

**RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION
FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

Message 1

A Holy Marriage for God's Purpose

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

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

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

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

- A. When God created man, He saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so He determined to make a helper for man as his counterpart; this shows that marriage is according to God's divine and holy ordination—Gen. 2:18:
 - 1. Immediately after God created man, He charged man to be "fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," that is, to fill the earth with human beings—v. 28.
 - 2. This indicates that we need to be married properly according to God's purpose and for God's purpose; God's purpose in marriage is to use us to maintain the existence of mankind on earth—vv. 27-28.
 - 3. Man should enjoy God's provision for his living and the marriage life for man's existence and multiplication to replenish the earth that it may be possible for God to save some men in order to produce the church—the Body of Christ—which will issue in the New Jerusalem as God's eternal enlargement and expression according to God's eternal economy—Eccl. 9:7-9, and note 71; Prov. 5:18; Mal. 2:14-15, and note 151; Eph. 1:22-23; Rev. 21:2, 10.
- B. God's enemy has a desire to destroy the accomplishment of God's goal, which depends upon human marriage—1 Tim. 4:1-3:
 - 1. Attacks on this divine matter of God's ordination come from enemies who have an intention to destroy God's goal by causing people to marry loosely or by forbidding them to marry—vv. 1-3; Luke 17:26-27.
 - 2. We should be aware that an ideology not to marry comes from demons, God's enemies.
- C. Marriage is a symbol of the union between Christ and the church—Gen. 2:18, 21-24; Eph. 5:22-32:
 - 1. Adam typifies God in Christ as the real, universal Husband, who is seeking a wife for Himself; Adam's need for a wife typifies and portrays God's need, in His economy, to have a wife as His counterpart, His complement (lit., his parallel)—Rom. 5:14; cf. Isa. 54:5; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 21:9.
 - 2. God desires to have both Adam, typifying Christ, and Eve, typifying the church; His purpose is to "let them have dominion" (1:26); it is to have a victorious Christ plus a victorious church; God wants Christ and the church to have dominion—Rom. 5:17; 16:20; Eph. 1:22-23.

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

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

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

- A. God's eternal purpose is to express Himself in a corporate way; in order to have this corporate expression, God must have a people; this people is the seed of Abraham—1:26; 12:1-3; 15:5; 21:12.
- B. Isaac's marriage was not simply that a single man might have a happy, comfortable life; without marriage, Isaac could not have brought forth the seed; if this single man was to have the seed for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, he had to get married—24:1-4.
- C. "We long to see that all the marriages in the churches will be for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This kind of marriage requires a daily living in oneness with God. Young brothers, if everything you do is in accordance with God's economy, even your marriage will be the carrying out of His economy. You need to say, 'Lord, what I am doing here today must be in accordance with Your economy. I am single now, but one day I will be married. May my marriage be for Your economy.' This is the main point of Genesis 24"—*Life-Study of Genesis*, msg. 60, pp. 791-792.

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

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

Excerpts from the Ministry:

MARRIAGE

Marriage Being Ordained by God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

flesh, we should see the mystery of the oneness of Christ and the church.

“A husband is head of the wife as also Christ is Head of the church...But as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:23-25).

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

HOLDING MARRIAGE IN HONOR

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

WALKING ACCORDING TO SPIRIT

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

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

A very important area in which to walk according to our spirit is our married life. It is difficult for husbands to remain in the spirit with their wives. It is easy for them to be either in the mind, the emotion, or the will. One of the most difficult things for a brother to do is to turn to his spirit in the presence of his wife. But we brothers need to learn to walk according to spirit in relating to our wives. If a brother’s wife treats him well, he may be happy. But if she is not pleasant to him, he may be offended. Instead of turning to the spirit, he may choose to stay in his emotion. But whether our wives are kind or unkind, we need to stay in our spirit. If your wife rebukes you, stay in the spirit. If she speaks well of you, stay in the spirit. If you stay in the spirit, you will walk according to Christ in your married life.

Wives also need to learn to be in the spirit when they are with their husbands. This is even more

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUR NEED FOR A REAL REVIVAL

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

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

THE BEST MARRIAGE

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

The highest intention of God in creating man and ordaining man's marriage is that He desires to be one with man, even by becoming man, that man could be made like Him in His divine life and nature but not in His divine Godhead. Four thousand years after the history of mankind began, God

came out of eternity into time to be incarnated, to become a man in the flesh, and this man was Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God. Jesus Christ is both God and man, a God-man who produced many believers through His death and resurrection to be His organic Body, the church. All this was done through man's marriage.

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

**RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION
FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

Message 2

A Godly Family for the Church Life

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

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

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

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

- A. Noah inherited the spiritual blessings from his forefathers to maintain and extend God's way of redemption and life:
 - 1. Noah found grace in the eyes of God (v. 8); born into a godly family (cf. Gen. 5:429), he inherited the spiritual blessings from his forefathers and took God's way of redemption and life, including Adam's way of salvation (3:20-21), Abel's way of offering (4:4), Enosh's way of calling (v. 26), all the fathers' way of living and begetting (5:3-28), Enoch's way of walking with God (vv. 22, 24); moreover, by faith he became a righteous man in God's eyes and a perfect man who walked with God in that generation (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:9).
 - 2. Therefore, he maintained and extended God's way of life so that God could carry out His plan on the corrupted earth according to His desire.
- B. The ark built by Noah eventually not only saved him from God's judgment but also saved his family from that evil generation—vv. 11-14; 7:1; Matt. 24:37-39:
 - 1. This is a type of Christ's salvation that not only delivers us out of eternal perdition but also saves us from the corrupted generation—Acts 2:40; cf. Gal. 1:4.
 - 2. Whoever is saved will by no means perish; however, we need the further and higher salvation that saves us from the corrupted generation; this salvation is the corporate Christ whom we are building—Gen. 6:11-14; 7:1; Acts 2:40-42; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:16.

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

- A. Next to the church, the family is the most important unit in society; without a proper family life, there would be no way to have a healthy society or country; a nation is constituted of families as the basic factors.
- B. We fully realize that without a proper family life it is difficult to have an orderly church life; we also realize that without a proper church life it is difficult to have a normal and proper family life; we are here for the church and also for the family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

VII. The church life is the purpose of the Christian life, and it is a great reality in the universe; hence, our family life should be brought into the church life—Matt. 16:16-19; Philem. 1-2:

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

Excerpts from the Ministry:

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

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

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

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

NOAH

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

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

Hebrews 4:16 tells us to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need. When I was young, nearly every day in my prayers I would say, “Lord, I am coming to the throne of grace. At Your throne of grace I find grace for my timely need. Lord, I need Your grace every minute. I not only need Your grace every year, every week, every day, and every hour, but every minute. Without Your grace, I simply cannot bear anything.” Today I still need the Lord's grace every minute. Perhaps in a few minutes my folks will give me a difficult time, or else one of the brothers will come to bother me. Perhaps I will receive a phone call from a sister. So, I keep on telling the Lord, “Lord, I need Your grace every minute. I know that You are gracious and that You have grace ready for me. Lord, since grace needs my cooperation, I kneel before the throne of grace to find grace to meet my need.” Many times we simply cannot stand our situation and we cannot face what is happening to us. However, there is a place called the throne of grace. Come boldly to the throne of grace that you may find mercy and grace for your time of need.

