

**RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION
FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

Message 4

**Parents as Proper Persons with a Proper Living
as Patterns for the Children**

Scripture Reading: Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:7-9; Prov. 22:6; 2 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 9:11, 15-16

I. To be a parent is very difficult; no amount of teaching concerning parenting is adequate; although there is no unique, fail-safe method for parenting, there are a few lessons we can learn:

- A. First, in order to raise our children to love the Lord and to come to the church meetings regularly, we must be a proper person; we must have a proper living before the Lord:
 - 1. Besides the Lord, the persons who know best about the kind of life we live are our children; we may be able to fool others about the kind of person we are, but we can never fool our children; therefore, we need to be genuine.
 - 2. Our behavior and our way of living does not affect anyone as much as it affects our children; this is a universal spiritual principle.
 - 3. Our children will be negatively affected if we are not upright persons, but this does not mean that our children will be good if we are upright persons; it is difficult to predict how a child will turn out; this depends on many factors.
- B. Besides being proper persons, parents need to exercise their wisdom; it is easy for a parent to have love, but it is not as easy to have wisdom:
 - 1. Parents must exercise their wisdom to discern whether or not to charge their children to come to the church meetings; for such situations, we need to exercise our wisdom to discern the situation; according to our discernment, we may exhort our children.
 - 2. However, some parents are zealous without wisdom, and their zealousness offends their children; the more they charge their children to come to the meetings, the more they offend their children, causing a strong reaction.
 - 3. It is right to charge our children to come to the meetings, but we need to discern, based on our children's condition, the proper time and the proper way to charge them; if our children are in a certain condition, it may be better not to charge them to come the meetings until their condition improves.
- C. Finally, parents need to trust in the Lord's mercy—Rom. 9:11, 15-16:
 - 1. There are many spiritual parents whose children have not been good; there are also worldly, backslidden, careless parents who are absolutely indifferent about their children's spirituality, yet their children are good and spiritual.
 - 2. Therefore, we must conclude that the way our children turn out depends on the Lord's mercy; the first part of Romans 9:18 says, "He has mercy on whom He wills"; as parents, our duty is to be proper persons and to exercise wisdom to discern when and how to speak to our children—cf. Isa. 50:4.
 - 3. We need to do our duty, but we should not trust in anything we do; without the Lord's mercy, everything we do means nothing; we must trust in the Lord's mercy—Rom. 9:15-16.
 - 4. Parents should never be proud, thinking that their ability can produce the best children; there are many different factors in producing a good child, but in the end it depends on the Lord's mercy—v. 16.
- D. To raise children is not easy or simple; it requires that we spend much time with our children; the more time we spend with our children, the better:
 - 1. We should spend at least two hours every evening doing nothing but being with our

children, talking to them, or teaching them something; this will make them happy and give them some training.

2. If we do not spend time with our children, we should expect that they will have problems.
 3. Although we cannot always afford to spend that much time with our children, the principle is that we need to spend as much time as possible with our children and give them the proper education according to their age.
- E. We must not neglect the raising of our children; if God has given us children, we must spend adequate time to raise them properly:
1. In order to take care of our children, we always need to prepare them ahead of time; in order to properly care for a fifteen-year-old, we need to spend fourteen years to educate the child.
 - a. Every bit of proper education at the proper age is an inoculation; if we adequately educate and inoculate our children, they can leave home to study without any problem.
 - b. If we do not adequately educate and inoculate our children, it will not matter much if they stay at home while studying.
 - c. A fifteen-year-old's spiritual health depends on how much education and inoculation he received in his first fourteen years.

II. God's ordained principle is that a father must live a life that is a pattern, an example to his children; nevertheless, we must realize that the way our children turn out ultimately depends on the Lord's mercy—Rom. 9:10-13; Eph. 6:4:

- A. Therefore, we must do our duty to live a proper life as an example to our children, but we should not be discouraged or proud because of how our children turn out; Jacob and Esau were twins, but Romans 9:10-13 shows that their destiny depended on God's selection.
- B. The best and most proper way to be parents is to live as an example to our children and pray for the Lord's mercy.
- C. If our living establishes a proper standard, we are not liable if our children behave badly; however, if we do not live as a pattern, our children's bad behavior is our responsibility.
- D. In order to be a good example, we must love the Lord and His Word, deal with sins, hate the self, and learn the lessons of the cross; this will be an example not only to our children but also to all the saints.

III. "I cannot tell you how many strong believers would be raised up in our second generation if all the parents of this generation would be good parents. I have always wanted to say this: The future of the church depends on the parents. When God bestows grace on the church, He needs vessels. There is the need for more Timothys to be raised up. It is true that we can save men from the world, but there is a greater need for raising up people from among Christian families." (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 48, p. 549)

Excerpts from the Ministry:

Question: My children are saved, but I cannot always convince them to come to the meetings. What is the best way to care for them?

