

Conference for the sisters in the French speaking European countries

12-13 December 2020

The Importance of the sisters in the church
life and in God's economy

SCHEDULE

Times	Saturday 12 December	Lord's Day 13 December
10:00 to 12:00	Meeting 1	Meeting 3
15:30 to 17:30	Meeting 2	

The Importance of the sisters in the church life and in God's economy

Message 1

The Importance of the Sisters in the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; 11:2-16; Matt. 1:16, 18; John 12:3; 20:1, 11-18;
Luke 8:2-3; Acts 12:12

I. In Christ, who is the Head of the Body, there is no difference between male and female, but in the Body there is a difference between male and female, that is, between the brothers and the sisters—Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; 11:2-16:

- A. First Corinthians 11 speaks definitely concerning the difference between man and woman, especially in the matter of headship—11:2-16.
- B. This indicates that in the church the difference between the brothers and the sisters still exists; in Christ this difference does not exist, but in the church, in the Body, the difference between male and female remains.
- C. We should not think that because the difference between male and female still exists in the Body, the standing of the sisters is not important; if this is our thought, we are wrong.

II. If we read the entire New Testament, we will realize that in the church life, from a certain perspective, the standing and function of the sisters are more important than those of the brothers:

- A. The three main steps taken by the Lord Jesus were His incarnation, His crucifixion, and His resurrection; related to each of these three steps, a sister was involved:
 - 1. The Lord was incarnated through Mary His mother—Matt. 1:16, 18.
 - 2. Just before His crucifixion Mary, the sister of Martha, anointed the Lord's feet for His burial—John 12:3.
 - 3. After His resurrection the first one who saw the Lord Jesus was Mary the Magdalene—20:1, 11-18.
 - 4. The sisters need to realize that they are the ones to bring the Lord's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to people.
- B. According to Luke 8:2-3, while the Lord Jesus was on earth, it was not a group of brothers who ministered material things to the Lord and His disciples but a group of sisters.
- C. In Acts 12:12, after Peter was released from prison, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, where a number of saints were praying; the prayer meeting held in the sister's home ministered much life to the church in that kind of situation.
- D. In Romans 16 Paul mentions the names of a number of sisters in his greetings to the saints—Rom. 16:1-3, 6, 12-13.
- E. If we read all the New Testament Epistles until the end of the book of Revelation, we will realize that the standing and function of the sisters can be more important than those of the brothers:
 - 1. We can liken the brothers to the bones of the physical body, and the sisters, to the blood.
 - 2. To have a strong physical body, we need the bones as a frame, and we need the blood to support the life of the body; to our body the blood is more important than the bones.
- F. If the Body is to be strong, healthy, and sound, the sisters must be right:
 - 1. Just as it is serious when there is a problem with our blood, whenever there is something wrong among the sisters, there is a serious disease in the Body.

2. Thus, whether a local church is strong or weak, healthy or sick, depends mainly on the sisters:
 - a. Regardless of how fine the brothers are, if the sisters are a problem, the church will be troubled; on the other hand, if there are no problems among the sisters, there will be no problems in the church; the sisters are the factors of calm and peace, and they can also be factors of trouble and turmoil—Rom. 16:1-2; Phil. 4:2-3.
 - b. Whether or not the church goes on depends more on the sisters than on the brothers; as long as the sisters are in a healthy spiritual condition, the church will go on very well.
 3. This is why we have the burden to point out that the sisters' standing and function in the church are of tremendous importance.
- G. The Lord is the source of all things, including us human beings, but in a practical, human way mothers are the source of mankind; without mothers, mankind would not be able to continue (1 Cor. 11:12); in the same way, the sisters are the root, the source, of the church:
1. Just as without mothers, mankind would be terminated, the continuation of the church, the corporate new man in God's eternal purpose (Eph. 2:15-16), depends very much on the sisters:
 - a. Human society and families depend more on the mother than on the father; in one sense, we need a good mother more than we need a good father.
 - b. A good father can do much good for his children, but what he does is not so practical and subjective.
 - c. The real, secret, practical, and subjective help comes not from the father's side but from the mother's; if some children lose their father yet still have a good mother, they will still be able to be good children, but if they lose their mother, they lose their source of proper help.
 2. Although the man occupies the higher position, in a secret, actual, practical, and subjective way the real situation of the family depends more on the female side; in the church it is the same.
 3. The sisters are a crucial factor in the church life—Rom. 16:1-4, 6, 12-13.

EXCERPTS FROM THE MINISTRY

THE STANDING, POSITION, AND FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH

Galatians 3:28 says, "There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In this verse we can identify three contrasting pairs: Jew and Greek, slave and free man, and male and female. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 there are two contrasting pairs: Jews and Greeks and slaves and free. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ there cannot be Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, male and female, whereas 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that in the church, in the Body, there is no distinction between Jews and Greeks and between slaves and free. This verse does not mention males and females. Based on these two verses we can see that in Christ, who is the Head of the Body, there is no difference between male and female, but in the Body there is a difference between male and female, that is, between the brothers and the sisters. First Corinthians 11 speaks definitely concerning the difference between man and woman, especially in the matter of headship (vv. 2-16). This indicates that in the church the difference between the brothers and the sisters still exists. In Christ this difference does not exist, but in the church, in the Body, the difference between male and female remains.