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

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

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

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

The ark built by Noah eventually not only saved him from God's judgment but also saved his family of eight from that evil generation. This is a type of Christ's salvation that not only delivers us out of eternal perdition but also saves us from the corrupted generation. Whoever is saved will by no means perish. However, we need the further and higher salvation that saves us from the corrupted generation. This salvation is the corporate Christ whom we are building. We need not only to preach the individual Christ but also to build the corporate Christ, the church. This Christ may be considered today's ark. Through this Christ as salvation thousands of people have been saved not only from God's judgment but also from the crooked and perverted generation...

The ark saved Noah and his whole family from the evil generation and ushered them into a new age that they might live an altogether new life for God and before God. In like manner, Christ's salvation also saves God's chosen people from the corrupted generation and ushers them into a renewed age, into the new realm of resurrection. Noah and his household passed through the flood waters by being in the ark. After the flood, the ark rested on the mountain of Ararat. Their passing through the flood was a type of baptism; the ark's resting upon the mountains was a type of Christ's

resurrection; and the living of Noah's family of eight after the flood was a type of the church life. Through baptism we buried the old community and the old society, and in resurrection we have entered into another community, another society, which is the church life. (*Truth Lessons*, Level Three, vol. 1, ch. 4, pp. 42-44)

THE FOCUS OF THE CHANGE IN SYSTEM— THE HOUSEHOLD

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

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

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

BRINGING OUR FAMILY LIFE INTO THE CHURCH LIFE

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

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

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

Although many Christians appreciate the Lord's charge in Matthew 6:33 to seek first the Father's kingdom and His righteousness, few realize that the kingdom of God in this age is the church life. This is confirmed by the Lord's word in Matthew 16:18-19, which says, "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the

kingdom of the heavens.” In these verses kingdom of the heavens is used interchangeably with church, indicating that the genuine church is the kingdom of the heavens in this age. For this reason Matthew 18:17 reveals that the believers are to obey the church. If a brother sins, we first need to deal with him in love (v. 15), then by two or three witnesses (v. 16), and finally through the church with authority. Verse 17 says, “If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector.” If a believer refuses to hear the church, he will lose the fellowship of the church. The Gospel of Matthew, a book on the kingdom, reveals that the church life is the practical kingdom of God on earth in the present age. If we are sincere with the Lord about seeking first the kingdom of God, we must be in the church life. Apart from the church life we cannot be in the kingdom of God in a practical way.

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

**RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION
FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

Message 3

**The Responsibility of the Parents in Leading their Children
to the Knowledge of the Lord**

Scripture Reading: Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:7-9; Prov. 22:6; 2 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 9:11, 15-16

- I. If we try to summarize the words in the Bible concerning parenting, the main thing parents should do is nurture their children in the teaching and admonition of the Lord and not provoke them to anger or discourage them—Eph. 6:4.**
- II. We must lead our children to the knowledge of the Lord; no family can go on without prayer and the reading of the Word—Deut. 6:7-9; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15; cf. Gen 18:19:**
 - A. The home meetings must suit the children; these family meetings are not designed for you; what you do in the family must suit the taste of your children and must be on their own level— cf. 1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:2:
 1. Some families fail in their prayer and Bible-reading time because their family meetings are too long and too deep; the children do not understand what is going on; they do not know why you are asking them to sit there—cf. Heb. 5:13.
 2. Some home meetings go on for one or two hours about difficult doctrines; this is indeed a great suffering for the children, yet many parents have no feeling about this.
 - B. Another problem with some home meetings is that there is little love in them; it is neither the father's attraction nor the mother's attraction that draws the children to these meetings; it is the whip that keeps them there:
 1. You must think of some ways to attract them and encourage them; never punish your children for not attending your family meeting.
 2. If you punish them once, you may create a problem in them for the rest of their lives.
 3. Parents must attract their children to the family meeting; do not force them to come; this will only result in terrible consequences.
 - C. We suggest having two family home meetings a day, one in the morning and one in the evening; the father should lead the morning time and the mother should lead the evening time:
 1. If you have children at home, you have to wake up earlier; have a little time together before the children go to school:
 - a. Your meeting should be short, living, and never long; perhaps ten minutes is enough; never exceed fifteen minutes and do not be shorter than five minutes.
 - b. Ask everyone of them to read a verse; the father should take the lead to pick out a few phrases and speak about them.
 - c. If the children can memorize something, ask them to memorize; do not quote a whole verse; ask them to remember the meaning of a sentence.
 - d. At the end of the meeting the father or the mother should offer a prayer for God's blessing; do not offer lofty or deep prayers; pray about things that children can understand; do not be long; be simple; then send them to school.
 2. Every time you sit down for your meal, you should thank the Lord for it; whether it is breakfast, lunch, or dinner, you should be sincere in your thanksgiving; help your children to give thanks—1 Tim. 4:4; cf. John 6:11.
 3. The evening meeting should be a little longer, and the mother should lead it; it is not necessary to read the Bible at night, but the family needs to pray together:

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- a. The mother has to gather the children together and talk to them; while the father is sitting next to her, the mother should encourage the children to speak up:
 - (1) Ask them whether they had any problems that day.
 - (2) Ask whether they fought with one another and whether anything was bothering them.
- b. If a mother cannot make her children speak up, something must be wrong; it is a failure of the mother to allow a barrier to exist between herself and her children:
 - (1) The mother must be at fault if the children are afraid to speak to her; they should be free to speak up.
 - (2) The mother must learn to bring out the things that are in her children's hearts; if they do not want to speak up that day, ask them the next day; guide the children.
- c. Let them pray a little and teach them to say a few words; this meeting must be living.
- d. Ask them to confess their sins, but do not force them; there must not be any pretense; everything must be done in a very natural way; if they have something to confess, let them confess; if they have nothing to confess, do not force them.
- e. The parents should lead them to pray in a simple way one by one; make sure that everyone prays; finally, conclude with a prayer of your own; but do not be long.
- f. Feed them according to their capacity; once you try to do too much, you will overburden them; pray a few sentences with them and then let them go to sleep.
- D. Let them know the meaning of sin; everyone sins; you must pay attention to the matter of their repentance and then bring them to the Lord.
- E. After some time you should ask them to receive the Lord sincerely:
 - 1. Then bring them to the church and let them be a part of the church.
 - 2. In this way you will lead your children to the knowledge of God.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

If we try to summarize the words in the Bible concerning parenting, the main thing parents should do is nurture their children in the teaching and admonition of the Lord and not provoke them to anger or discourage them....Being a husband or a wife is a matter of personal happiness; being a parent is something that affects the well-being of the children of the next generation. The responsibility over the future of the children of the next generation is on the shoulders of the parents.

