creation of man we have a spirit, a soul, and a body.

When the Bible speaks of the woman, however, it says that she was built: “And Jehovah God built the rib, which He had taken from the man, into a woman and brought her to the man” (Gen. 2:22). For the man to be produced, it was very simple. God simply formed the dust, with Himself as the pattern. Then



He breathed in the breath of life, and man became a living soul. With the woman, however, the matter was more complicated, because the woman was built out of something from Adam. The woman was built out of something from man. Why was she built? “And Jehovah God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart.” The woman was built to be the helper of the man.

### **THE WIFE BEING BUILT TO MEET HER HUSBAND’S NEED AND WITH HIS SPIRITUAL PROFIT IN VIEW**

Sisters, you need to see again that in the sight of God, the man and the woman are one entity. Then what is the woman’s place? According to the Bible, the woman’s place is that of a helper. She is a helper to meet man’s need. This means that a wife’s place is to meet her husband’s need. Because she is a helper to meet her husband’s need, her coming into existence was somewhat complicated. The woman was not made, nor was she created. The woman was built to meet the need of her husband. This is a profound matter. Anything that is built requires a blueprint, which is an exact design according to a specific purpose. Every woman was built according to a blueprint. This blueprint is the man for whom she was built.

There is a difference between a man and a woman. A man can be somewhat rough or crude, because he was made. But a woman has to be fine and delicate, because she was built. A man can be common, because he was made. But every woman is specific, because every woman was built in a detailed way according to a specific purpose. This is why every sister is unique. Every sister should realize, “I am special. I was built for a reason. I was built with a purpose. I was built to meet my husband’s need.” And every married brother in the church life should treasure the sister the Lord has given to him. The brothers should realize, “My wife is unique. On the whole earth, there is no other sister like her. She was built to be my helper. She is exactly what I need.”

This realization does not come with today’s culture. The mod-

ern thought is that woman should be equal with man, or even stronger than man. To speak of the purpose of a woman's existence being to meet her husband's need would be considered nonsense. But according to the Bible, the man and the woman have their respective functions. Between a wife and her husband, who is more fragile? We would all probably agree that it is the wife. But at the same time, which one operates in a greater and finer capacity? Again, it is the wife, because she was built, and not merely made. Anything that is built will operate more than something that is made. Anything that was built will be fine and delicate, but anything that is made can be quite rough and coarse. The man was made, and the woman was built. This really means that man has no way to compare with woman. A sister can tell her husband, "You were made, but I was built." A sister is a delicate, precision-built entity. But no matter how wonderful a sister is, she must remember that she was built for one purpose: as a helper to her husband. The husband is the blueprint for the sister's existence.

Man was created with something glorious in view. He was created in God's image and after God's likeness for the fulfillment of God's purpose. But man by himself has no way to attain such a glorious existence. For this reason, God realized that man needs a helper. Who is the helper? All of you dear sisters are the helpers. This kind of help cannot come from something which is merely made. This help can only come from something which is built. Every wife is built with her husband's spiritual profit and gain in view. So sisters, you need to see a profound yet simple vision. You need to see that God never intended for a woman to be a unit by herself. In the sight of God, the husband and wife together are one entity. Then with this realization, you should value who you really are: a helper. You were made according to a purpose. What is that purpose? To be a help to your husband. Every wife came into existence by being built according to her husband's need and with his spiritual profit in view.

**SISTERS SHOULD BE PEACEFUL AND RESTFUL:  
THEY ARE WHO THEY ARE BECAUSE  
THE LORD BUILT THEM THAT WAY**

You sisters are exactly who you are supposed to be. The Lord is absolutely satisfied with you being the way you are, because He built you in every detail according to the blueprint of your husband. It is a blessing to have this realization from the Lord. This realization will free you sisters from so much unnecessary pressure to change yourself. Sisters often become very frustrated with self-imposed standards. Sisters must realize that who they are in their person is exactly who they are supposed to be. Every sister is the way she is because of her husband's needs. This includes all of her strengths and weaknesses and all of the things she would rather change about herself. Sisters do not need to be someone they are not. The sisters should be at peace with how the Lord has built them.

Sisters put a lot of pressure on themselves. Very few sisters are restful and peaceful. A sister usually desires to be someone different from who she really is. With almost every sister there is a struggle taking place within her, because she is striving to become what she is not. Sisters, you have to realize that you are not intended to be so "spiritual." You are not intended to be someone different than you already are. You should be restful, because the Lord built you as you are with the intention that you would be a help to your husband. It is by your being who you are that your husband gains the most profit. No husband can ever gain more profit or be more helped by his wife if she tries to become what she is not. Sisters should be restful, joyful, and peaceful. When you become so aware of your limitations, and when you desire to be someone that you cannot be or do something that you cannot do, then you should remember that you were built to be the way you are. You should realize, "I was built with this limitation. I was built without this ability. The Lord wants me to be exactly who I am, because that is the best way to meet my husband's need." This is why the sisters should be restful and joyful.

The brothers should also have this realization. When a brother is first married, he may try to reform and change his wife. But eventually he should learn to just take her as she is, and be joyful. He should realize, “The reason my wife is like this is because I need her to be this way. She was built and designed for me. It is by being exactly who she is that she is a blessing to me from the Lord.” Every husband should appreciate his wife based upon how she was built. Brothers always have their concepts about what a “good wife” should be, but only the Lord knows what kind of helper is best for each husband. The Lord knows how to build a wife to meet her husband’s need and to render him the most spiritual profit.

#### **THE SISTERS BEING SUBJECT TO THEIR HUSBANDS**

For a sister to be the best helper to her husband, she must have a view concerning God’s governmental arrangement. Ephesians 5:22 says, “Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord.” This verse indicates that in God’s governmental arrangement, the husband and the wife have their respective places. It is much easier for a sister to be subject to the Lord than to be subject to her husband. Why? Because the Lord is so holy, but her husband is so “dusty.” However, in God’s eyes, the sisters must learn to subject themselves to their husbands, even though they are “dusty.” Perhaps when a sister was first married, she imagined that her husband was made out of the gold of the New Jerusalem. Soon every sister finds out that her husband actually was made from the dust of the earth. But even so, she still must submit to her husband. As we shall see, this can only be done by the enjoyment of the Spirit.

#### **THE HUSBANDS LOVING THEIR WIVES**

The sisters must submit to their husbands, and the husbands must love their wives. “But as the church is subject to Christ, so

also let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:24-25). The demand upon the wife is much easier to meet than the demand upon the husband. The husband must love the wife to the degree that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. The husband has to learn to give himself up for his wife. In other words, the husband must lose his personality in the presence of his wife. No lesson is harder for a husband than this. If a husband is always trying to reform his wife, it is because he has not learned to give himself up for her. Many husbands refuse to give up their personalities when there are conflicts at home. This is because they are short of the understanding that each wife is the way she is because that is what is best for her husband.

### **THE NEED FOR THE WASHING OF THE WATER IN THE WORD**

Ephesians 5:26-27 continues, “That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.” The way that the Lord operates in the church life, cleansing the church by the washing of the water in the word, is also the way the Lord wants to operate in each family. The relationship between husband and wife can be maintained at its highest level only through the continual experience of the washing described in this verse. Once this washing ceases, then God’s sweet arrangement between the husband and wife also ceases. The enjoyment of washing may then be replaced by doctrinal law-keeping, in which the husband demands submission from his wife, and the wife demands love from her husband.

The Lord’s operation in the family life is according to the same principle as His operation in the church life. He cleanses the church, washing her in the water of the word. The water is the flowing Spirit, the divine life of God. The word here is the in-

stant, living word which the Lord speaks to us. According to Ephesians 6:17, footnote 4, from the *Recovery Version of the New Testament*, the instant word of the Lord's speaking comes from the constant word of the Bible. In other words, both the Spirit and the Bible are necessary for the washing. For any family to have the reality of the husband as the head and the wife as the helper, the washing of the water in the word is essential. The enjoyment of the Spirit with the truth in the Bible will bring both the husband and the wife into their proper roles.

Ephesians 5:23 calls the Lord "the Savior of the Body." The Lord can only be the Savior of the Body by sanctifying us and cleansing us through the washing of the water in the word. Often in our experience we forget that we are fallen, so we attempt to guide our families with our own ethics and moral principles. We maintain an appearance of peace in our family, but without the washing of the Spirit. If this is the case, then a great part of the church life is gone. Problems in the church very often stem from problems in the family life. Even when both the husband and wife love the Lord, that does not necessarily mean that the family is spiritually healthy. There must be the spiritual joint-operation of the husband and wife according to God's design. For a family to become a blessing to the church, there is the desperate need for the washing of the water in the word.

"The water in the word" is a meaningful utterance. Water is able to wash and to soothe. In such a busy, consuming world, it is easy for us to become a "dry" wife or a "dry" husband. We simply fulfill our family obligations, but without any enjoyment of the water of the word. It is not unusual to lose the sweetness of a family life that operates in harmony with the Lord. Therefore we need to be saved daily into the reality of a spiritually healthy family life by enjoying the washing of the water in the word. This means to enjoy the Spirit, to enjoy the truth in the Bible, and to allow the constant word of the Bible to become the instant speaking of the Lord to us.

**OUR FAMILY BECOMING A BLESSING THROUGH  
THE ENJOYMENT OF THE SPIRIT**

God made man in such a wonderful way. He created a spirit within us, by which we can receive and enjoy Him as the Spirit. Yet for some reason we are always neglecting the Spirit with regard to our family life. We need the water, which is the Spirit, for our family life. When we are washed in the water of the word, then our family life will become soothing, peaceful, and enjoyable. In turn, our family will become a blessing to the church.

The subjection of the wife and the love of the husband must take place through the Spirit. Subjection and love that come out of human strength are of no value. The wife cannot be a help to her husband when she is striving by her natural effort to be subject to her husband, because the element of the Spirit is not there. The Spirit must become the strongest element in the existence of your household. Sisters, your family life in the church life must be filled with the fragrance of the Spirit. This does not have to be complicated, but it is absolutely necessary. Sisters should help their husbands and one another to have a strong and healthy spirit. In your family life, perhaps there can be short but genuine prayers before mealtimes. You can keep a Bible near your dinner table and read a verse before and after eating. There can be many different ways, but you should help your family remain refreshed in the Spirit. Then through the constant cleansing and washing of the water in the word, your family and the entire church life will be richly blessed.





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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### **OPERATING AS A SISTER, WIFE, AND MOTHER**

#### **THE CREATION OF MAN AND THE BUILDING OF WOMAN**

We have seen that man was made in the image and likeness of God. For man to be made in the likeness of God is for man to have the appearance of God outwardly. For man to be made in the image of God is for man to have the substance of God inwardly. God created a human spirit within man so that man could receive Him as life. God made man in this way for the fulfillment of His purpose. But such a goal was not intended for the male individually. In God's divine wisdom, God built for every man a woman, a counterpart, which makes this man complete and whole. For God to accomplish His eternal purpose, He needs the male and female together as one entity.

According to the Bible, the woman is man's helper. This implies an inequality between male and female. Within a family, the man is the head and the woman is in subjection according to God's arrangement. However, this is not a matter of superiority or inferiority. The male and the female are one unit, and each has a function according to God's creation. When the female is first mentioned in the Bible, she is mentioned as a part of man. When the Bible speaks of man's creation, it says, "And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). So within the man created by God, there was the female. The male and the female are one unit called "man."

**THE FEMALE BEING DESIGNED TO MEET THE  
NEED OF THE MALE IN HIS FUNCTIONING**

When this unit called “man” operates, it is the male that operates most visibly. The female may not stand out, but she is there to meet the need of the male in his functioning. This is a great matter, and many do not understand it. A husband may feel that he has a good wife if she can cook, clean the house, manage the children, and do other practical things. But this concept is far too low, and these functions are secondary. A good wife is one who meets the need of her husband in his function and in his operation. Sisters, you should realize that your person, your intelligence, your disposition, your abilities, and even your weaknesses all contribute to one purpose: to meet the need of your husband in the best possible way. There is no need for you to be someone or something that you are not. Your design is perfect for you to be a help to your husband so that he and you together can carry out God’s purpose. Who and what you are is exactly the best for your husband. This is truly a glorious realization.

The sisters must see this vision. You were built specifically with your husband in view. You are who you are entirely for your husband’s sake. If you are unable to cook, it means that your husband needs a wife who is unable to cook. If you are unable to balance the checkbook, it means that your husband needs a wife who is unable to balance the checkbook. You do not have bad qualities, and you do not have good qualities. There is no such thing as a good or bad quality. Every quality you have is according to your husband’s need.

**THE NEED FOR THE SPIRIT AND THE  
WORD IN OUR FAMILY LIFE**

We have also seen that this revelation is practically realized only through the washing of the water in the word (Eph. 5:26). We need the Spirit, and we need the word. When a marriage life is filled with the Spirit and the word, then that marriage can stand to fulfill God’s desire. The husband’s love for his wife and the

wife's submission to her husband should not be demands that they place on each other. These virtues must come from the Spirit. We need the enjoyment of the Spirit and the word (both the constant word of the Bible and the instant word of the Lord's speaking) to maintain the sweetness of the married life. When a family is continuously washed by the water in the word, then that family will become a blessing to the church.

**THE THREE-FOLD OPERATION OF THE SISTERS:  
AS SISTERS, WIVES, AND MOTHERS**

Now we come to the three-fold operation of the sisters. The sisters operate in three different capacities: as sisters, wives, and mothers. Of course, these operations are interrelated. In the Bible there are very few verses that explain how to be a good sister, a good wife, or a good mother. It seems that God unveils certain principles and then leaves the working out of those principles to each sister. Many of you dear sisters would like to discover the formula which would assure you the pathway to being a proper sister, wife, and mother. But the Bible never gives formulas. It only supplies principles, and each of us should look unto the Lord for how we should apply these principles in our lives.

**THE WIVES' LOVE FOR THEIR HUSBANDS**

We know that the Bible admonishes the husbands to love their wives. Surprisingly, there are no verses in the Bible which command the wives to love their husbands. This is because there is a natural law within the female to love her husband. In principle, once a woman marries, her love will spontaneously rise up for her spouse. Seldom is there the need to admonish wives to love their husbands. This does not mean that a sister can simply marry anyone, and that she will then love him regardless of who he is. Before marrying, a sister ought to have the proper feelings about the brother she will marry. But it is still part of God's creation that once a sister is married, her love will automatically rise up

for her husband.

On the other hand, because of today's culture, there may be some need to admonish wives to love their husbands. Historically, the wife's entire life centered on her husband. The husband would leave his home every day to go to work and support his household, and the wife in turn would focus her entire life on her husband and her family. So the Bible reminds the husbands to be centered on their wives and to show the proper love towards them. However, today, as more sisters have jobs or careers, they too need to be reminded about loving their husbands. Sisters, the center of your life should not be anything outside of your husband. Your husband must be the center of your life.