THE STANDING OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH

My reason for pointing this out is to say that the sisters have an important standing in the church. We should not think that because the difference between male and female still exists in the Body, the standing of the sisters is not important. If this is our thought we are wrong. If we read the entire New Testament, we will realize that in the church life, from a certain perspective the standing and function of the sisters are more important than those of the brothers.

The three main steps taken by the Lord Jesus were His incarnation, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. Related to each of these three steps, a sister was involved, and all three sisters were named Mary. The Lord was incarnated through Mary His mother (Matt. 1:16, 18). Just before His crucifixion Mary, the sister of Martha, anointed the Lord's feet for His burial (John 12:3). After His resurrection the first one who saw the Lord Jesus was Mary the Magdalene (20:1, 11-18). Therefore, three sisters were very involved with the three major steps of the Lord.

It is clear that for the Lord's incarnation, a sister needed to be involved, but before His death, why was it not a brother who poured the ointment upon the Lord's body? And at His resurrection, why was it not Peter or John or some other brother who was the first to see the Lord? This is very meaningful. The sisters need to realize that they are the ones to bring the Lord's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to people.

Furthermore, according to Luke 8:2-3, while the Lord Jesus was on earth, it was not a group of brothers who ministered material things to the Lord and His disciples, but a group of sisters. In Acts 12:12, after Peter was released from prison, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, where a number of saints were praying. The prayer meeting held in the sister's home ministered much life to the church in that kind of situation.

In Romans 16 Paul mentions the names of a number of sisters in his greetings to the saints. If we read all the New Testament Epistles until the end of the book of Revelation, we will realize that the standing and function of the sisters can be more important than those of the brothers. Of course, this does not mean that the brothers are useless. We can liken the brothers to the bones of the physical body, and the sisters, to the blood. To have a strong physical body, we need the bones as a frame, and we need the blood to support the life of the body. To our body the blood is more important than the bones.

Based on my experience in the church life, I have learned that problems among the sisters are more serious than problems among the brothers. If there are some problems among the brothers but no problems among the sisters, that situation is not so serious. In a local church I am most afraid of problems among the sisters. Just as it is serious when there is a problem with our blood, whenever there is something wrong among the sisters, there is a serious disease in the Body. If the Body is to be strong, healthy, and sound, the sisters must be right. Thus, whether a local church is strong or weak, healthy or sick, depends mainly on the sisters. This is why I have the burden to point out that the sisters' standing and function in the church are of tremendous importance. (CWWL, 1968, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," msg. 14, pp. 81-83)

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

It is very clear that the brothers and the sisters are of two categories. The Lord is the source of all things, including us human beings, but in a practical, human way mothers are the source of mankind (1 Cor. 11:12). Without mothers, mankind would not be able to continue. In the same way, the sisters are the root, the source, of the church. Just as without mothers, mankind would be terminated, the continuation of the church, the corporate new man in God's eternal purpose (Eph. 2:15-16), depends very much on the sisters. Human society and families depend more on the mother than on the father. In one sense we need a good mother more than we need a good father. A good father can do much good for his children, but what he does is not so practical and subjective. The real, secret, practical, and subjective help comes not from the father's side but

from the mother's. If some children lose their father yet still have a good mother, they will still be able to be good children, but if they lose their mother, they lose their source of proper help.

Although man occupies the higher position, in a secret, actual, practical, and subjective way the real situation of the family depends more on the female side. In the church it is the same. Regardless of how fine the brothers are, if the sisters are a problem, the church will be troubled. On the other hand, if there are no problems among the sisters, there will be no problems in the church. The sisters are the factors of calm and peace, and they can also be factors of trouble and turmoil.

The younger sisters do not trouble the church as much as the older sisters do. A teenage sister may be a little naughty, but this kind of naughtiness will not cause much trouble to the church. However, the older a sister becomes, the more she may be a problem to the church. The troubles in the church often come from the older, more experienced ones. This is a practical fact.

I say this not to belittle anyone. We respect all the mothers. Humanly, they are the source of mankind, and in the Bible they are admired and uplifted as the mothers of the children of God, the Lord's people, the saints (Rom. 16:13). Whether or not the church goes on depends more on the sisters than on the brothers. As long as the sisters are in a healthy spiritual condition, the church will go on very well. However, if the sisters are not healthy, there will be problems in the church no matter how strong the brothers are. The sisters are a crucial factor in the church life. (CWWL, 1975-1976, vol. 1, "The Crucial Function of the Sisters in the Church Life," pp. 129-130)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain the difference between the consideration of male and female in Christ in contrast to in the Body, the church?
2. From what perspective is the standing and function of the sisters in the church life more important than that of the brothers?
3. Using the illustration of blood in the body and motherhood in the family, explain how the function of the sisters is a crucial factor in the church life.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING (in English)

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1968*, vol. 1, "Various Messages in Los Angeles," msg. 14.
2. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, vol. 1, "The Crucial Function of the Sisters in the Church Life."