We have to realize how serious this responsibility is. God has placed a person's body, soul, and spirit, even his whole life and future, into our hands. No individual influences another individual's future as much as parents. No one controls a person's future as much as parents. Parents almost have a say in whether their children will go to hell or to heaven. We must learn to be good husbands and good wives, but above all we must learn also to be good parents. I believe that the responsibility of being a parent is more than that of being a husband or a wife.

LEADING THE CHILDREN TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

We must lead them to the knowledge of the Lord. A family altar is indeed necessary. In the Old Testament the tabernacle was linked to the altar. In other words the family is linked to service and consecration to God. No family can go on without prayer and the reading of the Word. This is especially true with families that have children.

Meetings That Are on the Level of the Children

Some families fail in their prayer and Bible-reading time because their family meetings are too long and too deep. The children do not understand what is going on. They do not know why you are asking them to sit there. I do not like it when families invite us to their homes to speak about deep doctrines and then force their children to sit with them. Some home meetings go on for one or two hours about difficult doctrines. This is indeed a great suffering for the children. Yet many parents have no feeling about this. The children sit there, but they do not understand. For example, if the topic is on the book of Revelation, how can they understand it? The home meetings must suit the children. These family meetings are not designed for you; your meeting is in the meeting hall. Do not impose your standard on your family. What you do in the family must suit the taste of your children and must be on their own level.

Encouraging and Attracting

Another problem with some home meetings is that there is little love in them. It is neither the father's attraction nor the mother's attraction that draws the children to these meetings; it is the whip that keeps them there. They do not want to join. But they come because there is the threat of the whip. If you take away the whip, they will not come. This will never work. You must think of some ways to attract them and encourage them. Do not punish them. Never beat your children for not attending your family worship hour. If you beat them once, you may create a problem in them for the rest of their lives. Parents must attract their children to the family worship hour. Do not force them to come. This will only result in terrible consequences.

Meeting Once in the Morning and Once in the Evening

We suggest having two home meetings a day, one in the morning and one in the evening. The father should lead the morning time and the mother should lead the evening time. Get up a little earlier. The parents must not remain in bed after the children have taken their breakfast and gone to school. If you have children at home, you have to wake up earlier. Have a little time together before the children go to school. Your meeting should be short, living, and never long. Perhaps ten minutes is enough. Fifteen minutes is the longest it should be. Never exceed fifteen minutes and do not be shorter than five minutes. Ask everyone of them to read a verse. The father should take the lead to pick out a few phrases and speak about them. If the children can memorize something, ask them to memorize. Do not quote a whole verse. Ask them to remember the meaning of a sentence. At the end of the meeting the father or the mother should offer a prayer for God's blessing. Do not offer lofty or deep prayers. Pray about things that children can understand. Do not be long. Be simple. Then send them to school.

Every time you sit down for your meal, you should thank the Lord for it. Whether it is breakfast, lunch, or dinner, you should be sincere in your thanksgiving. Help your children to give thanks. The evening meeting should be a little longer, and the mother should lead it. It is not necessary to read the Bible at night, but the family needs to pray together. In particular, the mother has to gather the children together and talk to them. While the father is sitting next to her, the mother should encourage the children to speak up. Ask them whether they had any problems that day. Ask whether they fought with one another and whether anything was bothering them. If a mother cannot make her children speak up, something must be wrong. It is a failure of the mother to allow a barrier to exist between herself and her children. The mother must be at fault if the children are afraid to speak to her. They should be free to speak up. The mother must learn to bring out the things that are in her children's hearts. If they do not want to speak up that day, ask them the next day. Guide the children. Let them pray a little and teach them to say a few words. This meeting must be living. Ask them to confess their sins, but do not force them. There must not be any pretense. Everything must be done in a very natural way. Let them take some initiative themselves. If they have something to confess, let them

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confess. If they have nothing to confess, do not force them. There must not be any pretense. The pretense found in many children is the result of pressure from strict parents. Children do not tell lies, but you can force them to tell lies. The parents should lead them to pray in a simple way one by one. Make sure that everyone prays. Finally, conclude with a prayer of your own. But do not be long. Once your prayer becomes long, children become bored. Feed them according to their capacity. Once you try to do too much, you will overburden them. Pray a few sentences with them and then let them go to sleep.

Paying Attention to Their Repentance

Let them know the meaning of sin. Everyone sins. You must pay attention to the matter of their repentance and then bring them to the Lord. After some time you should ask them to receive the Lord sincerely. Then bring them to the church and let them be a part of the church. In this way you will lead your children to the knowledge of God. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 49, pp. 520, 541-544)

**RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION
FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

Message 4

**Parents as Proper Persons with a Proper Living
as Patterns for the Children**

Scripture Reading: Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:7-9; Prov. 22:6; 2 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 9:11, 15-16

I. To be a parent is very difficult; no amount of teaching concerning parenting is adequate; although there is no unique, fail-safe method for parenting, there are a few lessons we can learn:

- A. First, in order to raise our children to love the Lord and to come to the church meetings regularly, we must be a proper person; we must have a proper living before the Lord:
 - 1. Besides the Lord, the persons who know best about the kind of life we live are our children; we may be able to fool others about the kind of person we are, but we can never fool our children; therefore, we need to be genuine.
 - 2. Our behavior and our way of living does not affect anyone as much as it affects our children; this is a universal spiritual principle.
 - 3. Our children will be negatively affected if we are not upright persons, but this does not mean that our children will be good if we are upright persons; it is difficult to predict how a child will turn out; this depends on many factors.
- B. Besides being proper persons, parents need to exercise their wisdom; it is easy for a parent to have love, but it is not as easy to have wisdom:
 - 1. Parents must exercise their wisdom to discern whether or not to charge their children to come to the church meetings; for such situations, we need to exercise our wisdom to discern the situation; according to our discernment, we may exhort our children.
 - 2. However, some parents are zealous without wisdom, and their zealousness offends their children; the more they charge their children to come to the meetings, the more they offend their children, causing a strong reaction.
 - 3. It is right to charge our children to come to the meetings, but we need to discern, based on our children's condition, the proper time and the proper way to charge them; if our children are in a certain condition, it may be better not to charge them to come the meetings until their condition improves.
- C. Finally, parents need to trust in the Lord's mercy—Rom. 9:11, 15-16:
 - 1. There are many spiritual parents whose children have not been good; there are also worldly, backslidden, careless parents who are absolutely indifferent about their children's spirituality, yet their children are good and spiritual.
 - 2. Therefore, we must conclude that the way our children turn out depends on the Lord's mercy; the first part of Romans 9:18 says, "He has mercy on whom He wills"; as parents, our duty is to be proper persons and to exercise wisdom to discern when and how to speak to our children—cf. Isa. 50:4.
 - 3. We need to do our duty, but we should not trust in anything we do; without the Lord's mercy, everything we do means nothing; we must trust in the Lord's mercy—Rom. 9:15-16.
 - 4. Parents should never be proud, thinking that their ability can produce the best children; there are many different factors in producing a good child, but in the end it depends on the Lord's mercy—v. 16.
- D. To raise children is not easy or simple; it requires that we spend much time with our children; the more time we spend with our children, the better:
 - 1. We should spend at least two hours every evening doing nothing but being with our

children, talking to them, or teaching them something; this will make them happy and give them some training.

