

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 18

The Function of the Sisters in the Church Life (2) Being Submissive, Praying, and Caring for the Affairs of the Church

Scripture Reading: Eph. 5:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:3; Acts 12:12; Rom. 16:1-2; John 12:2a

I. The function of being submissive—Eph. 5:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:3:

- A. The first function of the sisters is to be submissive; this does not involve the doing of any kind of work, but it is a real function; being submissive is much greater than any kind of doing:
 1. If the sisters are submissive, they are doing the greatest thing in the world; this is the greatest function on the side of the sisters—1 Cor. 11:3; cf. Gen. 3:15.
 2. In the entire world today, in every country, in all the schools, and in all the homes, what we see is not order and submission but rebellion upon rebellion; the entire world is rebellious toward God; the world is like a stormy ocean full of the winds of rebellion—Psa. 2:1-3.
 3. In the church the situation should not be like this; the church is God's chosen vessel to bear a testimony to the universe that is absolutely different from the world; in the local churches as the local expressions of the Body of Christ, there should be genuine submission—Eph. 5:21-22; 1 Pet. 5:5:
 - a. In Christ the brothers and sisters are the same; in Christ there is no difference between males and females—Gal. 3:28.
 - b. However, in the church life there is a difference between the brothers and sisters because the church life is a spectacle to be seen by men—1 Cor. 4:9.
 - c. In the eyes of the Lord, the universe today is like a theater, and the church is a spectacle in this universal theater to exhibit something, to show something, to the whole creation.
 - d. In this spectacle the sisters have been put in the position of being submissive, and the brothers have been put in the position of being the head.
 - e. The function of the church is to exhibit, to display, the matter of submission to the universe—1 Cor. 11:10; cf. Eph. 3:9-10.
- B. To be submissive requires the supply of life, the enjoyment of grace, the working of the cross, and the denial of the self—Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:16-18; Matt. 16:24.
- C. We should consecrate ourselves to the Lord not to do a work for the Lord but simply to be submissive.
- D. If the sisters in a local church are submissive, the church will be strong, living, rich, and prevailing; it is much more prevailing for the sisters to be submissive than for them to do any kind of work; this is the first lesson the sisters need to learn.

II. The function of prayer—Acts 12:12:

- A. The local church very much needs the functioning of the sisters in prayer:
 1. History and our experience tell us clearly that the praying function is not mainly on the brothers' side but on the sisters' side—Acts 12:12.

2. The brothers should be on the front lines battling the enemy, and the sisters need to be behind the scenes to control the situation by praying, by calling on the Lord as the highest authority to come into the situation—cf. 4:23-31.
 3. Some of the members of the church need to constantly bear the responsibility of praying for the church, which includes praying for the elders and the responsible brothers—Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:15-18; 3:14-21; Col. 1:3; 4:2-4, 12; 1 Thess. 1:2; Isa. 62:1-7.
- B. When the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, it will be easy for them to take care of their second function—the function of prayer:
1. The praying function of the sisters is based on and comes out of the real submission; the praying life comes from the submissive life—1 Cor. 11:5a.
 2. If the sisters are submissive, the Holy Spirit will burden them to pray for everything related to the church; whatever they realize, know, and understand related to the brothers and sisters, to the families, and to the spiritual situation of the church, they will turn into prayer:
 - a. If the sisters criticize only a little, this criticizing spirit will kill their prayer life.
 - b. The sisters must realize that the position the Lord has given them is to be submissive; if the sisters will fulfill this responsibility, they will have the life to continually pray for the church; the spiritual eyes in their spirit will be very keen to enter into the hearts of the saints and know their situation—cf. S.S. 7:4, note 1.
 - c. Although the sisters will know the situation of the saints, including the elders, they should never say a word; rather, they should bring all the matters to the Lord and call on the Head as the highest authority.

III. The function of caring for the affairs of the church—Rom. 16:1-2; cf. John 12:2a:

- A. If the sisters are submissive and carry out their function of prayer, it will be easy for them to realize what affairs of the church they need to take care of.
- B. Nearly everything related to the church needs to be taken care of by the sisters—cf. John 12:2a:
 1. In a family the wife and mother takes care of nearly everything; it is the same with the church.
 2. All the affairs of the church need to be taken care of by the sisters; the brothers are only the head, whereas the sisters can be likened to the body, which has many members and many functions.
 3. The sisters need to take care of the brothers, the sisters, the children, the elderly saints, and the young people—Rom. 16:1-2, 13:
 - a. If the elders are inadequate in fulfilling their function, the reason is not that something is wrong with them; rather, something is wrong with the sisters, because they did not take care of the elders well.
 - b. If the sisters care for the elders properly, the elders will fulfill their function.
 4. The sisters' care will issue in the genuine building up of the church.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH

The Function of Being Submissive

In considering how the sisters should function in the church, the first lesson the sisters need to learn is to be submissive. In fact, the greatest lesson for Christians to learn is to be submissive (Eph. 5:21-22). Being submissive requires the abundance of life, for submission is the expression of life. There is a difference between submitting and being submissive. The sisters need to learn the lesson not only of submitting but also of being submissive. If the sisters can learn this lesson, the church will be strong and will be enriched. To be submissive, the sisters need to realize what their position and standing are.