The Importance of the sisters in the church life and in God's economy

Message 2

The Importance of the Sisters in the Accomplishment of God's Economy

Scripture Reading: Gen. 3:1-6; 3:15; Luke 1:35; Matt. 26:6-8; John 19:25; 20:1, 16-17; Luke 8:1-3; John 11:1, 5; Acts 1:13-14; 12:12; Rom. 16:1-3, 6, 12-13; Phil. 4:2-3a

I. In God's administration of His economy, a very important position is assigned to the women:

- A. After man was created, what happened to man was very much related to the woman:
 - 1. The subtle serpent, the enemy of God, came in through the woman—Gen. 3:1-6.
 - 2. Therefore, God chose to defeat the enemy also through woman—through the same channel by which he came—v. 15.
 - 3. Thus, the fall occurred through the woman, and the deliverance was promised also through the woman; this shows us the importance of the sisters' position in the Bible.
- B. By this we can see that whether or not God can have His way today in His purpose depends very much upon what the sisters will do.
- C. If the women, or the sisters, will function properly, God will have a success; otherwise, there will surely be a failure or a loss.

II. The mention of six Marys in the New Testament is very meaningful; this simply means that to fulfill God's purpose and accomplish His economy, there is a great need for the sisters; in a sense, the sisters are more important for the accomplishment of God's economy than the brothers:

- A. Do you realize that there are at least six Marys mentioned in the New Testament?
 - 1. The first Mary is the mother of the Lord Jesus; the story of the life of the Lord Jesus begins with this woman—Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:34-35.
 - 2. The second Mary is the sister of Lazarus; she loved the Lord Jesus and followed Him, ministering to Him—John 12:2-3.
 - 3. The third Mary is Mary the Magdalene, out from whom seven demons were cast (Luke 8:2); while the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, she, with a few sisters, were standing there with Him; then on the morning of the resurrection, she went to the tomb—John 20:1, 11, 14-18.
 - 4. The fourth Mary, the wife of Clopas, with the other sisters, saw the death of Christ—19:25.
 - 5. The fifth Mary was the mother of John Mark; after Peter was released from prison, he went to Mary's home, where many saints were gathered together praying—Acts 12:12.
 - 6. The sixth Mary is in Romans 16:6; here Paul says to greet the Mary who labored much for the church; she was laboring over so many in the church life.
- B. One Mary gave birth to the Lord Jesus; the first position of the sisters is related to the birth of the Lord; the purpose of the Lord's birth is to bring the Lord into the human race:
 - 1. All the sisters must realize that their position in the church is to bring forth Christ to people; whatever you do must bring forth Christ.
 - 2. You have to pray that the Spirit will come upon you and that the power of the Most High will overshadow you so that you can bring forth Christ—Luke 1:35.
 - 3. If you are serving in a service group, you must bring forth Christ; if you visit the saints or have fellowship with the sisters, you must bring forth Christ to them.

- C. According to the Gospels, the Marys were the ones who loved the Lord and followed Him; they ministered to the Lord out of their possessions; this is the sisters' position—8:1-3:
1. Your position is first to bring forth Christ to people and then to love the Lord Jesus.
 2. We have to realize that the sisters represent the loving ones; you need to love the Lord Jesus, to follow Him, and to minister to Him.
- D. Among so many Marys, some stood by the cross watching and observing the Lord Jesus when He was being crucified—John 19:25:
1. They saw the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus; all the sisters have to see such a portrait of the crucified Lord Jesus.
 2. In other words, the sisters have to take a position that experiences the death of Christ—cf. Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:11-12.
- E. Furthermore, you need to do something that makes the burial of the Lord Jesus so sweet; it must be that whenever you mention the name of the Lord Jesus, people can sense something so sweet—Mark 16:1.
- F. Moreover, the sisters must discover something of the resurrection and be first to know the Lord's ascension—John 20:11-18:
1. Mary saw the empty tomb and went to tell Peter; she did not teach Peter, but she did pass on the revelation.
 2. In the church we do not need the sisters to teach, but we do need the sisters to see the revelation and to discover some of the things related to the Lord's resurrection life.
- G. In Acts there were no sisters taking the lead in the church, but they were praying:
1. When the twelve were praying for ten days before the time of Pentecost, the sisters also were there—Acts 1:14.
 2. In Acts 12 the prayer meeting was even in a sister's home—v. 12.
 3. All the sisters in the church have to learn to pray; if you see a problem, do not talk about it and do not gossip about it—pray.
 4. If you expect your local church to be strong, you must be praying sisters.
- H. Romans 16 mentions so many laboring and ministering sisters, the first of whom is Phoebe; Phoebe was a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea; we need many sisters who will minister in the churches, serving to such an extent they are called deaconesses—vv. 1, 3, 6.
- I. By putting all these verses together, we can see that there is no hint that a position was assigned to the sisters to take the lead, to do a great work, or to teach; there was no such position assigned to the sisters.
- J. Rather, the sisters should bring the Lord Jesus to people by the principle of incarnation, love Him, follow Him, minister to Him, experience His death, make Him so sweet and lovely to all the people, see His resurrected life, know the ascension, and then in the church always bear the burden of prayer and labor.