2. If we do not spend time with our children, we should expect that they will have problems.
 3. Although we cannot always afford to spend that much time with our children, the principle is that we need to spend as much time as possible with our children and give them the proper education according to their age.
- E. We must not neglect the raising of our children; if God has given us children, we must spend adequate time to raise them properly:
1. In order to take care of our children, we always need to prepare them ahead of time; in order to properly care for a fifteen-year-old, we need to spend fourteen years to educate the child.
 - a. Every bit of proper education at the proper age is an inoculation; if we adequately educate and inoculate our children, they can leave home to study without any problem.
 - b. If we do not adequately educate and inoculate our children, it will not matter much if they stay at home while studying.
 - c. A fifteen-year-old's spiritual health depends on how much education and inoculation he received in his first fourteen years.

II. God's ordained principle is that a father must live a life that is a pattern, an example to his children; nevertheless, we must realize that the way our children turn out ultimately depends on the Lord's mercy—Rom. 9:10-13; Eph. 6:4:

- A. Therefore, we must do our duty to live a proper life as an example to our children, but we should not be discouraged or proud because of how our children turn out; Jacob and Esau were twins, but Romans 9:10-13 shows that their destiny depended on God's selection.
- B. The best and most proper way to be parents is to live as an example to our children and pray for the Lord's mercy.
- C. If our living establishes a proper standard, we are not liable if our children behave badly; however, if we do not live as a pattern, our children's bad behavior is our responsibility.
- D. In order to be a good example, we must love the Lord and His Word, deal with sins, hate the self, and learn the lessons of the cross; this will be an example not only to our children but also to all the saints.

III. "I cannot tell you how many strong believers would be raised up in our second generation if all the parents of this generation would be good parents. I have always wanted to say this: The future of the church depends on the parents. When God bestows grace on the church, He needs vessels. There is the need for more Timothys to be raised up. It is true that we can save men from the world, but there is a greater need for raising up people from among Christian families." (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 48, p. 549)

Excerpts from the Ministry:

Question: My children are saved, but I cannot always convince them to come to the meetings. What is the best way to care for them?

Answer: To be a parent is very difficult. No amount of teaching concerning parenting is adequate. When couples do not have children, they pray as Hannah, the mother of Samuel, prayed for a son (1 Sam. 1:10-11). The Lord may hear their prayer and give them a child, but this child may become a great troublemaker. Although there is no unique, fail-safe method for parenting, there are a few lessons we can learn.

First, in order to raise our children to love the Lord and to come to the church meetings regularly, we must be a proper person. We must have a proper living before the Lord. Besides the Lord, the persons who know best about the kind of life we live are our children. We may be able to fool others about the kind of person we are, but we can never fool our children. Therefore, we need to be genuine. If we tell our children not to tell lies, yet we lie to our spouse, the children will see it. This is very serious, for if we lie to our spouse only one time, our children may remember it for their whole life. Our behavior and our way of living does not affect anyone as much as it affects our children. This is a universal spiritual principle. Therefore, being a parent is not easy. Our children will be negatively affected if we are not upright persons, but this does not mean that our children will be good if we are upright persons. If an upright mother has four children, two may be good, and the other two may be bad. However, if she is not upright, all her children may be worse. It is difficult to predict how a child will turn out; this depends on many factors.

Besides being proper persons, parents need to exercise their wisdom. This is the area in which most parents are lacking. It is easy for a parent to have love, but it is not as easy to have wisdom. Parents must exercise their wisdom to discern whether or not to charge their children to come to the church meetings. Asking whether or not parents should charge their children to come to the meetings may be likened to asking whether or not we should take an umbrella when we go out. For such situations, we need to exercise our wisdom to discern the situation. According to our discernment, we may exhort our children. However, some parents are zealous without wisdom, and their zealousness offends their children. The more they charge their children to come to the meetings, the more they offend their children, causing a strong reaction. This matter is not easy. Parents need to be proper persons and exercise their wisdom. It is right to charge our children to come to the meetings, but we need to discern, based on our children's condition, the proper time and the proper way to charge them. If our children are in a certain condition, it may be better not to charge them to come the meetings until their condition improves.

Finally, parents need to trust in the Lord's mercy. Romans 9:16 says, "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." I have seen many spiritual parents whose children have not been good. I have also seen worldly, backslidden, careless parents who are absolutely indifferent about their children's spirituality, yet their children are good and spiritual. Therefore, we must conclude that the way our children turn out depends on the Lord's mercy. The first part of verse 18 says, "He has mercy on whom He wills." As parents, our duty is to be proper persons and to exercise wisdom to discern when and how to speak to our children. We need to do our duty, but we should not trust in anything we do. Without the Lord's mercy, everything we do means nothing. We must trust in the Lord's mercy, praying, "Lord, it all depends on Your mercy. I do my duty as a parent by being a proper person to be a good example and to not stumble my children and by exercising my wisdom to know when and how to speak to my children. However, my trust is in You, Lord." We all need to learn this lesson. Parents should never be proud, thinking that their ability can produce the best children. There are many different factors in producing a good child, but in the end it depends on the Lord's mercy.

Question: How should I regulate my children concerning watching television and movies?

Answer: Because of the current of the age, it is very difficult for parents to forbid their children to watch television and movies. Therefore, parents need to exercise their wisdom to restrict which television shows or movies to allow their children to see. We also need to teach our children the reasons for these restrictions so that they will understand our decisions as they grow older. We need to give them a proper explanation according to their age, not prematurely. We should not tell them something that they cannot understand at their age. Our training must be according to their age.

To raise children is not easy or simple. It requires that we spend much time with our children. The more time we spend with our children, the better. We should spend at least two hours every evening doing nothing but being with our children, talking to them, or teaching them something. This will make them happy and give them some training. If we do not spend time with our children, we should expect that they will have problems. Although we cannot always afford to spend that much time with

our children, the principle is that we need to spend as much time as possible with our children and give them the proper education according to their age.

Question: Some young brothers and sisters who leave home to study end up staying in dormitories with unbelievers. What is the best way to care for these young ones?