### **THE SISTER AS THE WEAKER VESSEL**

First Peter 3:1 says, "In like manner, wives, be subject to your own husbands." Then verse 7 says, "Husbands, in like manner dwell together with [the wives] according to knowledge, as with the weaker, female vessel." When we put these verses together, we will realize that although the wife should be in subjection to her husband, the husband must properly understand his wife's function. A good husband should never put things upon his wife that she cannot handle. He should not pressure her with things that she is unable to bear. Instead, he must realize that she is the weaker vessel. This is for him to dwell with his wife according to knowledge.

According to First Peter, sisters are "weaker vessels." Although "weak" can mean "fragile," it also can mean being unable to use one's faculties properly. For example, when a sister gets upset, she often loses restraint on her emotions, while a man can usually control his emotions. A sister's mind is very apt to wander and dwell on thoughts which may have no value. A sister may be unable to resist certain temptations, such as shopping or enjoying holidays, because she lacks the will to resist. For the sister to be the weaker vessel can mean that her normal human faculties are not always working properly.

On the other hand, being a weaker vessel can also mean that the mind, the emotion, and the will are too strong. When sisters are too strong, they actually become weak. A sister's mind may become very strong—strong to the point of stubbornness. A sister's emotion may become very strong—strong to the point of being irrational. A sister's will may become very strong—strong to the point of inflexibility. Sisters, you should realize that your “strength” may actually become your weakness. For this reason it is good to pray, “Lord, have mercy on me in my weakness.” If you have this realization, then you will be protected.

Because they are the weaker vessel, the wives should remain subject to their husbands. Sisters are different from brothers, and they need a covering. Often a sister genuinely feels, “How can I be subject to *my* husband? You do not know what he is like. He is just not that spiritual.” But sisters, regardless of who your husband is, his vessel is stronger. His mind, emotion, and will have a greater capacity. Once you realize this and accept your husband as your covering, you and your family will surely be blessed. This is God's ordination. This view is according to His creation in His economy. For the same reason, if a sister is unmarried, it is good for her to learn to submit to the eldership God has given to her local church. In this way, even though she is unmarried, she can be covered as a weaker vessel.

### THE EXAMPLE OF NAOMI

Now we will come to the example of Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law. She is one of the greatest sisters in the Bible and one of the best examples of submission. Naomi was one who never gave up on the Lord. She remained steadfast, despite having a husband who was backslidden and who led her into much suffering and despair. According to the book of Ruth, Naomi followed her husband out of the land of Judah to go into the land of Moab. Because of her husband, Naomi left the good land together with her two sons. Then her husband died. After her husband died, her two sons took wives from among the Moabites, one of whom

was Ruth. Then both of the sons died. So now there remained Ruth and her two daughters-in-law. All of the males had died, and the three women were left alone. Undoubtedly they were in a state of distress and despair. Nevertheless, Naomi's heart was large. Because she had learned how to exercise as a wife before the Lord, she could also properly handle this situation. After she decided to return to the land of Judah, Naomi told her daughters-in-law, "May Jehovah deal kindly with you, just as you have dealt with the dead and with me" (Ruth 1:8). What kind of sister, after losing her husband and her sons, could make such a statement? After experiencing such a suffering, Naomi could still commend her two daughters-in-law to Jehovah for His kind dealing.

There is a wonderful principle here. Naomi understood that she was a weaker vessel. She learned to be under her husband, even though he was a backsliding husband. Her husband did not fight for the Lord's kingdom. Instead, he left the good land. He was a failure. But Naomi still submitted to him. She took her position as a wife before the Lord by submitting to her husband. Naomi was committed to God's purpose even when her husband was not, yet she still submitted to him. Her view was very clear. Naomi was a simple sister, yet she lived according to a great principle. She had received a commitment from the Lord, which was her position as a wife, and she exercised herself accordingly. She was a wife to an unhealthy head, yet she was faithful to this commitment. Then perhaps after her husband died and left her in such a desolate condition, she would have had good reason to be rebellious towards God. Had she not been treated unfairly after all her faithfulness? But Naomi did not give up the Lord. She remained faithful and steadfast. Then eventually she gave God a way to continue the carrying out of His economy. She became such a blessing. Her daughter-in-law Ruth came with her into the good land. Ruth eventually married Boaz and became an ancestor of Christ.

Sisters, you must lay hold of that which has been unveiled to you. You must lay hold of your God-given portion and place in your marriage life and church life. If your husband is unspiritual,

you should not be overly concerned. You are not here to have a spiritual husband or even to be a “prevailing” sister. This principle is also true in relation to the eldership in your local church. If you have opinions about the eldership, you should realize that it is not your concern. The spirituality of your husband or the healthiness of the eldership are issues which are not your commitment. If you try to assume a responsibility or a place of leadership that is not yours to assume, you will only aggravate your situation. Instead, you should realize that you are a wonderful sister with a wonderful commitment from the Lord. Your commitment from the Lord is to be a wife to your husband and a sister in the church life.

### **THE SISTERS’ VIRTUE OF STABILITY**

Rather than trying to be something which they cannot be, sisters should focus upon the virtues which they do possess and which can be a blessing to the church life. One of the greatest virtues of a sister is stability. Often in the church life brothers will say, “I am wholly for God’s economy,” and then in the next breath they will say, “I do not like it in this locality. I’m moving.” They are short of stability. Sisters have a virtue of stability that the brothers find hard to possess. Sisters, if you would realize this and live accordingly, you will become a stabilizing element in the church life. Then even when the brothers become frustrated, you will not give up. Even when the brothers are defeated, you will not be defeated. You will become the factor of stability in the church life.

There should be many sisters who operate as Naomis. When Naomi returned to Judah, she called herself “Mara,” meaning “bitter” (Ruth 1:20). But even her bitter experiences did not stop her from remaining in her commitment from the Lord. In the worst situation, she refused to give up. She remained stable, and she carried on God’s purpose. Brothers often have the experience of being prevailing for a while, but then losing their fervency. Sisters, however, are better able to endure. They can con-

tinue to pray when others have given up. A local church is healthy when there are a number of sisters who operate as Naomis. A “Naomi” does not have to be a prevailing sister. She may even have something bitter in her experience or environment. But a “Naomi” is one who is faithful to that which the Lord has committed to her. Such a sister is a blessing to the church, because she becomes a factor of stability in the local church life.

### **FELLOW HEIRS OF THE GRACE OF LIFE**

First Peter 3:7 tells the husbands to “assign honor” to their wives as “fellow heirs of the grace of life.” These two matters of subjection and being a fellow heir of the grace of life go together. On the one hand, a sister must learn to be in subjection to her husband. But on the other hand, a brother must learn to honor his wife because she is a fellow heir of the grace of life. The grace of life is received jointly by the husband and the wife as a couple. For a husband to enjoy the bountiful grace of life, he needs his wife. And for a sister to enjoy the bountiful grace of life, she needs to be in subjection to her husband. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is a good example of a sister being a joint heir with her husband, while Manoah, the father of Samson, is a good example of a husband being a joint heir with his wife. These two stories show us the joint participation in God’s economy between a husband and a wife.

### **THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM AND SARAH**

According to 1 Peter 3:6, “Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.” Sarah knew how to be subject to her husband, even when Abraham made mistakes. She took Abraham as her “lord.” When Jehovah first appeared to Abraham and told him to depart from his land and kindred, he brought his father and nephew with him. Sarah probably knew that Abraham was disobeying God, but she went along with him anyway, remaining in subjection. Later, when Abraham tried to pass Sarah off as his sister,



she went along with his scheme and said nothing (Gen. 12:9-20). Throughout their lives together, Sarah learned to take her husband's vision as her vision. Whatever God spoke to Abraham, she received it for herself. Eventually, she and Abraham together brought forth Isaac. Sarah and Abraham were joint participators in God's economy.

### THE EXAMPLE OF MANOAH AND HIS WIFE

The story of Manoah and his wife, the father and mother of Samson, portrays how a sister should render to her husband all that she herself has received from the Lord. When the children of Israel were in a desolate condition, and Jehovah had delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years, the Angel of Jehovah appeared to Manoah's wife. He told her that she would conceive and bear a son (Judg. 13:3-5). As soon as she received this revelation, she went to her husband to tell him. She had received something from the Lord, but she immediately took it to her husband. When she told Manoah about her experience, she was able to bring her husband into the presence of the Lord. Manoah offered the Angel of Jehovah some food. He refused, but told him to offer a burnt offering (vv. 15-16). Then when Manoah and his wife offered up the offering to the Lord, the Angel of Jehovah went up in the flame (v. 20). At that moment, Manoah exposed his spiritual immaturity. He said, "We will surely die, for we have seen God" (v. 22). But his wife replied, "If Jehovah had been pleased to kill us, He would not have taken a burnt offering and a meal offering from our hand, nor would He have shown us all these things or let us hear a thing like this at this time" (v. 23).

Here we see the top exercise of subjection. Manoah's wife had much more spiritual discernment than Manoah himself, yet she did not give any feeling of being spiritually superior. On the contrary, she went to her husband when the Angel of Jehovah first appeared. Then her husband did something so foolish in offering to have dinner with the Angel of Jehovah. And after the

burnt offering, he became frightened, thinking God would kill them. Yet his wife did not rebuke him or despise him. She was so wise. She never exposed her husband. This woman realized that her husband was the object of her spiritual exercise.

This story presents a high view of subjection. Subjection is not merely a matter of obedience. For a wife to be in subjection to her husband means that she knows her proper place. She knows the direction and scope of her spiritual discernment and exercise. She even knows how to help her husband without stepping out of her place. When a woman is in such a position, then whatever she has received from the Lord will be for her husband's benefit as a fellow heir of the grace of life.

### **BEING A PROPER MOTHER**

It is hard to find teachings in the Bible concerning being a proper mother. For example, Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger." Here, the admonition for parenting is given to the father. Fathers should not provoke their children to anger. But there are no specific directions for the mother. Instead of giving us directions, the Bible offers living examples of how to be a proper mother. We will look at one such example, the mother of Moses (Exo. 2:1-10).

As we know from this story, when Moses was a baby, his mother put him in a basket of reeds and sent him down the river to protect his life. Through God's divine arrangement, Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter and taken up as her very own son. But Moses' real mother was secured as a nurse to Moses until he was weaned. This meant that Moses spent the first few years of his life in the bosom of his Hebrew mother. This was not a small thing. These few years were crucial to Moses' entire life. How did Moses know that he was a Hebrew? How did he know about God's desire for the children of Israel? In those few early years, Moses' mother infused her little child with all of the things pertaining to God and His people. This story gives us a strong principle. Moses' mother was able to infuse her child with God's

purpose. It was her labor in those early years that enabled Moses to eventually receive the commitment to lead God's people.

We should realize that when children turn out well, it is largely due to the mother. The father is always in danger of provoking the children and stirring up their anger. But the mother is the one raising them up and nurturing them with the things of God. Moses learned something from his mother's person while he was very young. He must have received a strong impression from how his mother lived. Undoubtedly this affected him for his entire life. We should not think that our children are too young to learn from us. The mothers should become a "seeable" Christ to their children. Sisters, the children cannot see the Lord, but they do see you and how you are before the Lord. Because they see you, you will become the greatest influence in their lives. Over time you can infuse them with truth and help them to know spiritual things in the same way that Moses' mother helped Moses. This will prepare your children to love and serve the Lord.

### **A CONCLUDING WORD**

Sisters, your operation in the church life as a sister, wife, and mother is truly precious. You have received a wonderful commitment from the Lord, and it is yours to uphold. As a sister, you can provide stability in the church life regardless of the outward situation. As a wife, you can be a spiritual helper to your husband and a fellow heir of the grace of life. And as a mother, you can be a blessing to your children by infusing them with the things of God. Your commitment before the Lord is truly marvelous. May the Lord have mercy on us by bringing us all into a healthy operation!



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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

**HOW THE SISTERS OPERATE AS  
PILLARS IN THE CHURCH LIFE**

**THE SISTERS' OPERATION PRODUCES THE  
INWARD REALITY OF THE CHURCH LIFE**

There are two sides to the church life. There is the outward appearance, and there is the inward reality. The inward reality is the content of the church life. These two sides can be seen in how the brothers and sisters operate. Brothers and sisters operate differently. The operation of the brothers is very much on the surface and is outwardly manifested. This is why the brothers receive all the attention and admiration. But the operation of the sisters provides the inward content of the church life. Actually, no brother can operate properly without a number of sisters backing him up. The decisive factor in whether a local church is prevailing is not the operation of the brothers, but the operation of the sisters. If the sisters' operation is healthy, then the whole church life will be healthy.

This principle is similar to that of a household. In a household, the quality of the family life is dependent not as much on the father as it is on the mother. The father can make an outward show and provide a big mansion for the family to live in, but if the mother does not operate properly, then what the father does means very little. On the other hand, even if the family is not financially well-off and is squeezed into a small dwelling, the family is healthy if the mother operates properly. In the church life it is the same. There may be a very gifted brother in a locality

who is able to increase the attendance at the church meetings. But the healthiness of the church life will still be based upon the sisters' operation. No matter how effective the labor of the brothers may be, any wind can blow it away quite easily. The stability of the church life comes not as much from the brothers' ability as it does from the sisters' operation. When the sisters operate properly they become the pillars to uphold the church life. Even though this operation will not be so manifested outwardly, it is crucial to the healthiness of the church.

### **THE FIRST EXAMPLE OF A PILLAR: PHOEBE**

With this in view, let us consider Romans 16 and examine several sisters who operated as pillars in the church life. Romans 16 is a long greeting from Paul to a number of saints. The first name Paul mentioned was that of a sister, not a brother. Paul wrote, "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a deaconess of the church which is in Cenchrea, that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been the patroness of many, of myself as well" (vv.1-2). Paul mentioned this sister in a very touching way. He charged the church in Rome to do everything to support this sister. She was a serving sister, a deaconess. Why did he charge them to care for her? Because she had done everything for Paul and for many other saints. She had been a patroness to many.

### **A Patroness Who Helps, Sustains, and Supplies**

Being a pillar is related to being a patroness. The *Recovery Version of the New Testament* has a footnote on the word "patroness." It says, "Or, protectress. It is a word of dignity, denoting one who helps, sustains, and supplies" (Rom. 16:2<sup>2</sup>). Here are three words used to describe the work of a patroness: "help," "sustain," and "supply." These three words are important with regard to the operation of sisters in the church life. Phoebe was

one who helped people, sustained people, and supplied people. By doing these things, she operated as a pillar in the church life.

What does it mean to help others? Suppose a younger sister comes to an older sister and complains about a brother. In the younger sister's opinion, this brother is too peculiar and his prayers are too long. This sister surely needs a certain kind of help. However, it is possible that the older sister may feel the same way about that brother. So instead of helping the younger sister, the older sister joins in and agrees with her. This is obviously not being a help. To be a proper help, a sister must learn how to direct and coach the younger ones out of their problems. When someone is confused, frustrated, or bothered, you should have a way to help them out of their situation. This requires that you yourself be above the situation.