EXCERPTS FROM THE MINISTRY

THE SIX MARYS

In God's administration of His economy, a very important position is assigned to the women. After man was created, what happened to man was very much related to the woman. By this we can see that whether or not God can have His way today in His purpose depends very much upon what the sisters will do. If the women, or the sisters, will function properly, God will have a success; otherwise, there will surely be a failure or a loss. After the fall of man, God came in, not to do something through the man but to do something through the woman. The subtle serpent, the enemy of God, came in through the woman. Therefore, God chose to defeat the

enemy also through woman—through the same channel by which he came. In Genesis 3 the serpent came in through the woman, and in the same chapter God promised that this woman would bring forth a seed who would bruise the head of the serpent (v. 15). Thus, the fall occurred through the woman, and the deliverance was promised also through the woman. This shows us the importance of the sisters' position in the Bible.

The first account in the New Testament concerning a direct relationship with the Lord is related to a woman—Mary. The story of the life of the Lord Jesus begins with this woman. Of course, we know that this is the fulfillment of the promise given in Genesis 3:15. In Genesis God promised that the woman would bring forth a seed who would destroy the damaging serpent. This promise is fulfilled at the very beginning of the New Testament.

Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus is not the only Mary mentioned in the New Testament. Do you realize that there are at least six Marys mentioned in the New Testament? The first Mary is the mother of the Lord Jesus, and the second Mary is the sister of Lazarus. The third Mary is Mary the Magdalene, out from whom seven demons were cast out. While the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, a few sisters were standing there with Him. Besides Mary the Lord's mother, there were two other Marys. One was Mary the Magdalene, and the Gospel of John tells us that the other Mary was the wife of Clopas (19:25). This fourth Mary, with the other sisters, saw the death of Christ. On the morning of the resurrection, Mary the Magdalene went to the tomb. The Gospel of John mentions only that Mary the Magdalene went there, but the other Gospels tell us that there was another Mary (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). This other Mary was the first Mary, the Lord's mother (Matt. 13:55). The fifth Mary was the mother of John Mark. In Acts 12:12, after Peter was released from prison, he went to Mary's home, where many saints were gathered together praying. The sixth Mary is in Romans 16:6. Here Paul says to greet the Mary who labored much for the church.

These six Marys are very meaningful. One Mary gave birth to the Lord Jesus; another loved the Lord Jesus and followed Him, ministering to Him; two other Marys saw the Lord's death and prepared something for His burial, to anoint His body. They saw the resurrection and also received the vision of the ascension of Christ. Another Mary was related to the church, praying all the time. Finally, a Mary was laboring over so many in the church life. In the New Testament there are not so many Peters or Johns, but there are so many Marys. This simply means that to fulfill God's purpose and accomplish His economy, there is a great need for the sisters. In a sense, the sisters are more important for the accomplishment of God's economy than the brothers.

The little family at Bethany spoken of in John 12:1-9 is a type of the church. That family was composed of one brother and two sisters. This means that it consisted of one-third brothers and two-thirds sisters. A strong, normal, proper church should have one-third brothers and two-thirds sisters. In the church life we need more sisters.

We need to see the position of the sisters in the record of the New Testament. The first position of the sisters is related to the birth of the Lord. What is the purpose of the Lord's birth? It is to bring the Lord into the human race. All the sisters must realize that their position in the church is to bring forth Christ to people. Whatever you do must bring forth Christ. You have to pray that the Spirit will come upon you and that the power of the Most High will overshadow you so that you can bring forth Christ. If you are serving in a service group, you must bring forth Christ. If you visit the saints or have fellowship with the sisters, you must bring forth Christ to them. It is not just a matter of working for the Lord; it is a matter of bringing forth Christ.

According to the Gospels, the Marys were the ones who loved the Lord and followed Him. They ministered to the Lord out of their possessions. Sisters, this is your position. Your position is first to bring forth Christ to people and then to love the Lord Jesus. Can you tell the Lord that you love Him more than your family and your children? We have to realize that the sisters

represent the loving ones. You need to love the Lord Jesus, to follow Him, and to minister to Him.

One day when I was reading Luke 8:3, I was happy when I saw that among those ministering sisters, one was the wife of a high officer of Herod. Surely she had a high position and many material things. Yet she did not love other things; she loved the Lord. She not only loved the Lord but also followed Him and ministered what she had to the Lord and to the disciples. No matter what your position is, you have to follow the Lord, love the Lord, and minister something that you have to the Lord.

The New Testament also shows us that among so many Marys, some stood by the cross watching and observing the Lord Jesus when He was being crucified. They saw the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. All the sisters have to see such a portrait of the crucified Lord Jesus. In other words, the sisters have to take a position that experiences the death of Christ.

Furthermore, you need to do something that makes the burial of the Lord Jesus so sweet. It must be that whenever you mention the name of the Lord Jesus, people can sense something so sweet. If you do not have such a love, although you may mention His name in the same way, there will be no sweetness. There is a big difference. In the New Testament there is no position assigned to the sisters for taking the lead or doing a big work or being a great speaker. Rather, the position that has been assigned to the sisters is to love Him, to follow Him, to minister to Him, to experience His death, and to make Him so sweet to everyone. He was the rejected One, the condemned One, the crucified One, yet to you He is the lovable One. Your portion is to experience the death of the Lord Jesus and to make the rejected Jesus so sweet to everyone.

