

## LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

### Lesson 14

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. For a father and a husband to remain at home may be a help on the human side, but it cannot determine the salvation and spirituality of the children on the spiritual side; whether or not our children will be saved and be spiritual is up to God, not up to us.
- B. The church life is the purpose of the Christian life, and it is a great reality in the universe; hence, our family life should be brought into the church life—Matt. 16:16-19; Phile. 1-2.
1. We need to realize that in the sight of God, nothing compares with the church; thus, apart from the church life, our family life is vanity—Matt. 13:45-46; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 12:2; Eccl. 1:2.
  2. Only when our family life is brought into the church life will it be reality.
  3. While we need to bear the responsibility of taking care of our family, we need to see that the church is a treasure in God's heart—Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 12; Titus 2:4-5; Matt. 13:45-46.
  4. We should help all the members of our family to be not only saved but also brought into the church life; this is a matter of spiritual warfare.
- C. The church meetings are crucial because the church life is practically expressed by the church meetings—Heb. 10:25:
1. Without the church meetings, the church is something ethereal; the church meetings constitute the practical church life.
  2. We need to encourage the mothers to get together for babysitting so they can attend the prayer meeting on a rotating basis:
    - a. Every month one sister among four can take care of the babysitting for one Tuesday night; then three other sisters can be released to come to the prayer meeting.
    - b. Even the church can consider doing something to help the mothers take care of this babysitting burden.
    - c. To please God by attending the prayer meeting is the best thing.

## **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

The main function of the sisters both in the church and in the family is to preserve and maintain life. In a family it is the wife, not primarily the husband, who maintains life. If a father is not at home, the children are not affected as much as when the mother is away from home. The success of a home depends on the function of the wife and mother. It is the same in the church life. Much of the burden of the church life is on the shoulders of the sisters. The condition of a church depends on the sisters. When the sisters are healthy, living, and going on, the church is healthy, living, and going on. In caring for many things in the church life, the sisters must rise up to bear the burden.

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

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

### **CARING FIRST FOR THE CHURCH AND THEN FOR OUR FAMILY**

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

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

The New Testament does not tell us the names of the wives and children of the apostles. Because all the apostles were "drafted" into the heavenly, divine, and spiritual "military service,"

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

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

### **THE VANITY OF HUMAN LIFE**

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

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

### **THE CHURCH LIFE BEING THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

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

When I was a young believer, I was taught that Christ is the meaning of my human life. Nevertheless, it was not until I turned to the church that both my human life and Christian life became purposeful. Through the years I have been persecuted and defamed because I have

emphasized in my ministry not only Christ but also the church (Eph. 5:32). I have preached Christ with the church and for the church. Apart from the church, our Christian life has no purpose.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, the church meetings are crucial because the church life is practically expressed by the church meetings. Without the church meetings, the church is something ethereal; it cannot be manifested in a practical way. The church meetings constitute the practical church life. Thus, we should not come to the church meetings empty-handed. Rather, we should come with a portion of Christ and offer it to God and share it with others by functioning in the meetings. (*CWWL, 1982*, vol. 1, "Miscellaneous Messages in Anaheim," msg. 7, pp. 27-30)

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

need to care for their children, but they should not take this as an excuse for always missing the prayer meeting.

We need to care for the Lord and His interests above our consideration for our family (Luke 14:26). Abraham is an example of this. The Lord asked him to come out of Chaldea and from his relatives into the good land. But Abraham came out of Chaldea with his father Terah and with his nephew Lot, and they stopped at Haran. Eventually, Terah died, and then Abraham came into the good land (Acts 7:2-4). When Abraham was asked by God to get out of that idolatrous country, he could not leave his father or his nephew.

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

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

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

### **Study Questions:**

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

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

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