Answer: It is difficult to know whether it is better to keep our children at home or send them to school in another city. This is a very complicated matter with many factors involved. However, one thing I know is that in order to take care of our children, we always need to prepare them ahead of time. In order to properly care for a fifteen year old, we need to spend fourteen years to educate the child. Every bit of proper education at the proper age is an inoculation. If we adequately educate and inoculate our children, they can leave home to study without any problem. If we do not adequately educate and inoculate our children, it will not matter much if they stay at home while studying. A fifteen year old's spiritual health depends on how much education and inoculation he received in his first fourteen years. If parents do not properly prepare their children, it will not help much to suddenly consider where they should go to school. This is a warning to all parents. We must not neglect the raising of our children. If God has given us children, we must spend adequate time to raise them properly. Everyone likes to have choices, but we lose all our choices when we have children. Besides the time we spend in the meetings, we need to spend every minute for our children. Otherwise, we should not expect that we would have good children. The only way to have good children is to spend all our time with them and exercise our wisdom to give them a proper education and adequate inoculation beforehand. However, after all this, we still must place our trust in God's mercy. (*Crucial Elements of God's Economy*, chap. 6)

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The first kind of relationships in human life is family relationships. Verse 4 says, "One who manages well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." Managing one's house is a matter of taking the lead, but Paul's concept here is not mainly related to authority. As a husband and father, an overseer should take the lead in his family not merely by ruling but by establishing a good example and pattern. A family is not like a government or an organization, which are led by authority. A father's leadership in his family should not mainly be based on his ruling with authority but should instead be based on the pattern of his daily living. Similarly, to be an elder does not mean to rule the church with authority. This concept is absolutely wrong. A father's management of his family is very different from a supervisor's management of a business. A supervisor may hire and fire employees, but a father cannot hire or fire his children. The basic need in a family is the father's example. As a father, an elder must live properly before his family. This is the proper way to manage one's house. In our home we should not try to exercise our authority as a king, law officer, administrator, or school principal. Paul's concept in this section concerns the overseers' daily living. It does not work to merely discipline our children. God's ordained principle is that a father must live a life that is a pattern, an example, to his children.

As overseers, we must take the lead in our family by presenting a pattern in our living. This is our duty. However, if our children are in subjection with all gravity, we should not think that it is because of our doing; instead, we have to worship the Lord for His mercy. Although the disposition of our children is not under our control, this does not mean we can neglect our duties to live as an example and to spend as much time and energy as we can on our children. Nevertheless, we must realize that the way our children turn out ultimately depends on the Lord's mercy. We know that this is true, because if two children are siblings and are raised by the same parents with the same care, they may still turn out very different. One may have a good character and become a seeking believer, while the other may have a poor character and not even be saved. Therefore, we must do our duty to live a proper life as an example to our children, but we should not be discouraged or proud because of how our children turn out.

Paul's word concerning an overseer's children in verse 4 does not involve salvation or spirituality. We should be a good example to our children, but whether or not they will eventually be saved

depends on God's predestination. Jacob and Esau were twins, but Romans 9:10-13 shows that their destiny depended on God's selection. We cannot cause our children or anyone else to be spiritual, but we can establish an example by living a sober, temperate, and orderly life and by seeking the Lord. If two flesh brothers listen to the same gospel message, one may be saved, but the other may not. We have seen cases like this. Therefore, we must be zealous in preaching the gospel and convincing people to receive the Lord, but we must also realize that a person's salvation ultimately depends not on our effort but on God's predestination. We should not think that because it depends on God's predestination, we do not need to preach the gospel. We must do our duty. Similarly, we should not assume that our children will behave well if we are a good example, nor should we neglect our duty. The best and most proper way to be a parent is to live as an example to our children and pray for the Lord's mercy.

If our living establishes a proper standard, we are not liable if our children behave badly. However, if we do not live as a pattern, our children's bad behavior is our responsibility. If they are good, the credit does not go to us, but if they are bad, we receive the "debit." This is the divine accounting. We should not say that God is not fair. Romans 9:20 says, "O man, who are you who answer back to God? Shall the thing molded say to him who molded it, Why did you make me thus?" We cannot argue with God. If our children behave well and are eventually saved and live before the Lord, we must worship the Lord, saying, "Lord, I am nothing. Even my best behavior is like dust; it means nothing. I can only thank You for Your mercy." We should not ascribe anything to our goodness. We have to acknowledge God's predestination, His mercy, and His grace. If our children begin to live sinfully, we must humble ourselves, praying, "Lord, forgive me. I accept the blame because I may have neglected to adequately care for them in some aspect." This must be our attitude.

Paul's concept in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 concerns the overseers' living. Whether our children behave well is secondary; the primary matter is whether we have a proper living. We must take the lead and manage our family well by having a living that presents a positive pattern to them. This depends on what we are; it is a matter of life. (*Basic Principles concerning the Eldership*, pp. 49-51)

GREAT CHILDREN COMING OUT OF GREAT PARENTS

Finally, I would say that many men whom God used in this world came from great parents. Beginning with Timothy, we find numerous men used by God who came from great parents. John Wesley was one of them. Another one was John Newton. There are many hymns in our hymnal written by Newton. John G. Paton was another one. He was one of the most famous missionaries in the modern world. I can think of no other father like his father. In his old age Paton still remembered, "Every time I wanted to sin, I remembered my father, who was always praying for me." His family was very poor. There was only one bedroom, one kitchen, and another small room. He said, "I trembled every time my father prayed and sighed in the small room. He was making petition for our souls. Even though I am so old now, I can still remember his sighing. I thank God for giving me such a father. I cannot sin, because when I sin, I transgress against my heavenly Father as well as my earthly father." It is difficult to find a father like Paton's father, and it is difficult to find a son as great as Paton.

I cannot tell you how many strong believers would be raised up in our second generation if all the parents of this generation would be good parents. I have always wanted to say this: The future of the church depends on the parents. When God bestows grace on the church, He needs vessels. There is the need for more Timothys to be raised up. It is true that we can save men from the world, but there is a greater need for raising up people from among Christian families. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 49, p. 549)

**RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION
FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

Message 5

**Cooperating with God for His Move as Parents Entrusted
With Their Children to Cultivate and Nurture Them in the Lord**

Scripture Reading: Matt. 6:33; Eph. 6:4

I. The fulfillment of God's economy requires our cooperation, and to cooperate with God means to be bound together with Christ and to have one living with Him by one life—John 14:19b; 6:57; Gal. 2:20:

- A. God's heart is to carry out His economy; God's economy is not merely that we should be good, spiritual, holy, or victorious; He desires neither a good man nor a bad man but a God-man—Eph. 1:9-11; 1 John 3:2.
- B. Instead of usurping God by praying for our prosperity, health, or family without any consideration of God's economy, we should pray, live, and be persons according to God's heart and for His economy—1 Sam. 4:3; Hag. 1:2-5; Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:9-11.
- C. All things necessary for our human existence need to be under a divine limitation; anything that exceeds our need becomes worldly, and it frustrates us from the economy of God's purpose; in everything God's economy must be the deciding factor—cf. Matt. 24:38.
- D. When God's economy is carried out among His people, they are blessed—1 Sam. 7:1-5:
 - 1. Our welfare, our well-being, is linked to the carrying out of God's economy, and we should not seek our well-being apart from God's economy—Matt. 6:33.
 - 2. We should not expect prosperity for ourselves; rather, we should expect that through us the Lord will do as much as possible to accomplish His economy.