Not only should you help people, but you should also sustain them. To sustain is to impart spiritual reality to those who come to you. This imparting of spiritual reality ministers a way to go on to the person you are helping. For instance, the sister who is bothered about the brother who prays too long should firstly be helped out of her frustration, and then should be sustained with a higher vision and a richer experience of life. To be pillars in the church life, sisters need to develop this ability of sustaining.

Then thirdly, a patroness is able to supply others in their needs. This may include their practical and material needs. Phoebe cared for the needs of many saints. She also cared for Paul's needs. Because Phoebe cared for Paul's needs, he was more free to exercise his ministry. For a sister to operate as a pillar in the church life, she must learn to be a patroness. This means to help the younger ones out of their frustrations, to sustain them with life and truth, and then to supply them according to their needs.

### **THE SECOND EXAMPLE OF A PILLAR: PRISCILLA**

The second person Paul mentioned in Romans 16 was also a sister, Prisca. (Earlier in the New Testament she is called "Priscilla.") "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ

Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; and greet the church, which is in their house” (vv.3-5a). Paul called Prisca and her husband Aquila his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” With this couple the sister’s name comes before the brother’s name. This is not the usual practice in the Bible. Prisca was very much Paul’s co-worker. This sister was ready to risk her own life on behalf of Paul. She was really willing to die for the Lord’s servant. Paul was thankful that there was someone who was willing to die for him. He said that all of the churches should be thankful for this couple because of the firm stand they took for him.

We first encounter this couple in Acts 18. “After these things [Paul] departed from Athens and came to Corinth. And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy, and Priscilla his wife (because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to depart from Rome), he went to them. And because he was of the same trade, he remained with them and worked; for they were tentmakers by trade” (Acts 18:1-3). Paul was in need of work to support himself and those with him. He came to Corinth and found Aquila and Priscilla who had recently come from Italy. Aquila agreed to let Paul work with him, since they were both tentmakers. Then after some time, Paul took them with him to Ephesus. “And Paul, having remained there [in Corinth] yet a considerable number of days, took leave of the brothers and sailed away to Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow. And they arrived at Ephesus, and he left them there; but he entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews” (vv. 18-19). From this point on, when the couple is named, Priscilla’s name comes before Aquila’s.

Paul then returned to Antioch, leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (vv. 21-22). After Paul left, they simply began to labor. It is an amazing thing that after such a short time together, Paul was able to entrust them with this. They became useful workers. Their effectiveness can be seen in how they helped Apollos. “And a certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, an eloquent



man, arrived at Ephesus, and he was powerful in the Scriptures. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. And this man began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him to themselves and expounded the way of God to him more accurately. And when he intended to pass through into Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he arrived there, he helped much through grace those who had believed; for he vigorously confuted the Jews publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (vv. 24-28).

Apollos was able to speak effectively from the Scriptures when he first arrived in Ephesus. However, the Bible says that he only knew the baptism of John. This meant that he only knew the termination of the old things. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos, “they took him to themselves and expounded the way of God to him more accurately.” Because Priscilla’s name comes first, it is very likely that it was Priscilla who did much of the teaching. Aquila is mentioned because it is not good for Priscilla to stand alone. Priscilla sat down with this eloquent servant of the Lord to show him that what he understood was not adequate. She showed Apollos that he needed to know the One that John the Baptist ushered in. Apollos needed to know who the Lord was and what He was doing now. Apollos did not say, “Who do you think you are? You are a housewife, and your husband is a tentmaker. I am a servant of the Lord!” Apollos was proper before the Lord to receive what this sister had for him. Because of Priscilla and Aquila’s help, eventually Apollos was able to show by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (v. 28).

### **Absolute, Diligent, and Able to Teach**

Priscilla’s virtues were even higher than Phoebe’s. First, she was absolute. Priscilla was willing to die for the apostle Paul. She was not only willing to die for the Lord, but for the man on

the earth that the Lord was using. It is not improper to have such a stand. We should also be willing to die for the Lord's servant, because we are for the same goal. If we compromise our stand, then our operation in the church life will become limited. Priscilla's second virtue was her diligence. She was willing to travel and to labor for the Lord. She was a diligent laborer. She was a "doer," and not just a talker. Her third virtue was that she was able to teach. She did not give messages in church meetings, but in a smaller setting she was able, with her husband, to render help to Apollos. We should learn to be able to teach in this way. No matter how rich a brother's sharing in a meeting may be, it does not really work without a number of sisters in the church life who can function as Priscillas. A sister can exercise in this way by inviting some young ones to her home. She can teach the ones who are in need.

There are many saints who can speak about God's economy, but they do not fully know what it means. They need "the way of God" to be expounded to them "more accurately." We need a number of sisters who are able to teach, who are able to make saints clear about what God's economy really is. With every message shared, there is the need of much teaching to substantiate it. This is where the church needs some Priscillas to exercise in such a way. This sister was operating as a genuine pillar in the church life. She was absolute in her stand, diligent in her labor, and able to teach others. For a sister to become a pillar in the church life, all of these items must become her practice.

### **THE THIRD EXAMPLE OF A PILLAR: MARY**

In Romans 16:6, Paul greeted a sister named Mary: "Greet Mary, one who has labored much for us." In the New Testament there are a number of Marys, and the order in which they appear indicates a spiritual progression. The first Mary in the New Testament was Jesus' mother, who was a very pure and simple sister. We see this in Luke 1:46-47: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior." This Mary is the

foundation for the following Marys. The second Mary was the sister of Lazarus, who enjoyed the Lord's presence (Luke 10:39), and even wasted herself upon the Lord (John 12:3). The third Mary was the wife of Clopas, who was present at the Lord's crucifixion (John 19:25). The fourth was Mary the Magdalene. She saw the Lord Jesus after His resurrection, even before He had ascended to the Father (John 20:14-17). So we see a progression: from singleness and simplicity of heart, to abiding in the Lord's presence and being wasted upon Him, to experiencing the Lord's death, to partaking of His resurrection. Then when we come to Acts 12, there is another Mary. This Mary was the mother of Mark. When the apostle Peter was released from prison, he chose to go to Mary's house. When he got there, "there was a considerable number assembled together and praying" (Acts 12:12). Mary's home was open to the saints. This shows that to open our home is not a small thing. It is a high spiritual manifestation that follows the four previous stages.

Then we come to the last Mary, in Romans 16. Paul said that she was "one who has labored much for us." This sequence of Marys concludes with a laborer. This shows us that in order to be considered a laborer, we have to pass through the foregoing stages. If we are missing one of these stages, our labor will not be effective and cannot prevail. We must love the Lord with a single heart, we must learn how to abide in Christ and waste ourselves upon Him, we must experience the Lord's death, and we must partake of His resurrection. Then furthermore, we must open our home. If we are never able to open our home, but instead are always guarding our private life, our labor will have no impact. Passing through these stages represented by the Marys in the New Testament will issue in the practical labor. Then we will be like the sixth Mary, a laborer in the church for the Lord's testimony.

**THE FOURTH EXAMPLE OF A PILLAR:  
RUFUS'S MOTHER**

The last example of a pillar in Romans 16 is a sister whom Paul did not name. Paul said, "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother as well as mine" (v. 13). This sister was Paul's spiritual mother. Even a spiritual brother such as Paul had a mother in the church life. For any saint to grow up, he needs a good mother. Sisters, you should all learn to be the mother of many saints. Paul was under the care of Rufus's mother. Because of her serving, there was a way for Paul to operate powerfully and effectively. This is a precious operation in the church life.

**A CONCLUDING WORD**

The operation of the sisters is the inward content and reality of the church life. When the sisters operate properly, they become the pillars to uphold the church life. We have seen four examples of what it means for a sister to be a pillar. First, she is one who operates as a patroness by helping, sustaining, and supplying others. Second, she is one absolute in her stand, diligent in her labor, and able to teach. Third, she is one whose labor is based on a single heart for the Lord, an enjoyment of His presence, a partaking of His death and resurrection, and an open home for the saints. And fourth, she is a spiritual mother. If many sisters among us operate in such a way, then the church life will be healthy and the Lord's recovery will be blessed.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

***Question:** How should the single sisters function practically in the church life? What is the best way for a sister to love and serve the Lord before she gets married?*

***Answer:*** We should be cautioned against seeking ways in the Lord's recovery, or against taking any word too legally. For example, there is often a big difference between one who ministers and those who apply what the brother ministers. When a brother ministers, he may be in life, in spirit, and in truth. However, in applying what is ministered, we often like it best when we can do things without Christ or the Spirit, as long as there is a satisfactory result. We like to have everything laid out for us as "step one," "step two," "step three," and so on. Spiritual things cannot be taken in this manner.

Our legality in carrying out what we think of as "the way" can frustrate or even damage the church. If we just look for a way that we can legally follow, then where is our spirit? Where is our interaction with the Lord? This may seem like a peculiar answer to this question, but there is a principle involved here. We would like to find an answer when in fact there is no answer. We would like to hear, "Step one, a single sister should pray in the morning; step two, a single sister should pray concerning marriage; step three, she should pray that the Lord would lead a certain brother." It does not work in that way.

However, we should realize that all marriages are by God's governmental arrangement. There are no mistakes. This is why divorce among us is a serious matter. If a single sister is ready to

marry, there is no need for her to pray about it too much. It is enough for her to just tell the Lord, "I love You." In due time, He will bring the right brother to her. We should learn to trust our lives to the Lord. There is a case of a sister who prayed that she would marry a certain brother because she thought she had the Lord's leading. Then that brother got married to someone else, but this sister still continued praying for him to be her husband. Isn't that praying for his wife's death, or for a divorce? Yet she felt that she had the Lord's leading. This is why we should be very simple and open before the Lord. He knows what is best for us. We should just love and enjoy Him and trust that He will take care of us.

How should a single sister serve the Lord? She should simply take the Lord and the Body as her covering. Do not look for specific answers. Again, there is no legal way. There are only general principles which can apply differently to each case. Instead of doing things legally, we should do things according to life and the Spirit. As an example, we should all spend time in the Lord's presence. On one hand, the best time to do this is in the morning. However, if we make morning watch a legal matter and insist on it for everyone, then what about those who have a physical limitation which prevents them? Some may take medication which does not allow them to be so clear-minded in the morning. They may choose to spend their most precious time with the Lord in the evening, and they will find that His presence is still there. We should be disciplined ourselves, but we should not be legal. We should be very careful about legality. We will not be fruitful if we are too legal, because we will scare people away. We will make everything a law to them. Instead, we should be a living testimony of what we have enjoyed from the Lord. Instead of being under a law, we should be under a life supply. We should just love the Lord and serve Him diligently according to life.

***Question:** What should a sister do if she loves the Lord and is given to the church, but her husband has some limitation or does not have the same desire?*

**Answer:** In experience, it seems that if a husband is strong for the Lord and for the church, but his wife is not, then eventually the husband will be frustrated and dragged down by his wife. But for some reason, if it is the wife who loves the Lord and the church while the husband does not, the wife can still go on. There are numerous cases of sisters persevering in the church life and exercising in a healthy way over many years, even though their husbands did not have the same desire.

On the part of the sister, it is so important for her to realize the significance of the atmosphere in her home. It is the home environment, the home atmosphere, which sets the tone for the entire family life. The husband will not share the wife's interest in the Lord if she is overly zealous around him, or if she has been negligent towards him. Each environment that develops makes the husband react. If you press your husband too far, he will become irritated and closed. If you are negligent towards him, he will have no interest in you or your love for the Lord. But on the other hand, if you provide a home atmosphere in which your husband is continually witnessing something so high, something so human, yet so divine, he will eventually be attracted to such a life.

Your husband cannot get away from your influence, whether it is positive or negative. If your testimony is one of loving the Lord in simplicity, your husband will be gained. Do not think that you have to be so "spiritual," doing everything perfectly. Actually, when you make mistakes, it will cause your husband to feel that you are as human as he is. Yet he will also begin to recognize that you possess something different in your life. You have the Lord, you have the saints, you have the Bible, and he does not. This difference may be insignificant to him at first, but eventually it will become very manifest to him. He will realize that you have a joy that he does not have, and this will become attractive to him. There is no need to give your husband a sales pitch: "I am so happy in the Lord! How are you?" Instead, just love the Lord, love your husband, and wait for the proper time. When you provide such a warm, loving, accepting environment at home, it will eventually cause him to think about life and its meaning. He will

gradually be attracted to the life that you live.

At the proper and appropriate time, you can speak something to him. The Lord's timing is very important. Every person's life is filled with cycles of ups and downs. When they are promoted, they are up, and when they are fired, they are down. When they are successful, they are up, and when they are defeated, they are down. When someone is up, it is usually hard for him to receive something of the Lord. When someone is down, he is usually more open to the Lord. It is good to keep this principle in mind with respect to your husband. When your husband is low, do not try to impose something on him, and do not blame him for some mistakes that led to his problem. Instead, be sympathetic, and suggest to him that you pray together. Read some verses together with him. At such a time, he will be open to you.

As was said previously in this section, the sisters should be restful, peaceful, and joyful. This is true even when your husband does not share your desire for the Lord and for the church life. There is no need for you to try to be so victorious outwardly. Instead, just be joyful. Then at the same time, watch and pray for your husband. Trust in the Lord that the environment you are providing in your home is affecting your husband and children. Trust in the Lord's operating rather than in your striving. At the appropriate time, the Lord will be faithful to give you the opportunity to minister something positive to your husband. Learn to trust in the Lord in such a healthy way, while you provide a warm and loving atmosphere in your home that allows Him to operate.

These principles also apply in your exercise towards your children. Do not try to force your children to do spiritual things. If you force them to pray or read the Bible, you may lose them. Instead, provide a loving, warm, and caring atmosphere in your home. Let them see how you live. Your enjoyment of the Lord will attract them. At the right time, you can ask your children to pray or read the Bible with you. It is okay if they say "no." You do not need to force them. Just love them, and remember that they are in the Lord's hands. They are also in the hands of faithful brothers and sisters. Be wise in your care for your children, and



be watchful to render them help in the Lord's timing.

**Question:** *Why does it seem that often we care more about preaching the gospel or visiting new ones than we care about the saints in the church life? How should we care for one another?*

**Answer:** We should realize that spiritual things must be carried by spiritual men. No spiritual exercise has any value as a practice in itself. It must be carried out spiritually, in a way that is full of reality. For example, we know we must read the Bible. But many theological students read the Bible daily and get very little, if anything. The Bible cannot be handled by soulish, natural persons. The essence of reading the word is the Spirit. It is a spiritual exercise. In the same way, to preach the gospel and to visit new ones is absolutely right, but it should not be done naturally. We will hurt ourselves when we try to carry out the spiritual things with the natural strength.