Answer: To be a parent is very difficult. No amount of teaching concerning parenting is adequate. When couples do not have children, they pray as Hannah, the mother of Samuel, prayed for a son (1 Sam. 1:10-11). The Lord may hear their prayer and give them a child, but this child may become a great troublemaker. Although there is no unique, fail-safe method for parenting, there are a few lessons we can learn.

First, in order to raise our children to love the Lord and to come to the church meetings regularly, we must be a proper person. We must have a proper living before the Lord. Besides the Lord, the persons who know best about the kind of life we live are our children. We may be able to fool others about the kind of person we are, but we can never fool our children. Therefore, we need to be genuine. If we tell our children not to tell lies, yet we lie to our spouse, the children will see it. This is very serious, for if we lie to our spouse only one time, our children may remember it for their whole life. Our behavior and our way of living does not affect anyone as much as it affects our children. This is a universal spiritual principle. Therefore, being a parent is not easy. Our children will be negatively affected if we are not upright persons, but this does not mean that our children will be good if we are upright persons. If an upright mother has four children, two may be good, and the other two may be bad. However, if she is not upright, all her children may be worse. It is difficult to predict how a child will turn out; this depends on many factors.

Besides being proper persons, parents need to exercise their wisdom. This is the area in which most parents are lacking. It is easy for a parent to have love, but it is not as easy to have wisdom. Parents must exercise their wisdom to discern whether or not to charge their children to come to the church meetings. Asking whether or not parents should charge their children to come to the meetings may be likened to asking whether or not we should take an umbrella when we go out. For such situations, we need to exercise our wisdom to discern the situation. According to our discernment, we may exhort our children. However, some parents are zealous without wisdom, and their zealousness offends their children. The more they charge their children to come to the meetings, the more they offend their children, causing a strong reaction. This matter is not easy. Parents need to be proper persons and exercise their wisdom. It is right to charge our children to come to the meetings, but we need to discern, based on our children's condition, the proper time and the proper way to charge them. If our children are in a certain condition, it may be better not to charge them to come the meetings until their condition improves.

Finally, parents need to trust in the Lord's mercy. Romans 9:16 says, "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." I have seen many spiritual parents whose children have not been good. I have also seen worldly, backslidden, careless parents who are absolutely indifferent about their children's spirituality, yet their children are good and spiritual. Therefore, we must conclude that the way our children turn out depends on the Lord's mercy. The first part of verse 18 says, "He has mercy on whom He wills." As parents, our duty is to be proper persons and to exercise wisdom to discern when and how to speak to our children. We need to do our duty, but we should not trust in anything we do. Without the Lord's mercy, everything we do means nothing. We must trust in the Lord's mercy, praying, "Lord, it all depends on Your mercy. I do my duty as a parent by being a proper person to be a good example and to not stumble my children and by exercising my wisdom to know when and how to speak to my children. However, my trust is in You, Lord." We all need to learn this lesson. Parents should never be proud, thinking that their ability can produce the best children. There are many different factors in producing a good child, but in the end it depends on the Lord's mercy.

Question: How should I regulate my children concerning watching television and movies?

Answer: Because of the current of the age, it is very difficult for parents to forbid their children to watch television and movies. Therefore, parents need to exercise their wisdom to restrict which television shows or movies to allow their children to see. We also need to teach our children the reasons for these restrictions so that they will understand our decisions as they grow older. We need to give them a proper explanation according to their age, not prematurely. We should not tell them something that they cannot understand at their age. Our training must be according to their age.

To raise children is not easy or simple. It requires that we spend much time with our children. The more time we spend with our children, the better. We should spend at least two hours every evening doing nothing but being with our children, talking to them, or teaching them something. This will make them happy and give them some training. If we do not spend time with our children, we should expect that they will have problems. Although we cannot always afford to spend that much time with

our children, the principle is that we need to spend as much time as possible with our children and give them the proper education according to their age.

Question: Some young brothers and sisters who leave home to study end up staying in dormitories with unbelievers. What is the best way to care for these young ones?