II. The church cannot go on if parents do not have a sense of being entrusted; God has committed a human body, along with his soul, into our hands; we do not want to see our children needing to be rescued back from the world—Gen. 48:9; Psa. 127:3; Isa. 8:18:

- A. We are wrong if we do not take care of our children; please remember that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children turn out the right way—Psa. 127:3.
- B. When the children are young they are in your hands and can do nothing much themselves; if you are loose with yourself, you will also be loose with them; we must realize that parents must exercise self-control, sacrificing their own freedom—cf. John 17:19.
- C. After the church preaches the gospel and saves men, it has to deal with all kinds of family problems associated with these men; but if parents are responsible for the proper nurturing of their children, and if the children are brought up in the church, the church will be relieved of half of its burdens—2 Tim. 3:15; 1:5.

III. We should nurture the children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord; we should tell them what a proper Christian is by teaching them the discipline of the Lord—Eph. 6:4:

- A. Parents must help their children to have proper aspirations; how we live affects the aspirations of our child; parents must learn to channel the ambitions of their children in the proper direction—2 Cor. 5:9.
- B. Many parents cultivate their children's pride and encourage them to go after vainglory by heaping praises upon them in front of other people; we do not need to hurt their self-esteem, but we must point out their pride to them—Prov. 16:18; Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:5.
- C. A Christian needs to know how to appreciate others; it is easy to be victorious, but it is hard to accept defeat; when our children are defeated, we need to teach them to accept their defeat with grace—Phil. 2:3-4.

- D. From their youth, we should give our children a chance to make their own choices; we should not make every choice for them until they reach the age of eighteen or twenty or else it will be impossible for them to make any decisions when they grow up—cf. Deut. 30:19; Jer. 21:8.
- E. As Christians, we have to train our children to manage their things properly; we must give them the opportunity to take care of their personal belongings, to manage their own shoes, socks, and other affairs; let them know how things should be handled from their youth—Prov. 22:6.

IV. The way a child grows up depends on the atmosphere in the family; they must receive nurturing love as they grow up and must experience love in the family—cf. 1 Thes. 2:7-8:

- A. Half of the work of the church can be done by good parents; however, this work falls upon our shoulders today because there are few good parents—Psa. 127:3.
- B. A family must be filled with an atmosphere of love and tenderness; there must be genuine love—1 Thes. 2:7-8.
- C. Parents must learn to be friends to their children; never allow your children to distance themselves from you; never make yourself unapproachable; remember that friendship is built upon communication; it does not come by birth—Matt. 19:14.
- D. The most helpful thing to children is for their parents to spend time with them; the more time the parents spend with them, the better:
 - 1. Sometimes we need to have free talks with them about wide-ranging subjects.
 - 2. We should allow them to join in our daily activities, and we should join them in their activities.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

God's heart is to carry out His economy. His heart is not that we always please Him and make Him happy, nor that we should be good, spiritual, holy, or victorious. He desires neither a good man nor a bad man but a God-man. God created us according to His image and wanted us to take His life, signified by the tree of life. Because we became fallen, God became a man to save us, to redeem us. He died an all-inclusive death for us, and He resurrected to beget us by imparting God's life and nature into us, making us God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead.

We should not regard the Bible as a book that teaches us to be a good man or a spiritual man. The Bible reveals that God wants us to be a "Christ-man." To be a Christian is to be a Christ-man, a man of Christ.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the fulfillment of God's economy requires our cooperation. To cooperate with God means to be bound together with God. We may use a three-legged race as an illustration. The runners in such a race must run in pairs, with each partner having one leg bound to one of his partner's legs. In order for the partners to run, they must cooperate with each other and not move independently. This is a picture of the proper Christian life. To be a Christian is to be bound together with Christ and to have one living with Him by one life.

The birth of Samuel involved Hannah's cooperation with God. The old priesthood had become stale and waning, and God wanted to have another beginning. For Samuel's birth, God initiated things behind the scenes. On the one hand, He shut up Hannah's womb; on the other hand, He prepared a provoker (1 Sam. 1:5-7). This forced Hannah to pray that the Lord would give her a male child. In her prayer she made a vow and said, "O Jehovah of hosts, if You will indeed look upon the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me and not forget Your maidservant, but give to Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to Jehovah for all the days of his life, and no razor will come upon his head" (v. 11). This prayer was initiated not by Hannah but by God. God chose Hannah because she was willing to cooperate with Him. God answered her prayer and opened her womb, and

Hannah conceived and bore a son (v. 20). Then according to her vow, she offered her son to God, placing him in the custody of Eli. From this we see that Hannah, Samuel's mother, was one who cooperated very much with God. Her case shows us the kind of persons God expects to have today. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 5, 6)

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The ark was a type of Christ as the embodiment of God. It also signified Christ as the presence of the Triune God to be with His people for the carrying out of His economy to establish His kingdom on earth. To bring out the ark was just to bring out the presence of God. When the children of Israel began to move with the ark from Mount Sinai, Moses offered a prayer to God, saying, "Rise up, O Jehovah, and let Your enemies be scattered" (Num. 10:35). The ark took the lead to travel onward. The move of the ark was a picture of God's move on the earth.

In 1 Samuel 4 the elders of Israel were actually usurping God. At that time, God did not intend to move. The children of Israel had no thought of or concern for God's economy, and their bringing out the ark indicated that they were usurping God for their safety, peace, rest, and profit. They were usurping God, even forcing Him, to go out with them.

Today many Christians usurp God by praying for their prosperity, health, or family without any consideration of God's economy. When we ask God for His healing, we must be fully related to His economy. If you are ill, you should not pray for healing in the way of usurping God. On the contrary, from the depths of your spirit you should say, "Lord, I am not here on earth for my health, my prosperity, my children, or my work. I am here for Your economy. Do You still want me to live on earth for Your economy? I have seen Your economy, I realize that You need Nazarites, and I have a heart to be a Nazarite for You. As one who has been born of God and who has the life and nature of God, I ask You what is on Your heart concerning me." If God intends that you continue living on earth for His economy, you will be healed, either through a physician or through some other way. The point here is that, instead of usurping God, we must pray, live, and be persons according to God's heart and for His economy. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 22-23)

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For us to live for Christ, we need to exist. Without our human existence we cannot live Christ. But today those in the fallen world care for nothing but their existence; they do not care for the purpose of their existence. To exist is one thing, but to exist for the divine purpose is another thing. The purpose ordained by God for our existence is to live Christ, to live God out, and to have God's testimony. But the people of this world have only their existence; they have no purpose. Eventually they make their existence itself the purpose of their existence. They know nothing but existence. Satan picks up the existence of human beings or of human living and uses this existence to usurp people so that today the whole world cares only for existence, not for God's purpose in existence.