Moreover, the sisters must discover something of the resurrection and be first to know the Lord's ascension (John 20:11-18). The Lord's resurrection was not discovered first by Peter but by Mary. The brothers received the revelation from a sister. Mary saw the empty tomb and went to tell Peter. She did not teach Peter, but she did pass on the revelation. In the church we do not need the sisters to teach, but we do need the sisters to see the revelation and to discover some of the things related to the Lord's resurrection life.

I am hoping that in the coming days many sisters could stand up in the meetings, testifying, "Hallelujah! This morning I saw the empty tomb! I saw something new of the resurrected Christ!" This would not be a kind of teaching but a heavenly report. I would love to hear such a report. To me the best meeting is not a kind of teaching meeting but a meeting full of divine reports. I would love to hear such a sweet and divine report out of the mouths of all the sisters. The same report out of the mouths of the brothers would not be so sweet. But such a report concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus out of the mouths of the little sisters would be sweet to everyone. The sisters saw the resurrection first.

After the four Gospels we come to the stage of the church. In Acts there were no sisters taking the lead in the church, but they were praying. When the twelve were praying for ten days before the time of Pentecost, the sisters also were there. In Acts 12 the prayer meeting was even in a sister's home. It does not say that Peter went to Andrew's home where so many were praying but that he went to Mary's home. All the sisters in the church have to learn to pray. If you see a problem, do not talk about it and do not gossip about it—pray. If Peter is thrown into prison, do not talk—pray! You have to be so involved in the prayer and so burdened in the prayer that even after your prayer has been answered, you would continue to pray. If you expect your local church to be strong, you must be praying sisters. You must not be gossiping and talking sisters but praying sisters. We need the sisters to pray. Whenever you see that the church needs something, whenever you see some shortcomings, whenever you see something lacking in the church, do not spread any rumors—pray. Stop the rumors by praying; even kill the rumors by praying. You must pray and pray and pray until Peter comes back. Pray to such an extent that even after the prayers are answered, you are still praying. This is so healthy. I do know that

many of you pray, but I hope that more of you will learn to pray, and that those who pray already will pray more.

Romans 16 mentions so many laboring and ministering sisters, the first of whom is Phoebe. We need many Phoebes in the church. Phoebe was a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea. We need many sisters who will minister in the churches, serving to such an extent they are called deaconesses.

In verse 3 we read, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." In principle, the Bible usually mentions the man before the woman, but here is an exception. Paul does not say, "Greet Aquila and Prisca" but, "Greet Prisca and Aquila." It must be because Prisca was a very special sister.

Verse 12 says, "Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa...Greet Persis...who has labored much in the Lord." In verse 13 there is the mother of Rufus. Rufus's mother was also the mother of the apostle Paul. Do you know what this means? This means that the mother of Rufus was always taking care of the apostle Paul as her own son. She was continually nourishing, cherishing, and caring for this single brother, the apostle Paul. She was actually the mother of Rufus, yet Paul said she was also his mother because she took care of him.

By putting all these verses together, we can see that there is no hint that a position was assigned to the sisters to take the lead, to do a great work, or to teach. There was no such position assigned to the sisters. Rather, the sisters should bring the Lord Jesus to people by the principle of incarnation, love Him, follow Him, minister to Him, experience His death, make Him so sweet and lovely to all the people, see His resurrected life, know the ascension, and then in the church always bear the burden of prayer and labor. (CWWL, 1973-1974, vol. 2, "The Six Marys," pp. 243-249)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance and experiential application of the first Mary, the mother of Jesus?
2. What is the significance and experiential application of the women who stood by the Lord at the cross?
3. According to the picture in Acts 12, how can the sisters make the church in their locality strong?

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING (in English)

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1973-1974*, vol. 2, "The Six Marys."

The Importance of the sisters in the church life and in God's economy

Message 3

The Female Life Being the Life Useful to God in His Economy

Scripture Reading: Exo. 1—2

I. The book of Exodus reveals the kind of people God can use in His economy for the fulfillment of His purpose:¹

- A. God's intention as seen in this book is to have a people to build Him a dwelling place on earth; thus, at the end of Exodus the tabernacle is erected to be God's dwelling place—Exo. 40:17, 33-34.
- B. Furthermore, for the fulfillment of God's purpose, there is also the need for an army to fight for God's interests on earth; if the children of Israel were to enjoy the good land and to fulfill God's purpose of building a temple as God's testimony on earth, they had to fight to deliver the land from the usurping hand of the enemy—Num. 1:1-4; 33:52-54.
- C. Therefore, to be useful to God is related to building up His dwelling place and to fighting for His interests on earth—cf. Eph. 4:11-16; 6:10-18.
- D. The life useful to God in these matters is the female life:
 - 1. The underlying theme of Exodus 1—2 is that God needs a certain kind of life both to preserve His people and to prepare a savior to deliver them from bondage.
 - 2. Both the preservation of the people and the preparation of the savior were accomplished only through the female life—1:15-21; 2:1-10.