If we are really in the spiritual essence of what Brother Lee ministered to us, our care for one another will be strengthened. This is what we mean when we use the term "mutuality," which implies the adequate concern and care for all the members so that all the members may function according to their gift. Preaching the gospel, taking care of new ones, and the mutual care among the saints should all be interrelated. In preaching the gospel and taking care of new ones, we surely need the supply from all the members. Doing these things spiritually will bring in the real mutuality and companionship. This is why we should be careful about looking for methods and ways. Everything we do for the Lord must have the spiritual reality behind it.

If you carry what you have seen in a healthy, spiritual way, be assured that your church life will become prevailing. The saints in the churches are all at different spiritual levels. Do not demand others to do what you do. Instead, learn to be faithful yourself. As you pioneer in your labor, be assured that others will follow. Just be faithful to practice what you see and realize. For example, if you spend two mornings a week with one sister to pray, and an-

other two mornings with another sister to pray, eventually more sisters will get stirred up to practice this. Your faithfulness will stir up their faithfulness. Your example will become their pattern. Through your seemingly small labor you will begin to bear remaining fruit. If a few sisters labor like this in many avenues of spiritual exercise, their testimonies will have an effect on others. Then surely the Lord will have a way with us. This is to exercise spiritually, and this will bear fruit for the Lord's profit.

PART V

THE BLESSED  
OPERATION OF  
THE SISTERS IN  
CARRYING OUT  
GOD'S ECONOMY



THE CHAPTERS IN THIS SECTION WERE ORIGINALLY  
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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

**THE ALL-INCLUSIVE TYPES  
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

*Editor's Note: The fellowship in this message is based on messages given by Witness Lee on February 15, 1992, in Anaheim, California. The outline is taken from those messages.*

**Verses**

*Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him.*

*Ephesians 1:10*

*And to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages was hidden in God, who created all things.*

*Ephesians 3:9*

*...God's economy, which is in faith.*

*1 Timothy 1:4b*

**AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

In this section we will examine four major items in the Bible as they relate to sisters: allegories, parables, examples, and teachings. In the Bible there are many *allegories*. An allegory is some-

thing that is not so clear. The Random House Dictionary defines an allegory as a figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another. For example, if we look at modern art it does not seem to say much. There may be some lines on the canvas to represent light, but it is not clear. This is like an allegory. An example of a *parable* is a self-portrait. When we look at such a painting we can see the psychology and the feeling of the artist. The third item, an *example*, is like a clear portrait. For instance, we may see a painting of a flower or a person, and we can see right away what it is. Finally, in the Bible, what we see most often are clear *teachings*.

To talk about the biblical perspective of women is not that easy. This is because in the Bible women have caused many problems. Even Paul said that it was not the man's fault that mankind fell, but rather it was the woman who was the first to be tempted. "And Adam was not deceived; but the woman, having been quite deceived, has fallen into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). Sisters have caused many problems from the beginning. Eve was a problem to Adam, and Sarah was a problem to Abraham. Because of Eve we all have sinned. Because of Sarah we all suffer today. Women are powerful. Because of one mistake, a woman caused all of the human race to suffer until the Lord Jesus comes back. And Sarah's opinion caused God's operation on this earth to be affected. Today the Israelites still suffer because of the descendants of Ishmael, who was born because of Sarah's interference.

In the New Testament, Mary the mother of Jesus started out so well. When the angel came to her, she magnified the Lord (Luke 1:46-56). But twelve years later when the Lord was seemingly lost (Luke 2:40-52), she forgot the commitment she had heard from God. Even more than that, when Jesus began to operate, the first miracle He performed was because of His mother (John 2:1-11). The Lord told her it was not His time, but she insisted. From this you can see how powerful woman is. These examples show us the negative side of woman.

In the whole Bible, however, there is a hidden line which is the positive side of woman. Outwardly, after man's fall, man took

the lead. In the Old Testament many men are mentioned. If you only read the Bible in a shallow way, you will never appreciate the rich operation of women. There is an American proverb that says, "Behind every successful man is a woman." I mention this not so that you will try to make your husband successful. If you do this, you will cause trouble in your family life. In the same way, if a sister tries to make the church successful, the whole church will be in trouble. But on the other hand, if a man is really successful, his wife is behind him. And if the church life really becomes prevailing, it is because the sisters are there.

The Bible seems to be a history of God working with man. We may not see God's dealing with woman in the Bible. The New Testament begins with the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-16). In this genealogy three sets of fourteen generations are mentioned. Out of all these generations five women are mentioned. This is something hidden, yet the women that are mentioned are very crucial. The names of the men do not seem to stand out, but when a woman is named it is very meaningful.

This is a spiritual principle that is covered throughout the whole Bible. Every time the Lord does something drastic, a woman is involved. They may not stand out; they may even cause a problem. But for some reason, without them God is not able to fulfill all that He desires. In the Bible women are very crucial in a hidden way. Therefore, to study women in the Bible, you must understand allegories, parables, examples, and teachings. To study man is easy. To study woman is much more difficult because the Bible mentions women so few times that unless you have some spiritual insight, you will not understand the operation of woman.

If you want to understand the operation of woman, you must know allegories, parables, examples, and the clear teachings. If you never understand the allegory, the parable, or the example, you only have the teaching. For example, you may take the teaching that wives should submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22). But you may not understand why it must be so. If you were to mention this verse to those in the women's rights movement, they would be very upset. They would say this is discrimination against

women. And how can you blame them? They have the clear teaching, but they have never seen the examples. First you need to see the allegories, then the parables, and then the examples, so that when you come to the teachings you will be very impressed.

## OUTLINE

### I. The Purpose of God According to God's Economy

#### A. To have man as His organism

This utterance is extremely clear. Usually we say that man has God's expression, image, or likeness. Here Brother Lee uses the words: "to have man as His organism." In other words, from the very beginning, God's heart, God's desire, was to have an organic enlargement. He is a great God, but seemingly He is also a lonely God. He needs to be enlarged, not in an outward way, but through an increase in an organic way. This word is difficult to apprehend. To understand this you need to see a vision. Consider the following example. The first house you buy in your 20's is a small house. The older you get, the bigger will be the house you buy. But no matter how big your house is, it is not a part of you. You can only live in it until eventually you have to leave it. Even if your house is a mobile home and you can take it wherever you go, it is still not an organism. God desires an organism. He does not merely desire multiplication. His desire is an organism, and this organism is just His enlargement, His increase.

- 1. With His image (Gen. 1:27)**
- 2. With His likeness (Gen. 1:27)**
- 3. To magnify Him**
- 4. To represent Him (Gen. 1:26)**

In the beginning when God created man, He paid attention not only to our outward appearance, but also to our inward nature. Image is something of God's nature. Likeness is something



of God's appearance, but this appearance is not just physical. This appearance is also of the divine attributes. As a man created in the image of God, when we experience the divine attributes, a certain likeness comes out. Before we were saved, we were evil. Even our attempts to be good were evil. Once we are saved, however, we are an organism with the Triune God. Within us are the divine attributes, and what comes out of us are human virtues. For example, when we see a beggar on the street looking through the garbage, we may be moved to buy him some food and give it to him, without understanding why we want to do this. As a Christian this may happen often because of our enjoyment of the divine attributes. These attributes lived out of us become our human virtues. God's view when He created us was not to make us good men or evil men, but that we would be a part of the divine organism with His image and His likeness to magnify and represent Him.

## **B. To have the corporate Body of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:23)**

The divine organism today in reality is just the corporate Body of Jesus Christ.

### **1. To be joined to Him (John 15:5a)**

Jesus said, I am the true vine, you are the branches.

#### **a. With the same life and nature**

#### **b. To become one with Him (Eph. 5:31-32)**

Ephesians 5:31 says that a man should leave his parents and be joined to his wife. This is not our thought. Our thought is that the father gives the wife to be joined to the husband. Yet the verse says that the man should depart from his parents and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. From this you can see how crucial women are. According to God the man marries the woman. Again, this shows how powerful women are.

Brother Lee's burden in quoting this verse was not about women, but about how this verse shows that we should be one with the Lord.

## **2. To become the helpmate of Christ (Gen. 2:20b)**

### **C. The process of God's accomplishment**

#### **1. God formed man (Gen. 1:26)**

How did God accomplish His purpose? Firstly He formed man. In Genesis there are four Hebrew words used to describe God's creation of man. In Genesis 1:26 God said that He would "make" man. Then in 1:27 God used the word "create." You can only make something out of something, as a table is made out of wood. But to create brings forth something out of nothing. When God made man, He made him as a body, soul, and spirit. In using the word "create" God had a different view. His creation was something completely of life; no raw material was used. In verse 27 God was considering the whole human race. He had the multiplication of the organism in view.

Then in Genesis 2:7 another word is used: the word "formed." Man was formed. Anything that is formed is not that precious. A mold is used to form an object. For example, part of my watch is formed, and part of it is built. The outward shell is formed, but the inner parts are built. In Genesis 2:27 the woman was "built." After God formed man, He realized that the shell alone was not good. In other words, it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Thus God built a helpmate to meet his need; He built a woman.

#### **2. God built woman (Gen. 2:22)**

Now you can see how men and women balance one another. Men are obvious in an outward way, but they would be so void and empty without women. Outwardly in the church life you see

so many prevailing brothers, but the church life can never become healthy unless the sisters are built inside. Man was formed. Woman was built. Man is outward. Woman is inward. In the church life you see the brothers, but the reality of the church life is the sisters. The real value of the church is not only based on how marvelous the brothers are outwardly. It is actually based on how marvelous the sisters are inwardly.

You may ask why this is. Man was formed, but woman was built. Woman was built with a view to meet the need, the shortage, of man. For example, my watch may have a nice shell, but what makes it work are the inward parts. If the inward parts are not built properly, even if the watch is a Rolex, the whole watch will not work. Being a man is simple, because man is simply formed as by a mold. A woman is built very delicately, with a careful design and with a goal. When we come to God's economy we must have this kind of understanding. God desires a divine organism, and that organism today is the Body of Christ. Within the Body of Christ there is this principle of the brothers and the sisters. The brothers are formed, and the sisters are built. This is an operating principle in the Bible. The church life has many presentable brothers, but what really causes the church life to operate is very much related to the sisters.

#### **D. Man's fall**

Right after man and woman were created, the woman overdid it. She began to think she was so crucial, so she did everything. Then man fell. This caused women, especially in the Old Testament, to become very limited. In fact, as you read the history recorded in the Old Testament, mostly what you see is the operation of men. Women seemingly are not mentioned. The Old Testament records many great men carrying something for God's move, such as Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and many others.

## **II. The Four Major Allegories and Types in the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament we can see four crucial matters through four allegories, four types. While there are so many men in the Bible, there are four women who stand out. What is most crucial in God's economy? There are four crucial matters revealed in the Bible: life, the covenant, redemption, and the kingdom. The line of life began with Eve and will consummate in the New Jerusalem with the tree of life and the river of water of life. For this life to be realized, we need the covenant. In God's eyes the Old and New Testaments are actually the old and new covenants. Then, because of the fall of man, we need salvation. Salvation brings us back to God's people and to His intention. As saved ones we need to fight so that we can bring in God's kingdom. These are the crucial things in the Bible. Even though many of the characters in the Bible were men, the four crucial matters are still life, the covenant, redemption, and the kingdom, as represented by four women.

### **A. Speaking of God's unceasing operation in His economy throughout the Old Testament period (4000 years)**

These 4000 years have been divided into two periods—the age of the forefathers, lasting about 2500 years, and the age of the law.

**1. In the age of the forefathers—Eve and Sarah**

**2. In the age of law—Rahab and Ruth**

### **B. Eve—the Mother of all life (Gen. 3:20)**

The name Adam gave to the woman, "Eve," means "the mother of all life." Even though she caused so much trouble in this world, she was still the mother of all life.

### **C. Sarah—the reality of the covenant (Gal. 4:24)**

Sarah is the reality of the new covenant, as seen in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Sarah represents the covenant according to grace. Her handmaid Hagar represents the covenant according to law. Sarah was a very complicated woman. She was the one who encouraged her husband Abraham to marry Hagar, yet once Sarah gave birth to Isaac, she was jealous of Hagar and Hagar's son Ishmael and cast them out into the desert. This action makes you question her humanity. Yet God still refers to Sarah as the covenant according to promise.

I am very concerned when sisters tell the elders what to do. They may come in a very nice spirit to make a suggestion, but it is very hard to tell them not to give advice because they are a weaker vessel. Elders and husbands must learn not to offend the sisters, but they must also learn not to be manipulated by them.

Sarah's recommendation caused many problems, but in God's eyes her existence was very valuable for His operation. A brother seems to bless the church by his actions, but a sister is able to bless the church through her mistakes. We need to have this basic understanding. Eve got into much trouble, yet Adam called her the mother of all life. Sarah's humanity seems lacking at times, yet she represents the covenant according to promise. Sisters must learn to treasure themselves. Even they should tell the Lord, "Lord, thank You. I may be Eve, but I am the mother of life. I may be Sarah, but I am the new covenant. Something within me is so crucial."

I believe it is the Lord's sovereignty that He did not use a man to represent the new covenant. Men tend to be like Moses, authoritative, full of the law. Behind all the men in the Old Testament are life and the new covenant, which are represented by two women, Eve and Sarah. In order for the church life to match the new covenant, there is the need for sisters to operate properly.

**D. Rahab—a degraded Gentile sinner joined to God’s people to bring forth the proper fruit for God’s kingdom (Matt. 1:5)**

In Jericho Rahab was an immoral woman, but she was freed by joining God’s testimony. Eventually she brought forth fruit for God’s kingdom. Rahab brought forth a son, Boaz, an ancestor of David and of Christ. Why is a sister mentioned for such deep things and not a brother? This is because the operation of the sisters is very crucial.

**E. Ruth—a sinful Gentile by birth redeemed by the Savior through her purity and pursuing to bring in the reality of the kingdom (Matt. 1:5)**

Ruth may be the most beautiful and attractive character in the Bible. When her mother-in-law Naomi told her to return home, she refused to leave, telling her, “Your God is my God and your people are my people.” Ruth was so pure and simple, yet she was still a sinful Gentile by birth. But she was redeemed by Boaz through her purity and pursuing to bring in the reality of the kingdom. Eventually David was one of her descendants.

These four major items in the Bible—life, the covenant, salvation, and the kingdom—are all represented by sisters. This shows us that the reality of all these points must spring out from the sisters in the church life.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

# FOUR MARVELOUS PARABLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### AN INTRODUCTORY WORD

In the Old Testament many events took place. Often it seems that the women caused the negative events and the men were mostly positive. This may cause you to wonder, “What is a woman’s place in the Old Testament?” The genealogy of the Lord Jesus in the first chapter of Matthew gives us a hint. All the happenings in the Old Testament are for the carrying out of God’s economy so that the Savior can come. Within this process we can see a hidden element, that is, the sisters’ operation and the sisters’ function.

