

“And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”; “He who created them from the beginning made them male and female”
— Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4b.



“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)

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

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LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 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 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:

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."*

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 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 out (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—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 - Luke 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—12:12.
 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 labouring 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—Rom. 16:1, 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 labour.

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 rumours—pray. Stop the rumours by praying; even kill the rumours 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 labouring 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 labour. (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:

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

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 3

The revelation of the bible concerning male and female in God's economy

*Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4b;
1 Cor. 11:3-15; Gal. 3:26-28; 4:6; 2 Cor. 11:2*

- I. **“And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”; “He who created them from the beginning made them male and female” - Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4b.**
 - A. In God's creation there is a distinction between male and female:¹
 1. God's creation of men and women is different, and God's purpose for men and women is also different—Gen. 2:7, 21-22:²
 - a. The man was created by God, and the woman was built by God; God's building work is finer than His creating work—vv. 21-22.³
 - b. Man, as the one created by God, is rougher than the female, who was built by God; the female is much finer, because she was built by God.
 - c. Man is man and woman is woman; no matter how much people argue, they cannot make women into men, and no matter how the fashion changes, they cannot make men into women—cf. Deut. 22:5.⁴
 2. Since God's creation and purpose for men and women are different, the nature and function of men and women are different; no one can deny this or overthrow this fact: ⁵

- a. In the Bible the romance between male and female is used to illustrate God's divine romance—Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16:8; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2:⁶
 - 1) The wife is the object of the husband's love—Eph. 5:25; cf. Deut. 24:5.
 - 2) God's love needs an object; the church became and still is the object of God's love—vv. 2, 25.
- b. God has an arrangement in which He wants two groups, men and women, to portray how He and Christ are the head and how humans should obey—vv. 22-24:⁷
 - 1) God wants men to take the role of Himself and Christ, and He wants women to take the role of the submitting humans—1 Cor. 4:9; 11:10.
 - 2) We should not bring the thought of the equality of men and women into this matter; this is not a question of whether men and women are equal; rather, it is a question of the function of men and women before God.
 - 3) Before the Lord men and women are both redeemed creatures without the slightest difference, but when we come before people, we must differentiate between men and women to portray the role of the head and the role of those who submit - Rom. 3:21-24; 1 Cor. 11:3-15; 1 Tim. 2:11-14.
 - 4) This is similar to actors who are ordinary people off the stage but who play very particular characters in different roles on stage; when they are on stage, there is a sense that they are different in function, but there is no thought of inequality.
 - 5) May God show the sisters that their submission can cause people to sense the authority and glory of God and Christ!

- B. Today, we are still in the old creation;⁸ there is still the distinction between males and females in the church - 1 Cor. 11:3-15, 14:33b-38; 1 Tim. 2:11-14.⁹
1. On the one hand, in Christ there are no differences between males and females (Gal. 3:28); on the other hand, although we are the new man, in the church life the differences between males and females are still present (1 Tim. 2:11-14).¹⁰
 2. We have a spirit, but we also have the flesh; hence, we must keep the dividing line between males and females in our community and in our church life—Rom. 13:14.¹¹
 - a. The sisters should not forget that they are females when they contact people; they are not free to speak carelessly; otherwise, their contacting people will bring them many problems.
 - b. It is wrong to speak with a person of the opposite sex when we are alone in a room; we must have a third person present there; this is not only a virtue but also a great protection.
 3. While we live on this earth and in our flesh, in no way can you believe that the boundary between men and women can be abolished; there is no such thing.¹²

II. **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...There cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ”—Gal. 3:26-28:**

- A. Before the Lord and in Christ there is no distinction between male and female—v. 28:¹³
1. In the world the male occupies one role and the female occupies another role; in church administration the male also has his place and the female her place; within the family the husband has his place and the wife has her place—1 Tim. 2:12; Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 3:18-19.