II. God is the Head of Christ; Christ, under the headship of God, is the Head of every man; and man, under the headship of Christ, is the head of the woman—1 Cor. 11:3.2

III. Man, typifying Christ, signifies the independent life—Rom. 5:14; John 5:26; 8:58.3

IV. Woman, typifying man, signifies the dependent life—1 Cor. 11:7-8; Gen. 2:7-9; Matt. 4:4; John 6:53-54, 57; 14:19b; 15:4-5; 20:22; 1 John 5:12.4

V. Man is to be a real "female" living a life dependent on God—Phil. 1:21a; Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 3:5, 4:7; 12:9-10.5

VI. Man's independence of God is rebellion—Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6; Rom. 5:19a:6

- A. The moment we become independent, we become rebellious against God—1 John 3:4, 6; Col. 2:19.
- B. Because the male life is independent and rebellious, God cannot use it for the accomplishment of His purpose.

VII. If a woman lives an independent life, she becomes a real "male":⁷

- A. Today a great many women have become "males."
- B. This is the main reason for the many separations and divorces.

VIII. Only the real "female" life is useful to God—Exo. 1:15-21; 2:1-10:8

- A. In the Bible God's people are likened to a female:
 - 1. God dealt with Israel as His spouse—Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2; Hosea 2:19.
 - 2. In the New Testament the believers in Christ are considered virgins—Matt. 25:1; 2 Cor. 11:2.
 - 3. In Ephesians 5:25 we see that Christ loves the church as His counterpart, His wife.
 - 4. Christ will marry the New Jerusalem as His bride in the millennium—Rev. 19:7.5. For eternity the New Jerusalem will be the wife of God—21:2-3, 9.

- B. Whether we are sisters or brothers, we all need to be “females” and live by the only life that is useful to God:10
1. In order to be “females” we need to depend on the Lord—cf. S. S. 6:13b; 8:5a:
 - a. The tree of life in Genesis 2 signifies dependence, and the tree of knowledge signifies independence; life always makes us dependent, whereas knowledge always makes us independent—v. 9.
 - b. God desires that we choose life instead of knowledge; this means that He wants us to choose dependence rather than independence—vv. 16-17; cf. Deut. 30:19.
 - c. No matter how long we have been with the Lord, we still must depend upon Him for life today; we cannot graduate from eating, drinking, and breathing; with life, there is no graduation—John 6:57; 7:37; 20:22; Rev. 22:1-2.11
 - d. God’s strategy is to put us in a position where we must depend upon Him; this is the kind of life God can use for the fulfillment of His purpose—2 Cor. 1:8-10; 12:9-10; Gen. 32:1-31; cf. 2 Chron. 20:12-27; S. S. 6:13b; 8:5a.
 2. If we all have a healthy fear of independence, there will be no problems in the church life:12
 - a. All problems in the church life, in married life, and among the saints come from one source, and that source is independence—cf. Rev. 2:4.
 - b. The reason the church throughout the years has been torn down instead of built up is that the so-called builders have been too independent; they have been males instead of females—Gal. 4:29; Phil. 3:2-3; Col. 2:18-19; Jude 8, 19; 2 Pet. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:14-15; Titus 1:10-14; 3 John 9-10; Rev. 2:20.13
 - c. The crucial point is that it is not a matter of how much we can do, but of how much we depend upon the Lord—John 15:5; Phil. 4:13.14
- C. It is crucial that we learn of the Lord that only the “female” life is useful to Him:15
1. Not only do the worldly people live an independent life, but many Christians also live a life that is independent of God; for this reason, the vast majority of Christians have become useless to God.16
 2. Moses was trained to live a female life—Exo. 2:11-22; 3:1-6, 10-12; 4:10-12:17
 - a. Moses honored God as the unique initiator; he was called by God to ascend the mountain where God revealed to him what was on His heart and then charged him to build the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him on the mountain—25:40.18
 - b. If we would perfect others in a proper way and build up the church, we need such a “female” life—1 Cor. 2:1-5; 15:10; 2 Cor. 2:10, 12-14; 4:7; Phil. 3:3; Col. 1:29.19
 3. Moreover, all the warriors were living a female life of dependence on God—Josh. 6; 10:7-14; 11:1-9; cf. Psa. 18:1-3, 28-50:20
 - a. If you have not learned to be a female, you will not be able to fight for the kingdom of God—Eph. 6:10-18; Rev. 19:7-8, 11, 14; Hymns, #887, stanza 1.
 - b. God uses only female warriors; this means that if you are living an independent male life, you are useless as far as spiritual warfare is concerned—S. S. 6:10, 13.
- D. May we all see that God can use us only if we are “females” depending on Him at all times and for all things.21

EXCERPTS FROM THE MINISTRY

THE LIFE USEFUL TO GOD

The book of Exodus reveals the kind of people God can use in His economy for the fulfillment of His purpose. God's intention as seen in this book is to have a people to build Him a dwelling place on earth. Thus, at the end of Exodus the tabernacle is erected to be God's dwelling place. Furthermore, for the fulfillment of God's purpose, there is also the need for an army to fight for God's interests on earth. The children of Israel came out of Egypt as a collective people, and right away they were formed into an army. From the time of their redemption until the conquest of the good land, they had to subdue the enemies, especially the enemies who had occupied and fully possessed the land promised to them. If the children of Israel were to enjoy the good land and to fulfill God's purpose of building a temple as God's testimony on earth, they had to fight to deliver the land from the usurping hand of the enemy. Therefore, to be useful to God is related to building up His dwelling place and to fighting for His interests on earth.