### Four Old Testament Allegories

In the last message we considered four allegories, that is, four women representing four crucial matters in the Bible: Eve as life, Sarah as the new covenant, Rahab as salvation, and Ruth as the kingdom. These four allegories are the totality of the Bible. The Bible is filled with many interesting stories. Although most of the stories in the Bible are written about men, the crucial things in God’s economy are related to the four allegories mentioned

above. These four items are represented by four women from the Old Testament.

Let us consider the matter of salvation. Who needs salvation? Sinners do. The Lord used a sinner to represent His salvation. This sinner was Rahab, a prostitute. A prostitute is the most sinful of sinners. At first no one likes to commit sin, but eventually everyone gets involved with sin. In the Bible, even in the whole human race, no one can portray a sinner better than Rahab. All sinners are disgraceful and degraded. But through the spies, the Lord came to Rahab. When the spies came to Rahab, she forsook the sin she was in. She joined herself to God's people and brought forth Boaz, an ancestor of David.

Why does the Bible use women to represent all the crucial things? Why does life come from Eve? Why does the covenant come from Sarah? Why is the sinner represented by Rahab? Why does Ruth represent the one who brings in the kingdom? Why did God not use men? It seems as if the Lord is saying, "As long as you are a man you will not go that deep, and therefore you are disqualified to represent these matters." All the deep things are carried by women. A brother may minister many truths, but a sister experiences many things.

### **Four New Testament Parables**

In this message we will find out how crucial the sisters are in carrying out God's economy in the New Testament. The New Testament shows us four marvelous parables. The first parable is that of the ten virgins, the second is the parable of two women at the mill, the third is the parable of the woman seeking the lost coin, and the fourth is the parable of the bride. These parables are in a sequence that shows the operation of a healthy sister. The ten virgins show us how to take care of our self. The two women at the mill stress the preparation of spiritual food. The woman seeking the lost coin stresses our labor. And finally the bride shows the bringing back of the bridegroom, the kingdom.

Each of these parables is preceded by a parable about broth-



ers. The parable of the ten virgins follows the parable in Matthew 24 of the faithful steward. Matthew 24:45 says, “Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time?” This verse refers to the function of the brothers in the church life. The Lord has set the brothers to have charge over the household. The sisters are not in charge. The slave or steward over the house is required to be prudent, wise, and faithful. The Lord desires to give food to others, so His view of His household, the church life, is a matter of food supply. This parable is followed by the parable of the ten virgins.

The second parable, the parable of the two women, follows the parable of the brothers’ labor in the field. In this parable you can see the brothers in the field, sweating. Their labor is visible. But the brothers only produce raw food that no one can enjoy. The sisters at the mill take what the brothers have labored on and grind it into something very nourishing. The sisters are producing the real food.

The third parable, the woman looking for the lost coin, follows the parable of the shepherd. In this parable you can see a brother taking the lead, bringing back the sheep that was lost. But the woman sweeping in the room is hidden from view. Her operation is hidden. If you try to open the door too wide for people to see, the wind can blow out your light. The real work of the sisters is done in secret.

From these examples you can see that what the brothers do is the outward shell, but what the sisters do is the inward reality. Brothers, you must realize that from this perspective you are not that important. Sisters, you must realize that you are very important. The brothers are the stewards, laboring in the field, but the sisters have the oil, are able to process the real food, and are able to find the lost coin. In reality all the operation of the brothers must be backed up by the proper operation of the sisters. When the sisters ignore their place, even if the brothers are so good, it will still be hard to have the reality of the real church life.

I have seen this in a particular small church. The brothers’

labor there is so good, yet they never seem to grow in numbers. After considering their situation over many years, my realization is that their lack of increase is from a lack in the sisters' operation. This church has many stewards, but no burden. It has many in the field, but no one to grind the food. The brothers may continually pile up food, but this food needs to be processed before it can be eaten. Also, the sisters' sweeping of the house is needed to find all the lost coins within the house. When the sisters' operation matches the brothers' operation, the Lord can do so much.

The four parables covered in this message show us the totality of today's church life. What is happening in the church today begins with the purity in life and continues with the producing of food and the laboring in the church to bring the Lord back. But these four parables do not stand out by themselves. Each of them follows a parable concerning the brothers. The brothers have a certain portion, and the sisters have another portion.

## OUTLINE

### **I. The Parable of the Ten Virgins—(Matt. 25:1-13)**

#### **A. Sisters here represent the totality of the church life**

Every saved brother and sister, old or young, is included in the ten virgins.

#### **B. Our stand**

##### **1. Sisters take the lead in presenting themselves before the Lord in purity and simplicity**

It is hard for brothers to be pure. The brothers spend at least eight hours a day working in an impure environment. There are many temptations in the world. But the sisters' purity and simplicity will encourage a brother into that purity. A wife can help her husband through her enjoyment of the Lord in a pure way.

When sisters operate in this way, they not only preserve oil for themselves, but they also gain oil for others. Even in the church life, when the brothers get caught in the work and in numbers, sisters should take the lead to just love the Lord in purity as a chaste virgin. Be so pure in giving your love to the Lord and in giving your love to the church for God's economy.

**2. Waiting for the Lord to come back**

**3. Exercising to bring the Lord back**

Every Christian is waiting for the Lord to come back. We are always waiting for the One we love, but more than that, we exercise to bring Him back. Consider this: until there are five prudent virgins, prepared and equipped with oil, the Lord cannot come back. You can bring the Lord back by equipping yourself with oil. Brothers need many things, such as teachings, revelations, and visions; they even need to be prudent and faithful as stewards to carry God's testimony. Sisters, however, only need one thing—oil. Sisters are committed with purity and simplicity, waiting for the Lord's return and even bringing Him back. The secret to accomplishing this is to be rich in oil.

**C. Our living**

**1. In prudence—pay the price in our daily life to purchase the oil, to gain the Spirit**

Oil needs to be purchased. The five wise virgins told the five foolish virgins to go purchase oil. To purchase means to pay the price. In other words, to love the Lord is not so simple. Loving the Lord requires a price. A wife may feel that her husband does not understand how busy she is. Her husband spends his days in an air-conditioned office, but the wife spends her days doing housework and caring for the children. She may feel that she does not even have time to exercise her spirit to touch the Lord. But this is only because she does not know how to buy the oil.

Your day may be difficult, your children may be naughty, and you may be frustrated, but this is the time to pay the price. When things are difficult, call on the name of the Lord more. Pay the price to buy the oil to gain the Spirit.

**2. Be watchful—live a watchful life to be ready to enter into the wedding feast**

To get yourself ready, you must be watchful. A thief will surprise you when you are not watchful. When you are traveling or doing something out of the ordinary, you are very watchful. But nobody is watchful in their daily life, when their life is caught in routine. It is possible to spend years caught in your routine with no change. So the Lord spoke to the ten virgins to be watchful. Be watchful that your daily life will not become buried in routine.

**II. The Parable of Two Women at the Mill (Matt. 24:40-41)**

**A. Laboring together with the brothers in the practical church life**

I like this parable because both the brothers and the sisters are needed. Without the brothers, the sisters will not make it, because there will be no raw material for you to process. The raw material comes from the brothers. Right after the brothers labor, the sisters labor together with the brothers in the practical church life.

**B. The brothers labor in the field to produce the harvest**

We should pray for the brothers' labor to be so proper.

**C. The sisters labor at the mill to process what the brothers produce**

Paul said that he does not like a woman to teach. To teach is to

produce raw food. But Paul never said that he does not allow a woman to feed. There is a difference between teaching and feeding. A brother sharing a message may be just teaching. But after the teaching, the sisters have a marvelous function. What the brother speaks in his message is raw. The sisters have the ability to grind it. After a conference the sisters should be so busy at the mill grinding what was spoken. This grinding makes whatever the brothers shared become edible, enjoyable, real food for others to eat. The sisters' job is to make the raw food edible, so that all the saints can enjoy it.

### **1. Based on the fine nature the Lord has given the sisters**

Sisters have a much finer humanity than brothers. Their humanity is much more delicate. This enables them to see more of the spiritual things.

### **2. Based on the commitment we have received**

We have seen something. We have seen that God has an economy and that God's economy should become our daily exercise in our operation.

### **3. Based on the diligence we exercise**

We should be diligent to grind the food from the messages we hear. As a ministering brother I am not supposed to give you milk. I am supposed to give you hard food, and you are supposed to grind it to make it edible. In grinding it you produce soft food, enjoyable food to supply the whole church life. This surely requires diligence. A lazy person cannot do this work.

### **4. All these are carried out while working for our living**

The two men laboring in the field were working for their liv-

ing. The women grinding at the mill were working for their living. For the women, their living becomes a life supply to others.

**5. This watchful daily life is based on the realization of the Lord's coming**

This parable reminds us that we do not know when the Lord is coming back. Two were at the mill, but only one was taken. You have to realize that tomorrow may be too late. You may not have another chance. So be sober today about every minute before the Lord.

**III. The Parable of the Woman Seeking the Lost Coin  
(Luke 15:8-10)**

**A. Followed by the parable of the Shepherd looking after the lost sheep**

**B. This very exercise indicates that a sister:**

**1. Works closely with the Spirit—lights a lamp**

The story in Luke 15 refers to the Spirit's work. However, it mentions a woman. A woman lights the lamp. When the sisters in the church life operate, especially when they labor with others, they have to be extremely careful. Without the Spirit you cannot do much. Even lighting the lamp must be done with the Spirit. Those who work in an office are constantly battling. They are abused by their bosses and by their colleagues. This can cause them to become coldhearted. But if you stay at home with your children, you can be very sweet. Your dealings with your neighbors and your husband can be very sweet. It is easy for a woman to make friends. But it is also easy to lose friends. If this happens, it shows that in the process of laboring in the church life, the lamp is not there. For your labor with the saints, first light the lamp. Do not get caught in your emotions. In all your activities

you must first work closely with the Spirit.

**2. Works in a much smaller operating field—in the church life (sweeps the house)**

It is good to be a sweet sister operating in your local church. If your local church is small, operate in a small way. If your local church is big, operate in a big way. In this parable the woman closed the door, lit the lamp, and operated in that little room. She swept the house. Sweeping means to look around. In the church life we should always be looking around.

Today I met a brother in the elevator whom I did not recognize. But I found out that he has been in the church life for a long time, even spending some time in a church that I served. This reminded me that often we do not sweep the house. There are many lost coins in the house. When the sisters get too emotional, trying to see who is good, they do not look down to see the lost coin on the floor. Our problem is that we only see what stands out. In the church life no one bothers to sweep the floor, because everyone is too busy with new fruit. If some sisters begin to work with the Spirit to sweep the house, they will find so many lost coins already there.

**3. Exercises genuine care with diligence—seeking carefully for the lost coin**

**4. Bears the saints and unbelievers—not tolerating if even one is lost**

This is not the brothers' job. This is a job for sisters.

**5. Does this in the church life—calls friends and neighbors to rejoice together**

You need this kind of exercise.

## **IV. The Bride for the Bridegroom (John 3:29)**

### **A. Not in the work**

In John 3:29 John's disciples were concerned that Jesus' disciples were baptizing more people. Brothers are always troubled about who has bigger numbers. But John answered, "It is the bridegroom who has the bride." In other words, John was telling his disciples that they cared too much for the work. To all the brothers I would say the same thing: brothers, we are too much in the work. Our whole thought is to gain increase, to do more, to develop more. But the Lord does not desire this. The Lord desires something of life. That is why the Bible says, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." This is not a work, but an organism.

#### **1. But in life**

How does life come? Ephesians tells us clearly that the Lord as the husband loves the church as His wife. The bridegroom loves the bride. Christ loves the church.

#### **2. Through the washing of the water in the word (Eph. 5:26)**

The Lord purifies, sanctifies, the church. How can the bride become a reality? Forget about the work. It is not good for sisters to talk about how many people have been gained. A sister's talk should be washed by the water in the word, so that we can present ourselves to the Lord without blemish. Sisters, do not get caught in the work. Do not even get so excited about how many have been baptized. Just be in life, enjoying the washing of the water in the word.

### **B. Prepares herself to be ready—not individually but corporately**



## FOUR MARVELOUS PARABLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Enjoy life in the church life. How marvelous it is that the bride who prepares herself is not one person but a corporate body!



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### **THE OPERATION OF THE SISTERS IN RELATION TO JESUS CHRIST AND HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

#### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

This message will show us some living examples related to the sisters' function. When the Lord was on this earth, there were many dear sisters involved in the process He went through. In the beginning, during, and at the end of the Lord's process, there were many sisters operating to support Him. Before the Lord came, there were sisters praying. To bring the Lord to earth, there were some faithful sisters obeying Him in purity. While the Lord was on the earth exercising to fulfill His commitment, some sisters were with Him, serving and supporting Him. When the Lord was on the cross, four sisters and one brother stood by Him when all the rest had disappeared. The first one to witness the Lord's resurrection was a sister. And finally, the brothers and the sisters in one accord brought in the reality of the church life.

All of these points show us the principle of operation in the church life. The church life has the same Christ as the four Gospels. In the Gospels there is the incarnation of Christ. In the church life is the presence of Christ. In the Gospels there is the preparation for salvation. In the church life is the fulfillment of salvation. In the Gospels, there is the need of the kingdom to go to the Gentiles. In the church life, there is the need for the gospel to be preached over all the earth. In the Gospels, Christ died on the cross. In the church life, there are times of trial. In the Gospels

there is resurrection. In the church life, there is the experience of Christ's resurrection. Outwardly, all of these experiences, except for incarnation, seem to involve only brothers. The brothers are always on display. However, the reality comes from the faithful exercise of the sisters.

### **I. Exercising a Prayer Life for Christ's Incarnation as well as His Second Coming—Anna (Luke 2:37)**

From her youth, Anna was in the temple day and night, praying for the Lord's coming. Today there is the same need for the sisters to pray desperately for the Lord's coming back. Do not be concerned with how many are in your meetings. Just pray for the Lord to return.

### **II. Exercising Purity and Obedience for Christ's Incarnation as well as for His Living Presence in Today's Church Life —Mary (Luke 1:46-47)**

Two thousand years ago the Lord lived among the Jews physically. Today in the church life, in principle, we need the living presence of the Lord. His living presence comes to the church life not only by the brothers' speaking and admonishing, but also by the sisters' purity and obedience. If you want to understand the high things in the Bible, firstly you must be pure. In the Bible, sisters are often used as examples of purity. If you desire to see the church life filled with the living presence of the Lord, the secret is that many of the sisters must exercise a pure love towards the Lord.

Mary was so pure when she declared, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). Mary did not consider how great it was for her to be the mother of the Lord Jesus. Rather, when the angel told her she would conceive and bear a son, the Lord Jesus, her response was, "I will just obey the Lord. Whatever God says, let it be a reality. My soul and my spirit are all just focused on the Lord

Himself.”