All things necessary for our human existence need to be under a divine limitation. Anything that exceeds our need becomes worldly, "Egyptian," something of Pharaoh, and it frustrates us from the economy of God's purpose. In everything God's economy must be the deciding factor. Our living should not be like that of the "Egyptians," the worldly people. We need a place to live, and we need to keep our house clean. But if we continue with our cleaning when it is time to go to the meeting, our cleaning becomes "Egyptian," something apart from the economy of God's purpose. We are on earth not for cleaning but for a feast unto the Lord. Even how much time we spend with our children should be decided by God's economy. Other Christians may act like the people of the world, but we have to be a holy people, a separated people.

Our living and our existence depend on the provision from the heavenly source, not on the supply from the world. For this we need the vision, and we need the exercise of our faith. Moses was a man of great faith to lead two million people out of Egypt into the wilderness, where there was no earthly supply for their human existence. (*Life-study of Exodus*, p. 156)

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The picture portrayed in these verses (1 Sam. 7:1-5) is very beautiful. Here we have a people returning to God and a man—Samuel—who was one with God on earth. We may say that Samuel was the acting God on earth. At least we may say that Samuel was the representative of the very God in heaven to rule over His people on earth. As such a person, Samuel began to minister.

Samuel was faithful to God to do according to what was in God's heart and mind. His whole being and person, not just his doing, living, and work, were according to God. Samuel's being and God's heart were one. For this reason it is not too much to say that Samuel, a man according to God, was the acting God on earth. God's mind was Samuel's consideration. He had no other thought, consideration, or thinking. His living and working were for the carrying out of whatever was in God's heart. As a consequence, Samuel was one who turned the age.

In this replacing priesthood, Samuel anointed Saul and David to be kings (10:1; 16:1, 13) as God ordained that he should go before His anointed continually (2:35b) to supervise the king, observing what the king was doing. This indicates that Samuel, the acting God on earth, was greater than the king. Samuel could be qualified to such an extent because for many years God had been perfecting him for His economy, not for anything else.

When God's economy is carried out among His people, they are blessed. This means that our welfare, our well-being, is altogether linked to the carrying out of God's economy. We should not seek our well-being apart from God's economy. Because this has been neglected and even lost, it needs to be recovered. I wish to say, especially to the young saints, that we should not expect to have prosperity for ourselves. Rather, as saints in the Lord's recovery, we should expect that through us the Lord will do as much as possible to accomplish His economy. Then we will be blessed. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 27-30)

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The church cannot go on if parents do not have a sense of being entrusted. We do not want to see our children being rescued back from the world. Suppose we beget children, lose them to the world, and then try to rescue them back. If we allow this to happen, the gospel will never be preached to the uttermost part of the earth. Our children have been taught many teachings, and we have been taking care of them for years. At least these children should be brought to the Lord. We are wrong if we do not take care of our children. Please remember that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children turn out the right way.

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

NURTURING CHILDREN IN THE DISCIPLINE AND ADMONITION OF THE LORD

You must nurture your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). The discipline of the Lord is telling a person how he should behave himself. You must consider your children as Christians, not Gentiles. The Lord's discipline tells a person how he should behave as a Christian. The Lord intends that all of our children become Christians. He has no intention that any of them be a Gentile or an unsaved person. You should plan on all of them becoming not just Christians, but good Christians. You should tell them what a proper Christian is by teaching them the discipline of the Lord. Here we must briefly cover a number of points.

Helping Children to Have Proper Aspirations

The biggest thing about a child is his aspirations. Every child has an aspiration when he is young. If the government allowed every child to print his business card, I think many children would print “President,” “Chairman,” or “Queen.” Parents must help their children to have proper aspirations. If you love the world, your children will probably want to be the president, a millionaire, or a great academic. How you live affects the aspirations of your child. Parents must learn to channel the ambitions of their children in the proper direction. They should aspire to be a lover of the Lord. They should not aspire to love the world. You should cultivate such an ambition within them while they are young. Show them that it is an honorable thing to die for the Lord, that it is a precious thing to be a martyr for the Lord. You have to be an example to them, and you have to tell them your ambitions. Tell them what you want to be if you are given the opportunity. Tell them what kind of Christian you want to be. In this way, you will channel their ambitions in the proper direction. Their goals will change, and they will know what is noble and what is precious.

Not Encouraging the Pride of Children

Children have another problem: They are not only ambitious and aspiring but also proud of themselves. They may boast about their own cleverness, skill, or eloquence. A child can find many things to boast about. He may think that he is a very special person. Parents should not discourage them, but neither should they cultivate their pride. Many parents cultivate their children’s pride and encourage them to go after vainglory by heaping praises upon them in front of other people. We should tell them, “There are many children who are like you in this world.” Do not try to encourage their pride. We should enlighten children according to the discipline and admonition of the Lord. They should be able to think, to speak, and to learn all the skills. But you have to tell them that there are many who are like them in this world. Do not destroy their self-esteem, but do not allow them to become proud. You do not need to hurt their self-esteem, but you must point out their pride to them. Many young people leave home only to find out that they have to spend ten or twenty years in the world in order to learn how to do things properly. By then it is too late. Many young people have a wild temper at home. They are so proud that they cannot work properly. We do not want our children to become disheartened, but neither do we want them to be proud or to think that they are somebody.

Teaching Children to Accept Defeat and to Learn Humility

A Christian needs to know how to appreciate others. It is easy to be victorious, but it is hard to accept defeat. We can find champions who are humble, but it is rare to find losers who are not bitter. This is not a Christian attitude. Those who are good in some areas should learn to be humble and not boastful. At the same time, when a person is defeated he should learn to accept his defeat. Children are very competitive. It is all right for them to be competitive; they want to win at ball games, track meets, and in their school work. You have to show them that it is right for them to study well at school, but they have to learn to be humble. Encourage them to be humble. Tell them that there are many other students who may be better than they are. When they are defeated, you need to teach them to accept their defeat with grace. A child’s problem often has to do with these attitudes. After a game the winner is proud, while the loser will complain that the judge was not fair or that he made the wrong judgment because the sun was glaring in his face. You should help them to develop a humble character. They should be under Christian admonition and should develop Christian character. They can win, and when they lose they can also appreciate others. Admitting defeat is a virtue. The Chinese are greatly lacking in this virtue. Most Chinese blame others when they are defeated instead of conceding with grace. You must nurture your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

Many children say that their teacher plays favorites when others do well on tests. When they do not do well themselves, they say their teacher does not like them. Here we see the need for humility. Christians must have the virtue of accepting defeat. If others are good, we have to say promptly that

they are good. We also have to accept defeat and concede that others are smarter, more hard working, or better than us. It is a Christian virtue to accept defeat. When we win, we should not look down upon everyone else. This attitude is unworthy of a Christian. When others are better than us, we have to appreciate them. Others may jump higher or be stronger than us. We should train our children to acknowledge achievement in others, while they are still living at home with us. This training will help them understand themselves when they grow up as Christians. We should know ourselves and appreciate those who are better than us. If our children are this way, it will be easy for them to experience spiritual things.