The life useful to God in these matters is the female life. According to the natural concept, however, it should be the male life that is useful to God. This is because the males are good fighters, whereas the females are regarded as weaker ones.

Not many readers of Exodus 1 and 2 have seen the underlying theme that links these chapters. Chapter one shows that the people of God were under slavery, and chapter two reveals how God prepared one to save His people out of bondage. The underlying theme is that God needs a certain kind of life both to preserve His people and to prepare a savior to deliver them from bondage. Both the preservation of the people and the preparation of the savior were accomplished only through the female life.

In the Bible the concept of a "male" is rich in meaning. It refers, of course, to a man, but it also indicates an independent life. Furthermore, it refers to Christ as the unique male in the universe. All married brothers need to realize that they are simply husbands in shadow and that the real husband is Christ. Because God is the unique husband, Isaiah 54:5 says, "Thy Maker is thine husband." In the Old Testament God regarded His people as His spouse (Hosea 2:19). No matter whether an Israelite was a male or a female, he or she was part of God's corporate wife.

In the Bible the term "husband" indicates headship, and it also indicates an independent life. When we speak of a male in the positive sense, we have in mind a husband who is the head and who has an independent life. Because God is the unique husband in the universe, only He is the head and only He has an independent life. It is blasphemous to say that God needs to depend on anyone or anything. It is also blasphemous to claim that we can be independent of Him.

As females, the married sisters should not usurp the headship, nor should they live in an independent way. Rather, they must live a life of dependence upon their husbands, who are but shadows of the Lord as the real husband. Although the married brothers are husbands in shadow with respect to their wives, in actuality they are females with respect to the Lord. Therefore, they should not usurp the headship of the Lord nor have an independent life. They also should be submissive and live a life of dependence.

ONLY THE REAL "FEMALE" LIFE BEING USEFUL TO GOD

Whether we are sisters or brothers, we all need to be "females" and live by the only life that is useful to God. In order to be "females" we need to depend upon the Lord. The tree of life in Genesis 2 signifies dependence, and the tree of knowledge signifies independence. Life always makes us dependent, whereas knowledge always makes us independent. For example, before you teach a child something, he depends on you concerning that matter. But as soon as he learns that particular thing, he becomes proud and independent. Life, on the contrary, makes us

dependent on God. God desires that we choose life instead of knowledge. This means that He wants us to choose dependence rather than independence.

To live an independent life means to live by the tree of knowledge, but to live a dependent life means to live by the tree of life. Living by the tree of life is actually living by the Lord Himself. The vine in John 15 is an excellent illustration of the dependent life. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." All the branches of the vine are dependent upon the vine. To abide in the vine is to be dependent upon the vine. Thus, as far as abiding is concerned, there can be no independence.

Not only do the worldly people live an independent life, but many Christians also live a life that is independent of God. For this reason, the vast majority of Christians have become useless to God. Therefore, we must learn that, whether we are males or females, we must live a life in constant dependence on God. No matter how long we have been with the Lord, we still must depend upon Him for life today. For example, we cannot graduate from eating, drinking, and breathing. How foolish for a person to say that because he has been breathing for seventy years he no longer needs to breathe! With life, there is no graduation. God's strategy is to put us in a position where we must depend upon Him. We need to pray, "Lord, apart from You, I can do nothing. I must abide in You and take You as my life. Daily I need to eat the tree of life. Lord, I want to live a 'female' life, a life that always depends on You." This is the kind of life God can use for the fulfillment of His purpose.

At the age of forty, Moses lived an independent "male" life. Acting independently of God, he exercised his natural strength to smite an Egyptian. Moses was truly an independent "male." However, during the forty years Moses was set aside, God taught him that He would not use his male life. It is not an easy matter to train a male to live a female life. Nevertheless, in the second forty years of his life, Moses learned to be a female. During his third forty years, from the age of eighty to the age of one hundred twenty, Moses lived the life of a female. Only in one instance, when he struck the rock the second time, was he independent of God (Num. 20:7-13). Because Moses acted as a male on that occasion, he offended the Lord and thus was denied the privilege of entering into the good land.

Readers of the Bible usually regard Moses as the leader of the children of Israel. Moses, however, did not have this concept about himself; he never assumed a position as the leader. When the children of Israel rebelled against him, he considered it rebellion against God, not against himself. Moses simply went to the Lord and presented the problems to Him. In doing so, Moses honored the Lord as the head, as the unique male. This indicates that Moses was living a female life, a life of dependence on God.

The female life is seen not only in chapters one and two of Exodus, but also throughout the following chapters. We have pointed out that Moses was trained to live a female life. Moreover, all the warriors were living a female life of dependence on God. If you have not learned to be a female, you will not be able to fight for the kingdom of God. God uses only female warriors. This means that if you are living an independent male life, you are useless as far as spiritual warfare is concerned.