The secret of a prevailing church life comes from a group of sisters exercising such purity. It is not that profitable for the sisters to be overly involved in doing many things. What is really worthwhile is when all the sisters can testify, “I love the Lord, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit exults in my Savior. In my daily life, I obey the Lord’s word.” The disciples in the New Testament did not respond to the Lord in this way. Rather, Peter told the Lord, “Behold, we have left all and followed You. What then will there be for us?” (Matt. 19:27). Peter left a small sea and an old boat to follow the Lord at an exciting time, when crowds were seeking the Lord out, and he wanted to know what his reward would be. Mary, however, magnified the Lord and exulted in God her Savior. The difference between them lies in how God made man and woman. Sisters, do not try to change your God-given nature. Just be a sister—so sweet, so pure, and so obedient. The result of your purity and obedience will be the living presence of the Lord Jesus in the church life.

Do not criticize the church when you feel the saints are dead and dry. When the church is dead, all that the sisters have to do is love the Lord, magnify the Lord, and exult in their Savior. Then the Lord’s presence will return. The sisters should not care how things are arranged in the church life. Just love the Lord and be so pure and obedient before Him. Then wherever you are, the Lord’s presence will be there. Brothers are also a blessing to the church, but in different ways. A sister’s portion is to love the Lord and enjoy His presence. A sister can bring the Lord’s presence into the church life.

### **III. Exercising Diligence and Love in Providing for the Lord’s Needs and Comfort as well as for the Church’s Needs and Comfort**

The church has needs, and one of those needs is a need for comfort. The church should be a house of comforting. When you are religious, you are not comforting, but harsh. To be religious

is to believe in something subjectively. For example, you may believe a certain brother is right, but another brother is wrong. Or you may believe that a certain event did or did not happen. This is religion.

Comfort comes, in principle, from the sisters. At the end of the Lord's life, when He was ready to fulfill His ministry, He needed to do several things. Firstly, He needed to change the age from the Jews as the center to the Gentiles. Secondly, He needed to clear up the worship of God and make it so healthy and proper. Thirdly, He needed to make Himself available as the Savior. While He was doing all these things, He stayed in the village of Bethany.

#### **IV. The Lord's Preparation for Salvation**

##### **A. The Lord's preparation for salvation started in Bethany (Mark 11:1-11)**

Have you ever considered what was involved in giving hospitality to Jesus? Jesus never traveled by Himself. There were many people with Him including the twelve disciples and other men and women. To take care of the Lord also meant to care for those with Him. This was not easy. The Lord was able to go through this time of trial and carry out what had been committed to Him because of Mary and Martha. They honored the Lord to the uttermost; Mary even anointed His feet with costly ointment from an alabaster box. They did everything with diligence and comforting to sustain the Lord. Today we must exercise in the same way, with diligence and love in caring for the saints.

If Mary had told the Lord that there were too many people with Him and that they could not all be cared for, He would not have been so restful. But every night He was able to get a good rest because the sisters' serving upheld Him. Every night the Lord Jesus went to enjoy the sweet love expressed through the sisters' diligent serving to prepare Himself for the next day's trial.

Sisters, do not despise yourselves. The church life needs this kind of support. It is marvelous to give hospitality to the saints.

This is a comfort to the church and to the saints.

**B. He cursed the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14)**

This act changed the kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles.

**C. He cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15)**

The purging of the temple was a powerful act. The Lord used a whip and overturned tables. He was able to do this because the previous night He had rested under the careful, loving service of the sisters. And He knew that that night He would return to Bethany again to be served with tenderness and love.

**D. He was tested and examined by the chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees (Mark 11:27; 12:13, 18)**

The Lord was examined by all these people to make sure that He was qualified to go to the cross and die. We may consider that it was difficult for the almighty God to be confined in Mary's womb for nine months. But I would say that this time of testing before His crucifixion was more difficult. The Lord needed to take care of the transfer of the kingdom, clean up the way of worship, and be tested by many people. At this time, who was caring for Him? The disciples were just giving Him headaches. But every night Jesus went out of the city and stayed in Bethany at the house of two sisters. There He was comforted through the diligence of these sisters.

**E. This time of testing concluded with the poor widow's offering of two copper coins (Mark 12:42)**

The widow's offering shows that only a sister could have this kind of purity in giving everything she has to Christ. When a sister gives herself to the Lord, she is mainly giving her person.

When a brother gives himself to the Lord, he is giving his career, his future, his job, his education, and his success. In this respect, man is more complicated than woman.

At the end of the Lord's time of testing, there was a proper consecration. Yet this consecration came from a poor widow who had nothing. She was so simple, just giving herself to the Lord.

### **V. Being Desperate in God's Kingdom and Humbling Ourselves—the Canaanite Woman (Matt. 15:27)**

This Canaanite woman had a demon-possessed daughter. She was desperate for her daughter to be healed. She came to the Lord crying out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" and would not be silenced. The disciples wanted the Lord to do a miracle just to make her go away. Her persistence forced the Lord to tell his disciples that He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, and to tell her that it is not good to throw the children's bread to the dogs. Her response was that even the little dogs can eat the crumbs that fall from the table.

The Lord had been rejected by the Jews and was therefore traveling through Gentile territory. This Canaanite woman grasped the opportunity to be with the Lord. At this point the Lord's economy went to the Gentiles. This great turn came because of a humble sister's cry. May the sisters be so desperate, praying and crying out for God's kingdom and for the Lord's mercy!

### **VI. Exercising to Deny the Self Life by Standing With the Crucified Christ in the Church Life (John 19:25)**

When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, the brothers ran away, but the sisters stayed there. It must have been very difficult to see the Lord on the cross, especially for those who loved Him so much. May the Lord raise up such sisters in the church life! We should learn to tell the Lord, "Lord, I am not greedy. I do not care if I will be the wife of an elder or an apostle. Rather, I love to be someone who denies myself to the uttermost to stand with You,



even in Your death.” How precious this is, and how blessed the church is if many sisters exercise in the church life in this way.

**VII. Exercising Purity and Love in Seeking and Witnessing the Resurrected Christ in the Church Life (John 20:1, 11, 14)**

**VIII. Working Steadfastly and Positively in the Church Life with the Brothers in One Accord for God’s Kingdom (Acts 1:13-14)**



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### **THE OPERATION OF THE SISTERS IN THE PRACTICAL CHURCH LIFE**

#### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

In the first message of this section we talked about four major items in the Bible related to sisters: allegories, parables, examples, and teachings. We have had a message on each of these topics except for the matter of teaching. Many of the teachings related to sisters in the Bible are very hard to understand, so we will not consider the teachings in this section. Usually the simplest things are the hardest to understand. Simple things need experience to back them up. For this reason I would say that some of the clear teachings in the Bible related to the sisters' function are very hard to apprehend.

#### **OUTLINE**

### **I. The Operation of the Sisters in the Practical Church Life as Illustrated through the Healthy Church Life**

#### **A. In one accord with the brothers to bring in the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 1:13-14; 2:18)**

This is the stand of the sisters in the church life. Their stand is to be in one accord with the brothers to bring in the outpouring of the Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit is actually the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy. When the Lord

breathed the Spirit into His disciples, that was a partial accomplishment. The outpouring of the Spirit was the totality of His accomplishment. This outpouring came in because of the one accord of one hundred and twenty brothers and sisters standing together in fervent prayer.

In the church life, it is extremely hard to be in one accord, especially among the sisters. The brothers are raw, and so they do not notice things. The problem with sisters with regard to the one accord is that they are fine, and they see too much. In proper fellowship, it is a blessing to notice things in the church life. But on the other hand, when you notice things and do not know how to fellowship, the one accord is gone. To be in one accord, you must know this secret. When you have the ability to see things, you also need the ability to fellowship. Otherwise the church life will be frustrated by gossip and opinion.

Also, the brothers give up easily. If a few brothers are in fellowship about something, and several insist on one thing, a brother will go along with it even if he does not agree. But the sisters will not give up when they feel they are right. To have the one accord, sisters must learn this lesson.

**B. Becoming the first disciples in the apostle's labor in Philippi (Acts 16:12, 14), in Thessalonica (17:4), in Berea (Acts 17:12), in Athens (Acts 17:34), and in Corinth (Acts 18:2)**

When the Lord sent His servant to raise up churches, the first response usually came not from brothers, but from the sisters. The sisters should not despise themselves. In the Bible, the sisters were the first ones to follow the Lord and respond to His work, taking the lead to associate themselves with the reality of the gospel for the local churches to be raised up.

**C. Holding offices in the church life**

**1. Operating by being sent out**

Please have this understanding: sisters can become very useful. The sisters do have the ability to serve the Lord with an enlarged capacity, even to the point that they can be sent out.

## **2. Operating as deaconesses in the local church life**

The word *deaconess* is the same Greek word as for *ministering*. In other words, it means a serving one. In all the local churches some sisters should function as serving ones, taking the lead to take care of the services. It is a shame if there are only a few deacons and deaconesses operating in the church life in a proper way. Have you ever considered how hospitality is handled in your locality? Perhaps only one brother is handling many burdens, including hospitality. It would be good for some sisters to rise up and take the lead to serve in their locality.

### **D. Functioning in different capacities in the Body**

#### **1. Helping the saints by expounding the way of God— Priscilla with Apollos (Acts 18:26)**

The church in Ephesus began with only a few saints, including Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila. Apollos only had the teachings of John the Baptist. Priscilla and Aquila had been under Paul's teaching, and Priscilla realized there was something lacking in Apollos's understanding. However, she did not expose him in the meeting in front of all the saints. Rather, she invited him to her home and began to expound the way of God to him. This verse surely shows us that sisters are able to teach and should be able to teach, if it is in a proper environment. It is not proper for a sister to exercise teaching publicly in the meeting. But Priscilla exercised in a healthy way to present the way of God to Apollos.

#### **2. Becoming the patroness of many— Phoebe (Rom. 16:2)**

A patroness invests her whole person and all of her resources to bring what she sees into reality. Phoebe was a deaconess, but at the same time she operated as a patroness to make sure that blessings were rendered to all the saints.

**3. Risking their lives for the apostles and the Lord's testimony—Priscilla (Acts 16:4)**

**4. Laboring much—Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis (Rom. 16:6, 12)**

**5. Exercising with the apostles to become a nursing mother to both the apostles and the saints (Rom. 16:13; 1 Thes. 2:7)**

It is not wise for a sister to consider where her place is or what she should do. There is so much to do. If you are rich in truth, expound the way of God. If you do not feel you have that much truth, you can be the patroness of some of the saints. If you do not know how to be a patroness, then labor. At least you can come to the meeting hall to clean and dust. The church life needs many saints to labor much. And you can nurse some new ones. After the meeting, go up to a new one and take care of her. When you comfort a new one, or make a new one feel at home, this is to be a nursing mother. All of these points show the functioning of the sisters in different capacities in the Body as seen in the Bible.

## **II. As Illustrated through an Unusual Example of a Spiritual Family Life—the Household of Timothy**

This example should be a comfort to the sisters whose husbands are unsaved.

**A. With a Greek father who was perhaps an unbeliever (Acts 16:1)**

## **B. With a godly grandmother and mother who possessed unfeigned faith (2 Tim. 1:5)**

The situation of Timothy's mother and grandmother was difficult. Timothy's father was a Greek and may not have been saved, yet in such a household there was the Lord's presence, because the mother and the grandmother had unfeigned faith.

### **1. They infused that same faith into Timothy (1 Tim. 1:5)**

Timothy's mother and grandmother also passed this same faith on to Timothy. Many parents are overly concerned in correcting their children. Parents should remember that their children are in the Lord's hands, not in their hands. Timothy grew up in a discouraging family situation. His father may not have been saved and may even have brought sinful things into the home. However, the mother and the grandmother were extremely godly and were able to infuse something into Timothy that was greater than the sinful influence of the father. Timothy's mother "overpowered" his father by her unfeigned faith. She trusted in the Lord; she knew her God and Savior. This faith within her was eventually infused into Timothy so that he also possessed such faith.

### **2. They helped Timothy to know the Scriptures from his infancy (2 Tim. 3:15)**

Second Timothy 3:15 is a difficult verse to understand. How can a baby understand the Bible? We often like to ask when to start raising our children up spiritually. This verse shows us that we should start from day one. As soon as they are born, you can sing songs to them at bedtime and recite verses to them. They may not understand it, but do it. Paul told Timothy, "From a babe you have known the sacred writings."

## **C. Timothy was attested to by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2)**

Eventually two nearby local churches both knew that there was a fine young man named Timothy in the church life. They knew this because they had heard of the family situation, yet they admired this young man. For the church to attest to someone means to know him and to somewhat admire him.

**D. Timothy was selected to go forth with Paul (Acts 16:3)**

Are you willing for your sons to go full-time, to live a despised, poor life, and to suffer persecution from the Gentiles and from the church? This will happen if your son goes full-time. This was Timothy's life.

**III. As Illustrated through a Healthy Household in Bethany**

**A. Lazarus—the life of resurrection (John 11:43-44)**

**B. Simon the leper—a cleansed sinner (Mark 14:3)**

**C. Bethany—outwardly afflicted**

**D. With the Lord's presence—inwardly feasting (John 12:2)**

**E. Having more sisters than brothers (John 12:2-3)**

**F. Having members with different functions (John 12:2-3)**

**1. Serving—Martha**

**2. Testifying—Lazarus**

**3. Loving—Mary**

**G. Bringing in many believers (John 12:11)**

**IV. The Necessity of the Healthy Operations of the Households unto a Prevailing Church Life**

The last point of this section is the necessity of the household. Everyone has to live somewhere, and that is your household. Wherever you are, there is a household, and that household becomes the source of blessing. Usually we concentrate on good individuals. Very seldom do we acknowledge a good household.



Our thought is that a good church life has many good brothers and good sisters. But the term *good brother* is never mentioned in the Bible. A brother may be good, and his wife may be good, but they may not necessarily have a good household. In a good household both the brother and the sister serve together. What the Lord desires is the household.

**A. The church life started from house to house (Acts 2:46)**

Without houses, basically there can never be a proper church life.

**B. Many houses became houses of prayer and testimony—  
Peter went to Mary’s house (Acts 12:12)**

In the beginning of the church life, many houses must have opened up for the saints to eat together, enjoy the Lord together, fellowship together, pray together, preach the gospel together, and bear the Lord’s testimony together. Satan attacks the household by making you selfish concerning your home and your privacy. If your household is not used by the Lord, then Satan can come in with many things to distract you, but when the household is open to the church, even becoming a household of prayer and of the Lord’s testimony, Satan has to flee. Salvation comes to the household.

**C. Many local churches actually met at a particular house, e.g., the church in Colosse in Philemon’s house (Philem. 2), and the church in Rome in Aquila and Priscilla’s house (Rom. 16:5)**

How good it would be if, in a large metropolitan area with many small cities, there could be many small churches meeting from house to house. You could have a large meeting hall for corporate meetings, but your daily church life would be in the homes. These many houses could be houses of prayer and testi-

mony. How crucial is the household!