The first function of the sisters is to be submissive. This does not involve the doing of any kind of work, but it is a real function. Being submissive is much greater than any kind of doing. If the sisters are submissive, they are doing the greatest thing in the world. This is the greatest function on the side of the sisters.

First Corinthians 11:3 says, "Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ." In this verse we can see the divine order. However, in the entire world today, in every country, in all the schools, and in all the homes, what we see is not order and submission but rebellion upon rebellion. The entire world is rebellious toward God. The world is like a stormy ocean full of the winds of rebellion. In the church the situation should not be like this. The church is God's chosen vessel to bear a testimony to the universe that is absolutely different from the world. The church is sanctified, separated from the course of the world and from the current of the age. As the church we are not in the flow of the world but in the flow of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1). In the local churches as the local expressions of the Body of Christ, there should be genuine submission.

As I pointed out earlier, in Christ the brothers and the sisters are the same. In Christ there is no difference between males and females. However in the church life there is a difference between the brothers and the sisters because the church life is a spectacle to be seen by men. The Greek word for *spectacle* is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:9, which says, "God has set forth us the apostles last of all as doomed to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." Here Paul used a metaphor, referring to the fights between criminals and wild beasts in the Roman amphitheater. In the eyes of the Lord, the universe today is like a theater, and the church is a spectacle in this universal theater to exhibit something, to show something, to the whole creation. In this spectacle the sisters have been put in the position of being submissive, and the brothers have been put in the position of being the head. The function of the church is to exhibit, to display, the matter of submission to the universe.

To be the head in a proper way and to be submissive to the head both require the riches of life. It is not easy for the brothers to function as the head, and it is also difficult for the sisters to be submissive to the brothers. The sisters need to be submissive not only outwardly but also from within their spirit, without any complaining or murmuring. If the church is to have a proper testimony in the universe, there should be no murmuring or complaining from the sisters. The sisters need to learn the lesson of being submissive. They need to have the attitude that, as sisters, they do not know what is wrong or what is right; they only know one thing—that their position in the church is to be submissive. To decide what is right and what is wrong is not their responsibility or their position. The sisters are only in the position of being submissive.

To be submissive requires the supply of life, the enjoyment of grace, the working of the cross, and the denial of the self. We should never try to be submissive by our self. We should consecrate ourselves to the Lord not to do a work for the Lord but simply to be submissive. If the sisters take care of this one matter of being submissive, the church will be strengthened, enriched, and renewed. If the sisters in a local church are submissive, the church will be strong, living, rich, and

prevailing. It is much more prevailing for the sisters to be submissive than for them to do any kind of work. This is the first lesson the sisters need to learn. This does not mean that there is no need for the sisters to fellowship with the church, but the sisters must know that their position and standing are to be submissive.

The Function of Prayer

When the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, it will be easy for them to take care of their second function—the function of prayer. The local church very much needs the functioning of the sisters in prayer. The function of prayer is not mainly on the side of the brothers but on the side of the sisters. Some of the members of the church need to constantly bear the responsibility of praying for the church, which includes praying for the elders and the responsible brothers.

If the sisters are not submissive, they can never pray for the elders. Instead of praying, the sisters will criticize the elders. If the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, they will immediately have the life to pray for the elders. They will never say a word about whether the elders are right or wrong. The praying life comes from the submissive life. If we do not have the life of submission, it will be very difficult for us to have the life of prayer. There is a need for constant prayer not only for the elders but also for all the saints. If the sisters learn the lesson of being submissive, they will have the life to pray for the church. If they murmur and criticize only a little, their prayer life will be cut off.

If the sisters are submissive, the Holy Spirit will burden them to pray for everything related to the church. They will never criticize anyone in the church but will always pray for them. They will always be burdened to pray for all the matters and all the persons related to the church life. Whatever they realize, know, and understand related to the brothers and sisters, to the families, and to the spiritual situation of the church, they will turn into prayer. They will never complain, murmur, or criticize; rather, they will be submissive and always burdened to pray. The praying function of the sisters is based on and comes out of the real submission. This is what the church needs from the sisters.