2. However, in Christ and in the new man, both the man and the woman have the same stand; there is no distinction between them—Gal. 3:28.
 3. In Christ, the man does not occupy a special place, nor does woman, because Christ is all and in all; in this respect a man is no different from a woman:
 - a. The sisters' place in some areas of service is different from that of the brothers; but this pertains only to the matter of authority - 1 Tim. 2:12.
 - b. Today, in Christ, there is no difference between the two.
- B. According to life, all the believers are males; however, according to love, we all are females: ¹⁴
1. According to life, all the believers, including the sisters, are sons of God and brothers of Christ—Gal. 3:26, 4:6-7; John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11-12; Rev. 21:7.
 - a. As a help to the sisters, we need to point out that in God's household there are no daughters; God has only sons, not daughters—Gal. 3:26.¹⁵
 - b. In the flesh you are a female, but you have received the life of God's Son; therefore, even the sisters are sons—1 John 5:12.¹⁶
 2. On the other hand, as to the relationship between us and Christ, we all are females; even the brothers are females:¹⁷
 - a. We all are virgins betrothed to Christ; we are the bride of Christ and the wife of the Lamb—2 Cor. 11:2; John 3:29a; Rev. 21:2, 9; cf. S. S. 1:3b; 4:8-9.
 - b. The relationship between the Bride and the Bridegroom is a matter of love, not a matter of life; according to love, we all are females. ¹⁸
 - c. We are living sons of the living God, whereas we are the loving Bride of our dear Bridegroom.

- C. How wonderful that the church is both a man (Eph. 2:15, 4:24; Col. 3:10) and, at the same time, a bride (Eph. 5:23-27)!¹⁹

Excerpts from the Ministry:

GOD'S ORDER IN CREATION

The arrangement of God's will for men and women is different. In the order of God's creation, there is a difference between men and women. First, He created the man, and then He created the woman. Furthermore, the woman is out of the man and for the man; the man is not out of the woman or for the woman. Although men are born through women, they are only "through" the woman, not "out from" the woman as the woman is "out from" the man. God's creation of men and women is different, and God's purpose for men and women is also different. According to His creation, the woman is out from the man, but the man is not out from the woman; according to His purpose, the woman is for the man, but the man is not for the woman. "Therefore the woman ought to have a sign of submission to authority on her head" (v. 10). She should have something covering her head.

God's creation and purpose for men and women are completely different. Man is man and woman is woman, just as bronze is bronze and iron is iron. No matter how much people argue, they cannot make women into men, and no matter how the fashion changes, they cannot make men into women. Since God's creation and purpose for men and women are different, the nature and function of men and women are also different. No one can deny this or overthrow this fact. (Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, vol. 2, msg. 19, p. 254)

THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE BROTHERS AND THE SISTERS

There is [a] boundary that needs to be strictly kept. That is the boundary between the brothers and the sisters. This is also a great boundary. There is one thing we must admit: while Christians live on earth today, the place where they have the most opportunity to contact the opposite sex is the church. Between the brothers and sisters, they meet in the meetings, in the service, in the gospel preaching, and in their witnessing work. For this reason, in their administration of the church, the elders must draw a boundary between the brothers and the sisters. This is not a boundary of separation, but a boundary of distinction. This boundary must never be removed or annulled. Whenever you annul this boundary, you will involve yourselves in immense trouble.

In Christianity there are some zealous ones with little spiritual experience who suggest: "We are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. Since we are all spiritual, we do not need to distinguish the brothers from the sisters." I want to tell the brothers and sisters that I have seen the fruit from such a concept. I have heard even more about such things. They bring untold problems to the church. In some places, it is the elders who are reaping and eating their own fruit because the elders themselves have led the church this way. Their way of administration is to cause the brothers and sisters not to have any boundary. This is altogether wrong.