#### **D. The secret of exercising the church life through our household**

##### **1. To realize how crucial it is—a deciding factor of a healthy church life**

It is not enough to realize that you are a good sister. Your household must be a good household. Your household must be a blessing to the church life. You need this kind of realization.

##### **2. To enjoy the Lord's grace—know that it is more blessed to give than to receive**

As you open up your house, you will enjoy more because you are giving. As you give, the Lord will bless you more.

##### **3. To exercise with normality—present ourselves as who we are**

This point is crucial, because it is easy for us to try to put on a good face when we have company. But this is not genuine, nor is it a healthy operation of the household. And it can be very stressful for you as the hostess to try to make everything perfect outwardly. You must learn to be very normal. Do not be pressured; do not be somebody else; do not even try to be spiritual. Realize that when you operate, you are going to bless the Body.

##### **4. To realize that the saints' presence brings in the Lord's presence and many times "is equal to" the Lord's presence**

When I invite a few saints to my home or visit them in their home, just being in their presence many times equals being in the Lord's presence and even brings in the Lord's presence.

**5. With no work or accomplishment in view, but rather to make our house a place of nurturing and serving**

Our love for the brothers and sisters should not be cheap. We should not just love them if they come to the meetings. Rather, our home should be a place for us to nurture one another as well as to serve and fellowship with one another. We should not have any other expectations. Otherwise, we will be discouraged if the brother we are caring for does not make it to the meetings. We expect that if we invite him over, he should come to the meetings. This is too much like running a business. If the Lord had treated us this way, He would expect that since He died for us, we should die for Him. If this were the case, none of us could be saved. But this is not the case. The Lord is not running a business. He did His part and left the rest to the Father. So we should do our part and leave the rest to the Lord. Our view should be that we invite saints over to love and serve them. How good this is!

**6. With no view to solving problems, but rather seeking out the Lord's presence and enjoying each other's presence**

The danger of trying to solve someone else's problems is that it causes them to focus on their problems. If you would like to help the saints, it is better that you just enjoy the Lord with them. Do not try to make your home a problem-solving center.

**7. To restore our physical strength by being with the saints**

Even when you come home so tired, you should invite someone over. If you do not invite anyone over, you will become more tired. But if someone comes to your house, your physical strength will be restored. The strength and supply of the saints will produce physical strength in you. If you just concentrate on your

tiredness, eventually you will not even be able to go to work anymore. It is worthwhile to learn that your strength is from the saints.

To learn this lesson we must also learn to be simple. Be who you are in normality. Do not try to make things fancy or do anything extra. Just have an enjoyable time in the Lord's presence. The church life is very simple. Do not try to make it complicated.

**8. To open our house as a practice and appreciate its value in the church life**

In inviting saints to your home, do not wait until the Lord tells you to do so. You do not wait for the Lord to speak to you before you eat each meal. You just know you need to eat. In the same way, using your house for the church life should also be your practice. Open your house every week to the saints. This is to have the reality of the church life in your locality.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS (1)

**Question:** *A new sister's husband is very strong and will not allow her to come to any meetings. What should we do?*

**Answer:** I feel there is no need to answer this question, because it depends on what kind of person the husband is and what is his reason. For instance, sometimes when a wife starts going to meetings, she begins to behave differently at home, and that offends the husband. This may cause the husband to prohibit his wife from going to meetings. In this example, the husband has a legal case, a valid reason. On the other hand, sometimes the husband's refusal comes from jealousy or because Satan is doing something.

However, in principle, the wife should still insist on making the meetings in the church life to whatever extent she is able. In a very sweet way, with a good attitude, she may tell her husband, "I love you, I love our family, but I am saved. I must go to some meetings. I need this." Her insisting on the church life should not give her husband the feeling that she is giving up her family or him for the church. When the wife is very sweet in her insisting, very seldom can her husband overcome her. This is a brief answer because I do not know what kind of personality is involved.

**Question:** *When a brother has the feeling to migrate or go full-time, to what extent should his wife be involved in or control the decision-making process?*

**Answer:** Actually, the wife always controls. The wife is much more powerful than you realize. So the wife is always involved,

but the value of her involvement is based on her exercise of godliness. Sometimes the wife becomes emotional about the decision. Her feeling may be that they just bought a house or got a better job; how can they leave now? A sister always reasons according to her emotion. This is why the Bible says that the husband is the head. Men and women were created differently.

Once a sister is not that emotionally involved in a decision, she will have much more freedom to stand one with her husband. He may tell her that he has a feeling to migrate. She may encourage it based on her emotions because she does not like the church life where they are presently. Or she may stop it emotionally because she likes the house they live in or their finances have just stabilized. All these reasons are based on emotions. The sister should realize that migration is a very godly matter. And to be full-time is an even more godly matter. These things cannot be handled emotionally based on our preferences. Rather we must handle them in a godly way. Pray with your husband, and be in the Lord's presence with your husband. Then you will be much more clear, and it will even be much easier to be clear.

Suppose a husband tells his wife that he wants to go full-time, and his wife says no. In this case, the husband must learn to submit in the "sisters' way." The "sisters' way" is this: when the wife says no, the husband agrees. But the next day, the husband says again, "I prayed more, and I still have a feeling to go full-time." When the wife refuses again, the husband submits again, saying, "That's right, no. I'll pray more." I refer to this as the "sisters' way" because the sisters always do this. If you want a new vacuum cleaner, you talk about it until your husband cannot handle it anymore and buys you a new vacuum cleaner.

So this husband must learn to exercise in the sisters' way. When his wife says no to his desire to be full-time, he must take it as from the Lord. He must really pray. He should not just try to wear her out with his talk. Rather, he should pray, and if he still feels he should be full-time, then he should talk to his wife again. "I do not know what to do. I'm sorry, but after you said no, I prayed more, and I still feel the Lord telling me that I should be

full-time.” If his wife says no again, he should go back and pray more. Eventually the Lord will have His way.

For the husband to insist that he is the head and the wife should listen to him is not wise. It will hurt their relationship. Nor should he just drop his feeling to go full-time after his wife’s negative response, if he feels clear before the Lord. This same principle applies to migration.

My advice to the wives is to not be emotional. Many times your “yes” and your “no” can both become very emotional. A man may see a house and decide he wants to retire there. But do not believe him. When a good opportunity comes, he will sell the house. But when a woman likes a house, she can become attached to it. Then migration is difficult, because she does not want to leave her house.

Sisters, if your husband has the desire to migrate or to be full-time, realize that he is the head. However, you have the right to make sure the head is the head. For instance, your husband may also be emotional, just like you. His decision may be spontaneous and not from the Lord. You can help your husband by recommending that he pray more about his decision. In this way you will have a very good operation by standing one with your husband for the way to go on.

**Question:** *A sister is married to a brother who is in a denomination; he just started going back there. He does not see the church or the economy of God. Is the sister required to go with him to the denomination, or should she continue in the church life? The sister has been in the church life a long time.*

**Answer:** I will take this question as an opportunity to address a larger issue first. I have seen a few sisters, when they are single and in the church life, marry someone whom they got saved. And I have seen some of these brothers later become extremely useful, and I am very encouraged by this. But this is not easy work, because many times as the sister is trying to get the man saved, the man pulls her into the world. It is not easy to get a man saved and into the church life, but it is possible. I would say publicly

that, at times, it is good for a single sister who loves the Lord very much, if she sees a man that is so proper and healthy with a decent humanity, to make an effort to get him saved and to marry him. This is very good.

With regard to the question, we should not consider that there is such a thing called a denomination. Are there denominations? Yes, there are many. Are there denominations? No, they are all brothers and sisters. It all depends on how you look at it. Suppose a dear sister marries a brother, and after their marriage the brother goes back to his denomination. What should she do? Firstly, she has seen something, so she should not go with him. You may say that he is her head, so she should go with him. But if her husband were unsaved and wanted her to be a sinner with him, she could not do that. The husband is the head of the wife only when he takes Christ as his head. When he does not take Christ as his head, the wife still has to follow the headship of Christ. So the sister should not go to the denomination.

Secondly, the sister should not consider that her husband goes to a denomination, but rather that he goes to meetings. When she and her husband return home from each of their meetings, she can ask him how his meeting was and they can fellowship. Once you consider that brother as being a brother in a denomination, you are not going to gain him. But if you consider him simply as a brother, then you can open to him, and he can be open to you. Do not criticize that brother for being in a denomination. This will produce a barrier between you. The saints should encourage the sister to remain in the church life, and they should also visit her husband with no profit in view. In your visits you may fellowship about his meetings, and in the process you can help him to touch his spirit. After he has really touched his spirit a few times, for some reason he will lose his taste for his denomination. However, even if he never comes into the church life, that sister should still follow the Lord.



**Question:** *How do you live with a husband who is not spiritual at all?*

**Answer:** Just live with him. Firstly, how spiritual is spiritual? Secondly, very few husbands are spiritual. Basically, when a husband is at home, he is not spiritual. If your husband is that spiritual at home, that means he is not relaxed, but rather he has to do something to get your approval. Just consider how serious that is. To not be spiritual, to be worldly, and to be sinful are three different things.

According to my wife, I may not be spiritual, but I may actually be very spiritual. Outwardly I may be doing many things, but inwardly I may be praying and very much in my spirit before the Lord. Therefore, if you feel your husband is not spiritual, please try not to judge or evaluate. But you should ask yourself, is my husband worldly? If he is worldly, learn to stop it. For instance, your husband may buy a new car. After he has bought this car, he may begin to consider the next car he is going to buy and talk about it. A good wife should say something to stop this kind of thinking, or else your life will become worldly; the wife will begin to consider how to renovate their home or make a beautiful garden, and the family will no longer have time for the church life.

Then, suppose your husband is not only worldly, but has even become sinful. Here you have to learn to help your husband by being with him. Correcting him will not work. But always present something higher and better as a testimony. You must learn to exercise to stop all unnecessary things. If your husband is just not that spiritual, realize that we are not spiritual all the time. Treasure the five minutes that he is spiritual.

Consider this illustration. Suppose I attend four meetings a week, and in two of the meetings I give two testimonies which are my top experiences of the whole week. Wouldn't I impress everyone? But I would not impress my wife, because my wife is with me 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I may give a very good testimony about catching a bus and calling on the name of the Lord. But my wife would remember that that morning I was

upset because breakfast was not ready, and I had to rush to catch the bus. What my wife saw and what the saints in the meeting heard are totally different. In this case, am I spiritual or not?

So if your husband is not that spiritual, try to nurture what is spiritual in him. When you hear him call on the Lord, take that opportunity to encourage him. Try not to condemn or judge.

***Question:** How should a sister deal with a husband who sometimes seems overly spiritual? I feel as though I get in the way of his going on.*

***Answer:*** Suppose a sister's husband is very spiritual from morning until evening, calling on the name of the Lord, reading the Bible all the time, and even admonishing her, when she loses her temper, to be in her spirit. There is not much that sister can do. She married such a husband. She just has to suffer with it.

Personally, I would rather see a husband that is very normal. You must realize that genuine spirituality is in normality. Consider how normal Jesus was. People called Him a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Normal does not mean that you are not spiritual. Whether your husband is normal, not spiritual, or over-spiritual, praise the Lord that He has given you the husband you really need. In all of these cases, you can help your husband by exercising to be a proper wife.

***Question:** My husband serves full-time and is usually out six nights a week.*

***Answer:*** It is always good to spend one or two nights a week with your family alone, and this includes elders and full-timers. It is not healthy for a full-timer to spend seven nights a week out, especially if you have children. Fathers must spend time with their children. We have that responsibility. The Lord has committed our children to us.

I have often observed that when a full-timer is at home, his wife does not function that much. But when the full-timer goes away, the wife gets resurrected and operates so positively. This shows that the full-timer spends too much time doing his work,

but he does not draw the right strength. Actually, it is best for a full-timer to work together with his wife. That is the most prevailing. Even I would encourage full-timers to travel with their wives if possible. The wife is the strength of the husband, although the husband may not want to say this because he is proud. But the husband needs his wife. If it is not possible for the husband and wife to travel together, then at least when the husband is at home, he should try to operate with his wife and family as a unit. It is always much more fruitful. When a full-timer visits people by himself, it may seem that he is doing his routine check. But when people come to his home, his family can create a very warm atmosphere.

Sister, I stand with you. Praise the Lord that He has blessed you. It is a blessing to be a wife of a full-timer. I know that life is harder, both financially and practically. But it is also a blessing. My advice to you is to bring this fellowship back to your husband so that you can learn how to operate together.

***Question:** Is separation acceptable between a brother and a sister if there is abuse involved, or for other reasons?*

***Answer:*** The real marriage does not happen when the husband and wife say their vows. The real marriage is the oneness. In the sight of God, He has pre-arranged for each couple to become one. God has put the husband and wife together; therefore, you cannot separate them. If there is a need of separation, the only reason should be the habitual unfaithfulness of one party. Basically, a marriage should not be broken. The Bible does not talk about abuse. If a husband abuses his wife, she needs to find a way to protect herself and to fellowship. This is according to the Bible, not according to American society. According to the Bible, the only reason that a couple can separate is unfaithfulness.

For this specific question, I do not have an answer. Surely it is a shame to see a brother abuse his wife. However, the wife can go to the Lord and to the elders. She can fellowship with an older sister. And they can pray. Together we can do the proper thing to

restore the situation.

**Question:** *Is it wrong for a sister to ask the Lord to be given to a particular brother in marriage, when she asks that the marriage be for His purpose?*

**Answer:** To this question, I would have to say strongly, Yes, it is wrong. I say this because marriage is pre-arranged by God. You must believe this. Since it is pre-arranged, do not be so worried about it. Sisters can become obsessed with a brother in an unhealthy way. If you have some feeling for a certain brother, go and fellowship with the elders or with an older sister. The elder can ask that brother if he has any feeling for you. If he does not, then just drop it. If it is not from the Lord, do not pursue it. If you cannot drop this matter, then you will just have to wait. Perhaps the brother's feelings will change over time.

However, you cannot take this matter too spiritually or you will hurt yourself. If you do not let go of your feelings when a brother is not interested, then you may lose a proper opportunity when another brother comes along. You must learn to tell the Lord, "Lord, I know that You have prepared someone on this earth to be my husband. He just hasn't arrived yet. Praise You, Lord, he is coming." It may only take one day for your husband to be manifested. Until that day comes, it can be very hard to wait, so it is good to fellowship. Try not to be so complicated. Learn to tell the Lord, "Lord, I love You. I give my life to You."

**Question:** *What if our children become worse because of us?*

**Answer:** This possibly means that the more you try to help your children, the worse they become. I think it is very common for the parents to think that their children are getting worse. Sometimes the parents expect too much, and they forget that the Lord is also involved with their children. You love your children, but the Lord is still their Lord. You can do your best to raise them up, but eventually, it is the Lord who raises them up.