History and our experience tell us clearly that the praying function is not mainly on the brothers' side but on the sisters' side. In the prayer meeting in the sister's home in Acts 12, I believe that most of those who were praying were sisters. The brothers should be on the front lines battling the enemy, and the sisters need to be behind the scenes to control the situation by praying, by calling on the Lord as the highest authority to come into the situation. In carrying out the function of prayer, the sisters should not say a word to human beings but should speak to the highest authority. If the sisters criticize only a little, this criticizing spirit will kill their prayer life.

In order to function in prayer, the sisters first need to be submissive. They need to take the position and standing of being submissive. This is absolutely different from the age of the world, from the course of the world, and from the flow, the tide, of the present century. The sisters must realize that the position the Lord has given them is to be submissive. I say again that if the sisters will fulfill this responsibility, they will have the life to continually pray for the church. The spiritual eyes in their spirit will be very keen to enter into the hearts of the saints and know their situation. Although the sisters will know the situation of the saints, including the elders, they should never say a word. Rather, they should bring all the matters to the Lord and call on the Head as the highest authority. The church will receive the greatest benefit from the sisters' function.

The Function of Caring for the Affairs of the Church

If the sisters are submissive and carry out their function of prayer, it will be easy for them to realize what affairs of the church they need to take care of. Nearly everything related to the church needs to be taken care of by the sisters. The sisters need to take care of the brothers, the sisters, the children, the elderly saints, and the young people. In a family the wife and mother

takes care of nearly everything. It is the same with the church. All the affairs of the church need to be taken care of by the sisters. The brothers are only the head, whereas the sisters can be likened to the body, which has many members and many functions. If the elders are inadequate in fulfilling their function, the reason is not that something is wrong with them; rather, something is wrong with the sisters, because they did not take care of the elders well. If the sisters care for the elders properly, the elders will fulfill their function. The sisters should not complain that the work among the young people is poor. The sisters need to realize that it is poor because they did not take care of the young people well. If the sisters exercise the proper care, the work among the young people will be uplifted.

In the church there may be a number of brothers and sisters who are students. In general, students are unmarried. Some of the young married sisters who are older than the students should take care of these unmarried ones. Some of the students may be spiritually weak. The young married sisters need to bring these weaker students to their home to care for them. Some of the older sisters who are mothers need to care for the single ones who are far away from their own families. They need to do something to meet their practical need. This will be a real exhibition of love and a real ministry of life to these students.

Some of the sisters also need to look after the teenagers. As a rule, teenagers like to listen to other saints but not to their parents. The sisters should take advantage of this to care for the teenagers. The teenage boys, for the most part, will not listen to their parents, but if the sisters take care of them, they will listen to whatever the sisters say to them. The teenagers in the church are the young members of the Body. Since the sisters are so much for the Body, praying constantly for the Body, they need to care for these young members. This will be a great help to the whole church, including the families.

First, the sisters need to be submissive; second, they need to fulfill their praying function. If the sisters have such a life with such a spirit, they will be able to help the teenagers. In contrast, if the sisters are constantly criticizing the elders yet still try to care for the young people, they will damage and poison the young saints. They will never minister life to them. If the church as a whole is weak and the elders are inadequate, the sisters must still keep their position of submission and fulfill their praying function. Then when the sisters take care of the teenagers, the sisters will not need to say anything. The sisters' conduct in the presence of the teenagers will minister life to them. They will be helped by the sisters' life and spiritual behavior. This will help the church very much.

The sisters also need to care for the children, and not only on the Lord's Day in the children's meeting. Some of the sisters need to be burdened to care for the children by realizing that the parents and the children in some of the families need the sisters' help. If the sisters receive this as a burden, they will know what they should do and render the proper help.

If the sisters take care of the elders, the young people, and the children, what a help they will render to the church! The sisters' care will issue in the genuine building up of the church. Moreover, the sisters will be strong in spirit, rich in life, and bold in what the Lord has done through them. Then it will be easy for the sisters to function in the general meetings of the church, even though many brothers may be present. The sisters need to increase their functioning in the church meetings, but this depends on their being submissive, fulfilling their praying function, and taking care of the things that they need to take care of in the church. (*CWWL*, 1968, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," ch. 14, "The Standing, Position, and Function of the Sisters in the Church," pp. 83-88)

Study Questions:

1. Why is being submissive the greatest function on the side of the sisters and greater than any kind of doing?
2. What is the relationship between the function of being submissive and the function of praying for the church?
3. What does it mean to say that the brothers are like the head but the sisters are like the body with many members and many functions?

References and Further Reading:

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968*, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," ch. 14.