While we live on this earth and in our flesh, in no way can you believe that the boundary between men and women can be abolished; there is no such thing. This is the devil's teaching. In some places, some teach that we are all spiritual, and that to talk about the boundary between male and female is to have defiled thoughts. Some almost condemn me by saying that it is

because my thoughts are filthy and unclean that I am talking about the boundary between the brothers and the sisters. No. Even if thousands of people would rise up to say that my thoughts are unclean, I will still stand up to tell you that you need a boundary between the brothers and the sisters. The elders in every locality must set up a firm boundary between the brothers and the sisters; they should never remove it.

Galatians 3 says that in Christ there is no more distinction between male and female. But in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, it says that in the church we must still distinguish the boundary between male and female. There is no distinction between male and female in Christ, but there is still the distinction between male and female in the church. If in the church we make no distinction between male and female, then Paul is actually contradicting himself in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, because there he clearly says that brothers do not have to cover their heads when they pray, but that the sisters do. In addition, the sisters should not speak in the meeting. You can see that there is still a distinction between male and female in the church.

Some have checked with me in a serious way: “Brother Lee, why does the church not come up to the standard of the age? In most social gatherings today, men and women sit together. Why do the men and women sit separately in the church meetings?” Dear brothers and sisters, you cannot deny that David loved the Lord more than you do and was more spiritual than you are. But even David could fall. How much more can we fall also? Today, we are still in the old creation, and it is still possible for us to fall. God has not removed the boundary between male and female in the church. When you and I administrate the church, we must not give the impression that we are all in the Lord and that it makes no difference whether we are brothers or sisters. This indifference is detrimental and must never be permitted. We must learn to draw a boundary here. (The Elders’ Management of the Church, msg. 9, pp. 149-151)

PAYING ATTENTION TO THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN MALES AND FEMALES

The first relationship in a community is the relationship between males and females. This relationship exceeds that of a parent and child. God did not first create a parent and then a child. He first created a male and then a female and only through them were descendants brought forth. The relationships within a community began with the descendants of Adam and Eve, but the first relationship was that of a male and a female. This is also a very personal relationship. a parent-child relationship is not a matter of our own choice, but the male-female relationship involves a choice. We must be clear concerning this and keep a dividing line between male and female. We should not think that we cannot be influenced to make a wrong choice because we have a regenerated spirit. Our body is fallen and is still the flesh. Romans 7 says that nothing good dwells in our flesh and that sin dwells in our flesh (vv. 17-18).

John 1:14 says that the Lord Jesus as the Word became flesh. The flesh belongs to sin, yet the Son of God became flesh. How can this be? The proper answer is in Romans 8:3, which says, "God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh." This verse says that although the Lord Jesus became flesh, He was only in the likeness of the flesh of sin and did not have the sin of the flesh. This was typified by the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses for the sinful Israelites (Num. 21:9; John 3:14). The bronze serpent was in the form, the likeness, of a serpent, but it did not have the poison of the serpent. This bronze serpent bore God's judgment for the poisoned Israelites and dealt with the serpents that poisoned them. Although Christ did not have the flesh of sin, He was crucified in the flesh. Thus, through His death on the cross God condemned sin, which was brought by Satan into man's flesh. Only the Lord Jesus was without the flesh of sin. The Bible does not say that man is spirit. It says that man has

a spirit (Job 32:8) and that man is flesh (Gen. 6:3). Since man is flesh, it is necessary to keep the differences between males and females. We should never abolish such differences.

Colossians 3:11 says, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all." First Corinthians 12:13 says, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." If we read these two verses carefully, we will discover that they do not mention males or females. However, 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." On the one hand, in Christ there are no differences between males and females. On the other hand, although we are the new man, in the church life the differences between males and females are still present. We have a spirit, but we also have the flesh. Hence, we must keep the dividing line between males and females in our community and also in the church life.