Teaching Children to Choose

I hope that we will pay attention to this matter. In many aspects we have to teach our children according to the discipline of the Lord. From their youth, we should give them a chance to make their own choices. We should not make every choice for them until they reach the age of eighteen or twenty. If we do, it will be impossible for them to make any decisions when they grow up. We have to always give them the opportunity to make decisions. Give them the chance to choose what they like and what they do not like. We have to show them whether their choices are right. Give them the chance to choose and then show them the right choice. Let them see it for themselves. Some like to wear short dresses. Some prefer one kind of color, while others prefer another kind of color. Let them make the choices by themselves.

Some people do not give their children the opportunity to make choices. As a result, when their children reach their twenties and marry someone, they do not know how to be the head. You can tell them that the husband is the head of the wife, but they will not know how to be the head. You must not allow them to wait until they are married to find out that they do not know how to be the head. If at all possible, give your children plenty of opportunity to make decisions. When they grow up, they will then know what to do. They will know what is wrong and what is right. Give a child opportunities to make choices from the time he is young. I will say a word to all those who have children: "Give them a chance to choose." Otherwise, many Chinese children will be damaged when they grow up. The damage is often manifested when the children are between the ages of eighteen and twenty. They act in irresponsible ways at this age because they have never been called upon to make any choices. We must teach our children according to the discipline of the Lord. We must teach our children to make choices rather than making all the choices for them. We have to let our children know whether they have made the right choices.

Teaching Children to Manage Things

We must also teach our children to manage things. We must give them the opportunity to take care of their personal belongings, to manage their own shoes, socks, and other affairs. Give them a little instruction and then let them try to manage things by themselves. Let them know how things should be handled from their youth. Some children have a bad start because their fathers love them blindly and do not know how to train them. As Christians, we have to train our children to manage their things properly.

I believe if the Lord is gracious to us, we will gain half of our increase from among our own children and the other half from the "sea" (i.e., the world). If all the increase is from the sea and none is from among our own children, we will not have a strong church. Paul's generation could be saved directly from the world, but the generation after Paul, men like Timothy, came in through their families. We cannot expect our increase to always come from the world. We have to expect the second generation, men like Timothy, to come from our own families. God's gospel does save men from the world, but we also need to bring in men like Timothy. Before the church will be rich, there must be grandmothers like Lois and mothers like Eunice who raise, edify, and nurture their children in the discipline of the Lord. If there are no such people, the church will never be rich. We must give our children the opportunity to manage things from their youth. We must give them the chance to learn to arrange things by themselves. Hold family meetings frequently and allow the children to make decisions. If we have to rearrange the

furniture, involve them in its rearrangement. If we have to rearrange the cupboard, involve them in its rearrangement. Teach them to manage things. Whether we have daughters or sons, we have to teach them to manage things. Then they will become a good husband or a good wife in the future.

What is our situation today? Girls should be cared for by their mothers. But many mothers do not take care of them, and the burden is turned over to the church. Boys should be cared for by their fathers. But many fathers do not take care of them, and the burden is also passed on to the church. As a consequence, as men are saved and brought into the church, the business burden of the church doubles. This is because those who are parents do not live properly as Christian parents. After the church preaches the gospel and saves men, it has to deal with all kinds of family problems associated with these men. But if parents are responsible for the proper nurturing of their children, and if the children are brought up in the church, the church will be relieved of half of its burdens. In Shanghai I have often felt that the workers should not be handling the many affairs that they handle; those affairs should be handled by the parents. The parents do not teach their children well, and these children drift into the world. As a result, we have to rescue them back from the world and pick up the burden of teaching them ourselves. This creates much work for the church.

THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE FAMILY BEING ONE OF LOVE

The atmosphere in the family should be one of love. Some become psychologically abnormal or withdrawn because they do not have love at home

The way a child grows up depends on the atmosphere in his family. If a child does not receive any nurturing love as he grows up, he will become stubborn, individualistic, and rebellious. Many people cannot get along with others in their adult life because they did not experience love in the family as a child. They saw only quarrels, arguments, and fights in the family. Children from such families grow up abnormally. Those who come from such abnormal families surely grow up to be lonely people. They will be antagonistic toward others. Because they feel inferior in their heart, they try to boost their self-image by considering themselves better than others. All those who have an inferiority complex have a tendency to exalt themselves. This is their means of offsetting their own inferiority.

Many bad elements in society such as robbers and rebels come from families which are void of love. Their personality becomes warped, and they turn against their fellow man when they grow up. When they come to the church, they bring their problems with them. I feel that half of the work of the church can be done by good parents. But this work falls upon our shoulders today because there are few good parents. New believers should see that they should treat their children in a proper way. A family must be filled with an atmosphere of love and tenderness. There must be genuine love. Children who grow up from such families will become normal persons.

Parents must learn to be friends to their children. Never allow your children to distance themselves from you. Never make yourself unapproachable. Please remember that friendship is built upon communication; it does not come by birth. You must learn to approach your children. Be happy to help them so that they will tell you when they encounter problems and seek your counsel when they are weak. They should not go to others when they are weak. They should be able to tell you their successes as well as their failures. You should be their good friend, the approachable and helpful one to them. They should look to you when they are weak and fellowship with you when they are successful. We have to be friends to them. When they are weak, they should be able to come to us for help. We should not be a judge on the throne but a help to them. We should be there whenever they need help, and we should be able to sit down with them and discuss problems with them. They should be able to seek counsel from us as from friends. In a family the parents must earn so much trust from their children that they become their friends. If a parent will do this, he or she will have done the right thing.

You have to learn this lesson from the time the children are young. How dear and near your children are to you depends on how you treat them the first twenty years of their lives. If they are not near to you the first twenty years of their lives, they will not be near to you when they are thirty or forty years old. They will drift further and further away from you. Many children do not like to be near their parents. They are not friends to them and there is no sweet relationship between them.

They go to their parents when they have problems in a way that resembles a criminal going before a judge. You must work to such an extent that your children will come and seek your advice first when they have problems. They must feel comfortable confiding in you. If you can achieve this, you will find few problems in your family. In fact, all problems will be solved. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 2, pp. 522-523, 536, 537-541, 544-546)

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Question: How can an elder who is a father care for his family and also be always available to help the saints?

Answer: To be an overseer is difficult. The most helpful thing for children is for their parents to spend time with them. To sit with them, observe what they are doing, and instruct them is the best encouragement to them and prevents them from being idle. Sometimes we need to have free talks with them about wide-ranging subjects. If we do, they will be happy. All children like to learn. The need with our children is endless. The more time we spend with them, the better. We should allow them to join in our daily activities, and we should join them in their activities. However, an elder also needs to be available to help the saints. In order to care for both these needs, we must learn to fellowship with the Lord and follow His leading. What I have shared concerning the eldership are principles. We need the Lord's leading for specific situations. (*Basic Principles Concerning the Eldership*, pp. 57-58)