In today's society, it seems that almost any chance occurrence

or involvement with another person can cause your child's life to become worse. So you must learn to pray, "Lord Jesus, by Your mercy, I will take care of my children whom You have committed to me. But Lord, I still realize that they are Yours. So I won't overdo my regulating of them." Many times our children get frustrated because we are too strict with them. When our expectations are unreasonable, our children react. You are the outward ones caring for your children, but they are still the Lord's. Do not try to keep them only in your hand.



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## CHAPTER THIRTY

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (2)

**Question:** *If the Lord gives us a definite burden about something that needs to be taken care of in the church life, how do we go to the brothers in a proper way to fellowship about it, without seeming to be taking over or telling them what to do?*

**Answer:** This is very hard. My suggestion is to just go and tell them, but do not tell them what to do. Just fellowship your feeling with them. Sometimes the brothers may get frustrated by a sister's suggestions, but the Lord at times does generate some feeling through the sisters. This is because sisters are able to see some things that brothers do not. For instance, brothers never see dust. But as soon as a sister sees dust, she will immediately clean it up. So it is good for a sister to fellowship with the leading ones if she sees something that she does not know how to handle. Then she can get the brothers' feeling about the situation.

The secret of practicing the church life, the secret of going on in the Lord's recovery, is to not be offended. Sometimes the brothers will not understand you. Sometimes the brothers will even lose their temper. But do not be offended; realize that, in that moment, that is just where the brothers are. If you do not learn this secret, the Lord's recovery will be hard. In the recovery we do stress order, but to be in order, we need to be very spiritual. However, there is no need to be overly concerned if the brothers react to what you say. You are still a good sister. You did not come to the church life because the brothers are so nice to you all the time. No matter how you are treated in the church life, you are here because of the Lord.

***Question:** If there is a sister who has been in the church life longer than the only brother in a locality, who should take the lead? This concerns a strong sister in my locality. My spirit is really bothered about this, and when she speaks to me alone, my spirit is bothered also. This conference is helping me to have something to share with her.*

**Answer:** The Bible makes it clear that there are strong sisters in the church life. Consider the example of Priscilla and Aquila. Priscilla and Aquila both got saved probably around the same time, when Paul went to work for them. I see Aquila as a very faithful, common brother, even capable, but not saying too much. His wife may have been just the opposite, aggressive, talking all the time. Priscilla stands out. When they went to Ephesus, they met Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). They brought Apollos to their home, and Priscilla taught Apollos. What she taught was not the best, because it was not until shortly afterwards, when Paul returned to Ephesus, that the believers there received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). It is also possible that Priscilla encouraged Apollos to go to Corinth, where she and Aquila had been saved. Eventually the church in Corinth was divided. Some claimed to be of Paul, and others of Apollos, because Apollos was such an able preacher. But the Bible records all of this very positively.

Sisters have their place. But a sister is also a saint. As a saint you can operate in all capacities. As a sister you must know your limit. Suppose there is a church life which has a spiritual sister, comparatively speaking, and the brothers there are very young, possibly even saved by her. Yet even in this case, the brothers still have to learn how to take the lead. That sister may operate very sweetly. In the whole Bible there is no condemnation of Priscilla. Eventually she and Aquila moved to Rome, and again the church met in their home. Paul even greeted Priscilla and Aquila; he greeted the sister first (Rom. 16:3).

If there is only one brother in the locality, my advice to you is to pray for the Lord to gain two, and make an effort for the Lord to gain two brothers. The sisters in that locality should stand with the brother, but not jeopardize any sister's function. If you jeop-



ardize another sister, that church will become poor in resources. The one brother can only function so much. That church needs all the members to function. The sisters can easily speak, but they should try not to teach. The sisters can minister and even expound the word. But do not teach, and do not tell the brothers what to do.

My advice to the sister who asked this question is to try not to make too much of an issue. If that sister operates more, then pray with her more. Very few people are able to turn because of our admonishing. People turn by our love. In your locality, fellowship with this dear sister in love. Even make a habit of praying with her more, and laboring with her more until all the distance between you is gone. Then if that sister has any shortcoming, she can be covered and restored.

***Question:** How can a single sister be used by the Lord to the fullest extent before she gets married? What is the difference between the function of single sisters and married sisters in the church life?*

***Answer:*** The biggest difference between the married sisters and the single sisters is the household. I would say that a married couple has a much greater operation than a single sister. You may think that once you get married and have children you cannot do that much. But I do not agree. Unless the single sister lives in a sisters' house, and that house operates as a unit, single sisters are limited. In principle, a married couple with a family can do much more, because in the Bible the operating of the church life is through the household. In the early church in Jerusalem, the saints met from house to house. Every house is a little operating unit of the church life.

The single sisters, therefore, must learn to work with the families. If you have a sisters' house, it is different. But if you do not yet live in the sisters' house, do not try too hard to do things by yourself. You can either use the sisters' house near you or you can work with a married couple. In this way every one of your contacts becomes a contact of the household.

A married sister may be limited in her reaching out. As a single sister on campus, your reaching out is unlimited. There are thousands of students waiting for you to contact them. Even if you work, you are still much more relaxed than a married working sister. A married sister must rush home right after work to care for her family, so she has very little opportunity to really get acquainted with her colleagues. But a single sister can invite a girl that she works with out for dinner and become her friend. This is an opportunity to use a family's home. You can invite yourself and your friend over for dinner. If the single sisters can work with the families in this way, how prevailing the church life will be! I would say that the Lord can bless the church life much more by this kind of cooperation.

***Question:** What is the significance of head covering? How should I wear it as the reality and not a ritual?*

***Answer:*** I would encourage the sisters to try to wear a head covering, although surely it is not a law. Try to cover your head, not for your sake, but for the brothers' sake. Many times when I see a sister properly cover her hair, it really puts me on the spot. That head covering speaks to me: "Brother, are you a proper brother?" Even more than that, that head covering really puts Satan to shame. Satan became Satan because he did not cover his head. And Eve sinned because she did not cover her head in that particular incident. So it is very good to have your head covered.

The kind of head covering you wear should be proper and simple, and it should present our stand to others. Do not make it overly pretty. In some denominations the women wear hats and each week is a hat contest to see who can wear the prettiest hat. This is not a covering but an exposing. So do not try to make your head covering too pretty. I would also recommend that you not try to be the same as all the other sisters. If we are unified, it will make us exclusive.

***Question:** Is it proper for sisters to break the bread in the Lord's table meeting?*

**Answer:** Sisters should try to not be overly involved with any of the functions in the church life that people can see. It is best that the sisters not take care of the duties in the church life that are manifested, such as making announcements, leading the meeting, or breaking the bread.

This is based on the principle shown in the parable of the two men in the field and the two women at the mill (Matt. 24:40-41). The brother works in the daylight, and the sister works at night. “At night” can imply “before the Lord’s coming”; it can also indicate difficult times. When the church is in trouble, the sisters should labor even more by processing what the brothers produce. In the parable of the woman seeking the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), she closed the door and lit the lamp to find the coin. In that principle, if anything is public or stands out, try not to do it. However, if you really feel led and inspired to break the bread, especially in a smaller Lord’s table in a homey setting, I would say to go ahead and do it. But do not make it a practice.

**Question:** *What is the Lord’s way for a sister to coordinate with a brother for the proper preparation of the Lord’s coming? How can a sister apply the Lord’s way for her daily church life?*

**Answer:** This question is very spiritual, and very hard to answer. Actually, the Lord’s way is different for every individual, even though the Lord’s principle is the same. You need to have morning revival, to come to the word daily, to be in the church life, and to take care of the saints. These are the principles, but how you carry them out is different for each individual.

**Question:** *How can we learn to “grind at the mill”? How can we take the wheat the brothers produce and make it nourishing?*

**Answer:** This is also a spiritual question, and very hard to answer. Any spiritual exercise is related to certain principles. Firstly, you need spiritual insight. For instance, if you exercise in the church life, yet you do not have any spiritual insight, you will never see anything. The brothers may produce a lot of hard food,

but you will never see it.

Secondly, this insight should motivate a burden in us. For instance, after a conference you may see something. What I see must become a charge within me. This insight should become my burden. Then, thirdly, out of that burden there should be some labor. Many times the saints do not have insight, or they have insight but no burden. Even if you have insight which has generated a burden, there still may be no labor. We may think about someone we are burdened for, but if we do not do anything, that is a burden without labor. This is very common in the church life. It is good, when you are burdened about something, to labor into it and exercise accordingly. You may enjoy a message from a conference and have a burden to get into it. Your labor can be to transcribe the message, to pick out the speaking that is crucial, and to read it with some sisters.

Then, fourthly, out of your labor you always produce some kind of practice in the church life. We should exercise in this way. Otherwise our church life is just a meeting life. We go to the meetings, then we go home. The brothers may speak many things, but it does not produce anything. But when the brothers speak something that charges you, go back to labor and to practice so that many of the saints can see what you see. This is a marvelous church life. If we would all exercise this in the church life, how blessed would the church life be!

Then, how can we use the wheat to produce something nourishing? When you hear a message, you should labor to get the speaking into yourself. You should not be so distant from what you have heard. Otherwise you will forget it. In the church life, there are many things going on. This makes it too easy for us to forget the riches that we have. So you should abide in and labor in what the Lord has inspired you with. Brother Lee produced many riches that will take countless brothers and sisters many nights of grinding at the mill to make them enjoyable. We should learn these things.

**Question:** *We are burdened for the children's service. What should we do? How can we carry out our burden without feeling like we are in charge? How can we bring more saints into the service?*

**Answer:** If you take care of the children's meeting, surely you are in charge. When we say that the sister cannot be the head, that does not mean that sisters should not do anything. If you have a burden for the children's meetings, then be in charge. Just because the sister is not the head does not mean that she should just be a robot, being told what to do and not daring to make any suggestions in fellowship. We should be very free and relaxed in the church life. When we are in charge, we should be in charge.

To bring more saints into the service, just fellowship your need in the meeting. Before you say something publicly, fellowship with the elders. Then in the meeting, you can announce the need for serving ones and ask for all those who are burdened to contact you. It is always sweet and good for the sisters to be so aggressively burdened and exercised.

**Question:** *When negative things rise up in my soul, such as criticism, gossip, complaints, or offenses, it is very hard for me to drop them. They always seem to find me. If they do not come out at that moment, then they will only erupt later in a worse way. It seems that putting these things to death is hard.*

**Answer:** This is also my experience. You may try so hard not to lose your temper, but it will only come back later. Or, you may just lose your temper. Do not try to do anything either to stop or to encourage your temper.

For example, suppose you visit Los Angeles. You will expect sunny skies. But suppose that four typhoons come in a row and it rains the entire time you are there. Your feeling may be that you are in Taiwan, not in Los Angeles, because of all the typhoons. But the fact is that you are in Los Angeles.

Your temper is like a typhoon. You are in the heavenlies in fact, even when you lose your temper. Just take care of life. When you take care of life, all your worrying over your temper will no

longer exist. The fact is that you are in the heavenlies.

Do not try to overcome your weaknesses. Instead, just enjoy them. If you are not weak, how can you know the Lord's grace? In the midst of your weakness, do not focus on Satan or he will overcome you. Focus on the Lord. Then you will not be weighed down by your weaknesses. Rather, you will be enjoying the Lord.

***Question:** If a sister has a very good idea that might help the church, in what way can she speak it out to help?*

***Answer:*** If a sister has an idea that will help the church, there is nothing wrong with her fellowshiping her idea with the elders. The problem arises when a sister focuses too much on whether a thing should or should not be done. You must learn to pay attention to how it is done. For instance, you may see the need for more prayer in the church life. And you know that a number of sisters are not working and would have time to come together and pray. If you have the burden to bring the sisters together to pray, the elders would not tell you that you are too opinionated. However, to carry out this burden you must do it in the right way. If you go to the elders and fellowship your burden in a sweet way, you will not be rebuked. But if you stand up in the meeting and rebuke the sisters for being lazy and tell them they have to come pray with you, you will get into trouble. Your way of expressing your burden in this case is very offensive. A strong sister operating properly in the church life can be a blessing to the church. But if that strong sister operates improperly, she will cause problems in the church.

***Question:** Is it proper for a sister to wear make-up?*

***Answer:*** There is no "yes" or "no" answer to this question. It depends on how the Lord leads you personally.

I would like to use this opportunity to say a word to the wives. Many wives try to be a good wife by being sloppy. They try to show their husband that they are faithful and hard-working, so they do not take time to take care of their appearance. Do not do this. Even if you are only with your husband, make yourself very

presentable. This is proper and wise.

Regarding make-up, I am for a very proper appearance. When you are at home, even if you are only with your husband, present yourself with dignity. Do not become sloppy. The same thing applies to the church meetings. Do not take my word as a license to buy a new wardrobe or do your hair and make-up in outlandish styles. Be careful. We are not for the world, but surely we should present ourselves properly.

***Question:** My feeling is that in the church, brothers discourage sisters from working. But part of me feels that perhaps I could be more of a profit to my family and to the church if I do work. I have prayed about this a lot, but I am still waiting for an answer.*

***Answer:*** In the United States today, with our current standard of living, it is difficult for the wife not to work. In order to pay for a house, your children's education, or a second car, the wife needs to work. If you do not want to work, the secret is to be very simple and not be attracted to anything. Just be satisfied with what you have.

There are several reasons why a wife would go to work full-time. Finance is one of the reasons. But it should not be the only reason. Rather, try to live simply. Another reason the wife may work is to challenge herself humanly. Today, many women are highly educated. It is hard for them to stay at home all day. If the wife is frustrated at home, then she should get a job. But I strongly recommend that you do not work overtime. I feel it is best if the wife only works part-time, just to relieve the pressure. Then she will feel more useful, but she will still have time to give to the church life. How much you can give to the church life is based on how much time you have. I would encourage the sisters to live a simple life and to try to keep their evenings free for others, so that your household can become a blessing to the Body.

**Question:** *I am often confused about the line between submission and opinion. How far do we have to go to meet the requirement of submission? Should we be like robots, doing whatever we are told? It seems whenever we say something it becomes opinion.*

**Answer:** Submission is a matter of your person. It is not a matter of your deeds. A submissive person is submissive in whatever he or she does. You may do one submissive act, but that does not make you a submissive person. Learn to realize that being a submissive sister is a matter of your person, as you see your place in the church life and in the family life. This does not mean that you do not have leadings from the Lord. Surely you can have much speaking from the Lord. With regard to the matter of opinion, if you feel what you say is opinion, then do not say it. If you feel it is not opinion, then say it. Do not make your life so complicated. Just be restful and simple.

**Question:** *The brothers have shared that our home meeting should be eighty percent of our church life. They said this refers to our time. Suppose I already have two meetings. How many more meetings should I have?*

**Answer:** The church life is different from the meeting life. The church life means that our living is involved with one another. To practice the church life together means that my house and living are open to you, and that your house and your daily life are open to me and to others also. Let the Lord lead you as to how many meetings you should have. But try to involve your daily life with other saints. In your daily life, try to help others.