SHAMEFASTNESS BEING GREATER PROTECTION

When we share and testify in the meetings, the sisters should always remember that they are females and that whatever they do should be done with modesty, that is, shamefastness. Modesty, or shamefastness, is a female virtue (1 Tim. 2:9). The Bible says that if a woman prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, she disgraces her head (1 Cor. 11:5). This does not mean that the brothers can act immodestly. Both males and females should have a proper shamefastness. The more modest we are, the higher the standard of morality we will have and the greater will be our protection. a proper person should be very modest and be limited in the places he goes, the people he knows, and the things that he says. The basic principle of the

Christian life is to walk according to the Spirit. When we walk according to the Spirit, we will have no need for anyone to teach us, but His anointing will teach us concerning all things (1 John 2:27).

The saints who have a heart to serve full time should learn the lesson of not being careless when contacting people and being careful concerning the setting in which they contact people. In particular, the sisters should not forget that they are females when they contact people; they are not free to speak carelessly. Otherwise, their contacting people will bring them many problems. Not only will they suffer loss but they will also cause the Lord's name to suffer shame. in human communities as well as in the church, we must remember that there is a difference between males and females. It is wrong to speak with a person of the opposite sex when we are alone in a room. We must have a third person present there. This is not only a virtue but also a great protection. (The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones, msg. 16, pp. 138-140)

THE ANNULING OF DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE

The fourth distinction that has been abolished in Christ is that of gender, that is, the distinction between male and female. In this world the male occupies one role and the female occupies another role. in church administration the male also has his place and the female her place. Within the family the husband has his place and the wife has her place. However, in Christ and in the new man, both the man and the woman have the same stand; there is no distinction between them.

In Christ, the man does not occupy a special place, nor does the woman, because Christ is all and in all. in this respect a man is no different from a woman. Please remember that in spiritual matters there is no distinction between male and female.

We have mentioned that the sisters' place in some areas of service is different from that of the brothers. But this pertains only to the matter of authority. Today, in Christ, there is no difference between the two. a brother is saved through the life of Christ, the life of God's Son. in the same way, a sister is saved through the life of Christ, the life of God's Son. Every case in the Bible where the Chinese version translates "sons and daughters," the original word is children. This word does not differentiate between male or female (even though its usage is masculine). I am born a child of God and grow up to be a son of God. a son is male. Yet this description fits both the brothers as well as the sisters.

In the whole New Testament, only 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 speaks of sons and daughters. "Therefore 'come out from their midst...and I will welcome you'; 'and I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me.'" After we have believed in God and are delivered and separated from the world and its polluted and unclean influence, God will receive us like a Father, and we will be His sons and His daughters. This is a matter between God and an individual; it is not a matter of what a person is in Christ. This is why it says sons and daughters. When a person suffers for God, incurs loss for His sake, and experiences hardship because of Him, God will become a Father to such a one as an individual. If you are male, God will receive you as a son. If you are female, God will receive you as a daughter. God will receive you as His sons and daughters. He is the all-sufficient Lord. He has everything. This is a matter of what a person is before God. It has nothing to do with what he or she is in Christ. in Christ, we are all God's children, and there is no distinction between male and female. This distinction does not exist at all.

Once I asked a certain craftsman in Shanghai, who was a brother in the Lord, "Brother, how are the brothers in your place doing?" He replied, "Are you asking about the male brothers or the female brothers?" This answer could not have

been put better. It is one of the truest words ever spoken. Male brothers are brothers and female brothers are also brothers; there is no distinction in Christ. What this brother said was absolutely correct; he was simply stating the biblical truth. When we come to the Lord and touch Him, we transcend all male and female distinctions. We are beyond gender. Before the Lord and in Christ, there is no distinction between male and female. (CWWN, vol. 48, "Messages for Building Up New Believers (1)," msg. 8, pp. 121-122)

We should not hold the concept that we cannot be an apostle like Paul. The apostles are examples of what all believers should be. Paul was not an extraordinary person, and he did not reach a state that no one else can attain. The concept that the apostles are unique is a Roman Catholic tradition. This tradition is related to the concept that Peter was the unique successor of Christ and therefore the first pope. What a devilish concept! Far from being unique, Peter is an example of one who followed the Lord. In particular, he is an example to Jewish believers in Christ. Paul is a pattern especially for Gentile believers. In 1 Timothy 1:16 he says, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Since Paul is our pattern, none of us should say that we cannot be like him.

