

**Lessons for Sisters**

**The Human Life and Family Life of the Sisters**

**Houston Area Training for Sisters  
February 22-23, 2019**

# Schedule

## Friday

7:30 - 9:00pm **Lesson 13 – Expressing Christ through a Human Life and Building up a Proper Family Life for the Church Life**

## Saturday

**Rise, prepare for the day, and have a personal time with HIM.**

7:30 - 8:30am **BREAKFAST**

8:30 – 10:00am **Lesson 14 – The Family Life Wholly for the Church Life**

## **BREAK**

10:30 – 11:15am -- **Group Fellowship**

11:15am -12:00pm **Overflow**

12:00 - 1:00pm **LUNCH (Catered)**

## **Training Regulations:**

Please arrive at the training meeting praying, singing, and rejoicing!

All trainees must bring the *Recovery Version of the Bible* and *Hymns* to all the sessions.  
(Digital is ok)

Please be on time for all the sessions of the training and learn to practice arriving 5 minutes before the start time of the meetings.

## LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

### Lesson 13

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

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

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

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

- D. For us to live Christ we must practice the one spirit with Him, and for us to practice the one spirit with Him, we must exercise our spirit to pray unceasingly—1 Thess. 5:17; Eph. 6:18:
1. If we try to live Christ beyond or apart from praying we cannot make it:
    - a. If we make up our minds to try to live Christ, that is actually the living of our self; if you try to live Christ without praying you will fail.
    - b. It is only by a continual living prayer, a breathing prayer, that we spontaneously live Christ.
    - c. This is why Paul charges us to pray unceasingly; to pray unceasingly simply means to stop our own effort; if you do not pray, yet you try to do something, that is your own effort.
    - d. This point is like a small screw in a large machine; when a large machine works, it depends upon some small screws; not to try to live Christ, but to pray is a small thing, yet it is very crucial.
    - e. Do not make up your mind to try to live Christ, but all the day long pray, “Lord, live through me”; pray every moment in anything, in everything, and everywhere.
  2. In the spiritual life to pray is to breathe, and to breathe is to live; to live Christ is to pray unceasingly, and to pray unceasingly is just to call on the Lord while you are doing anything—John 20:22; Lam. 3:55-56:
    - a. We have a lot of duties and responsibilities, but regardless of how busy we are, we still breathe; while you do things, you breathe; we must build up such a breathing habit.
    - b. All day long you should call on Him; you must do all things by talking to the Lord, by praying to Him, by calling on Him—Psa. 116:1-2; Job 27:10; 1 Cor. 1:2.
    - c. By this you are breathing; this is to live spiritually, and to live spiritually is just to live Christ.

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

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

## Excerpts from the Ministry:

### THE FACE OF A MAN

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

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

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

Some believers have the thought that once they begin to pursue the Lord, they should be special or different from others. We need to realize, therefore, that we should be ordinary, that is, we should be the same as common, ordinary human beings. Although we pray, read the Bible, attend the meetings, and serve God, our appearance is still the appearance of a man, and our face is the face of a man. In our dress we are proper, but we are ordinary, not peculiar or eccentric. Yes, we experience the Lord as the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum, but the issue of this

experience is that we bear the face of a man. As living creatures, we are not angels but are very human. In fact, the more spiritual we become, the more normal and human we will be. The more we have of Christ as our life (Col. 3:4), the more we will bear the face of a man. In the Epistles we are taught by the apostles to be proper human beings, in particular how to be proper husbands, wives, and parents (Eph. 5:22—6:9; Col. 3:18—4:1). God's salvation causes us to be proper men for His manifestation, move, and administration. (*Life-study of Ezekiel*, msg. 5, pp. 51-53)

### **LIVING A NORMAL HUMAN LIFE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### EXPRESSING CHRIST IN HUMAN LIFE

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

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

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

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

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

The living of the saints in union with Christ should result in the expression of Christ in human life. If we see this, we shall praise the Lord for our human living. Furthermore, we shall

have a fresh appreciation for married life. I can testify that I am thankful for my wife, children, and grandchildren. I am grateful for all the lessons the Lord has taught me through them. The more I advance in years, the more I appreciate the lessons I have learned through the course of my human life. In the relationship between wife and husband and between children and parents we need to live out Christ and express Him.

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

### **Study Questions:**

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

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

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

## LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

### Lesson 14

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. For a father and a husband to remain at home may be a help on the human side, but it cannot determine the salvation and spirituality of the children on the spiritual side; whether or not our children will be saved and be spiritual is up to God, not up to us.
- B. The church life is the purpose of the Christian life, and it is a great reality in the universe; hence, our family life should be brought into the church life—Matt. 16:16-19; 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.