I wish to emphasize the point that to be a male is to be independent of God. For example, a husband may deal with his wife in a way that is independent of God, and a wife may deal with her husband in the same manner. This means that both the husband and wife may be "males" in the negative sense. But we should not be such "males," those who are independent of God. We should be "females," those who depend upon God and do nothing apart from Him. In all that we say or do we should depend on Him. If this is our situation, then we are true "females" living a dependent life.

The history of the church reveals that whenever there is such a “female” life, God is able to do something for His purpose. Take Martin Luther as an example. He was a man who learned to depend on God. No doubt, Luther was born with a strong will. Nevertheless, he learned to depend on the Lord. He did not live and act as a strong “male,” but as a dependent “female.”

The Apostle Paul also was such a “female.” His writings bear witness to this fact. As a “female,” Paul did not do anything in a way that was independent of the Lord. His work, his behavior, and his actions issued from a life of dependence on God.

...

We all need to live such a dependent life in the local churches today. None of us should behave as “males.” The problems among Christians and in the churches are due to brothers or sisters living an independent “male” life. Whenever there are brothers or sisters in a local church living like “males,” there will be trouble. How we must learn not to live independently of God! If we learn this lesson, we shall realize that we must not do certain things; this is not because these things are wrong, but because in doing them we would be independent of God. If we all have a healthy fear of independence, there will be no problems in the church life. Furthermore, there will be no problems among married couples. All problems in the church life, in married life, and among the saints come from one source, and that source is independence. We need to be like the midwives in Exodus; we need to pray, “Lord, I don’t want to be a strong ‘man,’ full of opinions and always insisting on my way. Lord, I want to be like the midwives in Exodus 1 and like the females in Exodus 2.”

As we shall see, when Moses confronted Pharaoh, Moses was not a “male.” In his dealings with Pharaoh, he was a “female” depending on God. Moses made no decisions nor did he make any proposals. Everything he did was initiated by God. Moses honored God as the unique initiator.

God’s initiating work is seen very clearly in the building of the tabernacle. Moses did not wake up one morning with an idea to build a tabernacle for God. On the contrary, he was called by God to ascend the mountain where God revealed to him what was on His heart and then charged him to build the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him on the mountain (25:40). God gave Moses no room to make independent decisions. Moses had to depend on God for every detail. This is the life God can use for His purpose.

In these days we have been speaking much about the perfecting of the saints for the building up of the Body of Christ. If we would be used to perfect others, we ourselves must have a dependent life. The only life the Lord desires to see perfected is the dependent life. If we live and work independently of God, the result of our work will be that other lives will be perfected to be independent. Only a dependent life can produce a dependent life. Only a life that depends on God for all things can perfect others to be “females.” Suppose a certain person is very strong in himself, confident of his abilities, proposals, and decisions. Such a one can produce only independent lives, capable persons who are independent of God. The result of such work will not be the New Jerusalem—it will be Babylon the Great, a city independent of God and rebellious against Him. The church, however, is a female. As a female, she does not have the headship, nor does she have an independent life. Her head is Christ, and her life is a dependent life. This should be the situation in the church today. If we would perfect others in a proper way and build up the church, we need such a “female” life.

The reason the church throughout the years has been torn down instead of built up is that the so-called builders have been too independent. They have been males instead of females. Nevertheless, we thank the Lord that there have been a small number who were willing to live a “female” life in dependence on the Lord.

The crucial point is that it is not a matter of how much we can do, but of how much we depend upon the Lord. We have pointed out that in John 15:5 the Lord Jesus says that apart from Him we can do nothing. Although we are familiar with this word, in our daily living we frequently

forget it or set it aside. The Apostle Paul, however, was one who practiced it. In 1 Corinthians 2:3 he said, "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." Paul was fearful that he might do something in himself independently of the Lord. How we need such a fear today! May the Lord be merciful to us and grant us this proper kind of fear. If we have it, we shall be afraid to say or do anything in ourselves, anything that is independent of God.

Anything we do independently of the Lord is rebellion. Even our preaching of the gospel or our helping of the saints may be a form of rebellion. We may do many things to help the churches; yet all that we do may be rebellion because it is done independently of the Lord.

I am thankful for the light the Lord has shown us concerning the female life in the book of Exodus. The only life useful to Him is the female life. We all must learn that God never uses the male life. The females in chapter one were used to preserve the children of Israel, and the females in chapter two were used to prepare the vessel the Lord had raised up. Eventually, even Moses himself was trained to be a "female"; he became like the midwives in chapter one and like the different females in chapter two. Because he was a "female" for the fulfillment of God's purpose, he could be used by God. But even Moses, when he was provoked by the children of Israel in the wilderness, once acted like a male and in so doing lost God's blessing. In the Lord's economy and in His move today in His recovery, we all must be watchful with fear and trembling not to act independently of God. May we all see that God can use us only if we are "females" depending on Him at all times and for all things. It is crucial that we learn of the Lord that only the "female" life is useful to Him. (*Life-study of Exodus*, msg. 4, pp. 37-38, 41-44, 45-48)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be useful to God for His purpose according to the book of Exodus?
2. What does it mean to be a "female" spiritually?
3. What is the one source of all the problems in married life, the church life, and among the saints, and what is the solution to this problem?

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

1. *Life-study of Exodus*, message 4.
-