Although the brothers may believe that they can be today's apostles, the sisters may find it very difficult to believe that this also applies to them. As a help to the sisters, we need to point out that in God's household there are no daughters. God has only sons, not daughters. Christ, the firstborn Son of God, has brothers, but He does not have sisters. This indicates that, according to life, all the believers, including the sisters, are sons of God and brothers of Christ. For this reason, in his Epistles Paul addresses the brothers, but not the brothers and sisters. The sisters, of course, are included in the term brothers.

According to life, all the believers are males. However, according to love, we all are females. Christ is our Bridegroom, and we are His Bride. The relationship between the Bride and the Bridegroom is a matter of love, not a matter of life. Love is the unique requirement of married life. Therefore, we are living sons of the living God, whereas we are the loving Bride of our dear Bridegroom. How, then, would you answer this question: Are we, the believers in Christ, males or females? The proper way to answer is to reply that according to life we are males, but according to love we are females.

Paul was made an apostle not according to love, but according to life. It was as a matter of life that he was made a pattern for all the believers, the brothers and the sisters as well. This indicates that by taking Paul as our pattern, we all, brothers and sisters, can be God's sent ones today. Paul's status was that of an apostle, and ours should be the same. Hence, as we study the formation of Paul's apostleship, we are also studying the formation of our own apostleship.

All of us in the Lord's recovery need to be sent ones. At the least, a young sister can be sent by the Lord to her parents to testify to them about the Lord Jesus. Are you ready to be sent by the Lord? We all should be prepared to be sent forth by Him. Concerning this matter of apostleship, our minds need to be renewed. (Life-study of Galatians, msg. 5, pp. 41-42)

Study Questions:

1. What are two specific ways we can see that the nature and function of men and women are different based upon God's creation and purpose for male and female?
2. Why is it important to understand that even in the church the distinction between male and female is not nullified?

3. What is the significance of the fact that in Christ the distinction between male and female has been abolished?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Words of Training for the New Way*, vol. 2, msg. 7
2. *The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ to Be the Organism of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God*, msg. 3
3. *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, msg. 19
4. *The Elders' Management of the Church*, msg. 9
5. *The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones*, msg. 16
6. *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 1, msg. 8
7. *Life-Study of Galatians*, msgs. 5 and 21
8. *The Central Thought of God*, msg. 13
9. *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 42, "Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (2)," msg. 46

1 Words of Training for the New Way, Vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 69.

2 Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 254.

3 The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ to be the Organism of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God, ch. 3, p. 39.

4 Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 254.

5 Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, vol. 2, ch. 19, p. 254.

6 Elders' Training, Book 11: The Eldership and the God-Ordained Way (3), ch. 1, p. 9.

7 Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, vol. 2, ch. 19, pp. 251-252.

8 The Elders' Management of the Church, ch. 9, p. 151.

- 9 The Elders' Management of the Church, ch. 9, p. 150.
- 10 The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones, ch. 16, p. 139.
- 11 The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones, ch. 16, pp. 139-140. 12 The Elders' Management of the Church, ch. 9, p. 150.
- 13 Messages for Building Up New Believers, vol. 1, ch. 8, pp. 121-122. 14 Life-study of Galatians, ch. 5, p. 42.
- 15 Life-study of Galatians, ch. 5, p. 41.
- 16 CWWN, vol. 42, "Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship," ch. 46, p. 374.
- 17 The Central Thought of God, ch. 13, p. 120.
- 18 Life-study of Galatians, ch. 5, p. 42.
- 19 The Completing Ministry of Paul, ch. 5, p. 38.