Answer: It is difficult to know whether it is better to keep our children at home or send them to school in another city. This is a very complicated matter with many factors involved. However, one thing I know is that in order to take care of our children, we always need to prepare them ahead of time. In order to properly care for a fifteen year old, we need to spend fourteen years to educate the child. Every bit of proper education at the proper age is an inoculation. If we adequately educate and inoculate our children, they can leave home to study without any problem. If we do not adequately educate and inoculate our children, it will not matter much if they stay at home while studying. A fifteen year old's spiritual health depends on how much education and inoculation he received in his first fourteen years. If parents do not properly prepare their children, it will not help much to suddenly consider where they should go to school. This is a warning to all parents. We must not neglect the raising of our children. If God has given us children, we must spend adequate time to raise them properly. Everyone likes to have choices, but we lose all our choices when we have children. Besides the time we spend in the meetings, we need to spend every minute for our children. Otherwise, we should not expect that we would have good children. The only way to have good children is to spend all our time with them and exercise our wisdom to give them a proper education and adequate inoculation beforehand. However, after all this, we still must place our trust in God's mercy. (*Crucial Elements of God's Economy*, chap. 6)

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The first kind of relationships in human life is family relationships. Verse 4 says, "One who manages well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." Managing one's house is a matter of taking the lead, but Paul's concept here is not mainly related to authority. As a husband and father, an overseer should take the lead in his family not merely by ruling but by establishing a good example and pattern. A family is not like a government or an organization, which are led by authority. A father's leadership in his family should not mainly be based on his ruling with authority but should instead be based on the pattern of his daily living. Similarly, to be an elder does not mean to rule the church with authority. This concept is absolutely wrong. A father's management of his family is very different from a supervisor's management of a business. A supervisor may hire and fire employees, but a father cannot hire or fire his children. The basic need in a family is the father's example. As a father, an elder must live properly before his family. This is the proper way to manage one's house. In our home we should not try to exercise our authority as a king, law officer, administrator, or school principal. Paul's concept in this section concerns the overseers' daily living. It does not work to merely discipline our children. God's ordained principle is that a father must live a life that is a pattern, an example, to his children.

As overseers, we must take the lead in our family by presenting a pattern in our living. This is our duty. However, if our children are in subjection with all gravity, we should not think that it is because of our doing; instead, we have to worship the Lord for His mercy. Although the disposition of our children is not under our control, this does not mean we can neglect our duties to live as an example and to spend as much time and energy as we can on our children. Nevertheless, we must realize that the way our children turn out ultimately depends on the Lord's mercy. We know that this is true, because if two children are siblings and are raised by the same parents with the same care, they may still turn out very different. One may have a good character and become a seeking believer, while the other may have a poor character and not even be saved. Therefore, we must do our duty to live a proper life as an example to our children, but we should not be discouraged or proud because of how our children turn out.

Paul's word concerning an overseer's children in verse 4 does not involve salvation or spirituality. We should be a good example to our children, but whether or not they will eventually be saved

depends on God's predestination. Jacob and Esau were twins, but Romans 9:10-13 shows that their destiny depended on God's selection. We cannot cause our children or anyone else to be spiritual, but we can establish an example by living a sober, temperate, and orderly life and by seeking the Lord. If two flesh brothers listen to the same gospel message, one may be saved, but the other may not. We have seen cases like this. Therefore, we must be zealous in preaching the gospel and convincing people to receive the Lord, but we must also realize that a person's salvation ultimately depends not on our effort but on God's predestination. We should not think that because it depends on God's predestination, we do not need to preach the gospel. We must do our duty. Similarly, we should not assume that our children will behave well if we are a good example, nor should we neglect our duty. The best and most proper way to be a parent is to live as an example to our children and pray for the Lord's mercy.

If our living establishes a proper standard, we are not liable if our children behave badly. However, if we do not live as a pattern, our children's bad behavior is our responsibility. If they are good, the credit does not go to us, but if they are bad, we receive the "debit." This is the divine accounting. We should not say that God is not fair. Romans 9:20 says, "O man, who are you who answer back to God? Shall the thing molded say to him who molded it, Why did you make me thus?" We cannot argue with God. If our children behave well and are eventually saved and live before the Lord, we must worship the Lord, saying, "Lord, I am nothing. Even my best behavior is like dust; it means nothing. I can only thank You for Your mercy." We should not ascribe anything to our goodness. We have to acknowledge God's predestination, His mercy, and His grace. If our children begin to live sinfully, we must humble ourselves, praying, "Lord, forgive me. I accept the blame because I may have neglected to adequately care for them in some aspect." This must be our attitude.

Paul's concept in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 concerns the overseers' living. Whether our children behave well is secondary; the primary matter is whether we have a proper living. We must take the lead and manage our family well by having a living that presents a positive pattern to them. This depends on what we are; it is a matter of life. (*Basic Principles concerning the Eldership*, pp. 49-51)

GREAT CHILDREN COMING OUT OF GREAT PARENTS

Finally, I would say that many men whom God used in this world came from great parents. Beginning with Timothy, we find numerous men used by God who came from great parents. John Wesley was one of them. Another one was John Newton. There are many hymns in our hymnal written by Newton. John G. Paton was another one. He was one of the most famous missionaries in the modern world. I can think of no other father like his father. In his old age Paton still remembered, "Every time I wanted to sin, I remembered my father, who was always praying for me." His family was very poor. There was only one bedroom, one kitchen, and another small room. He said, "I trembled every time my father prayed and sighed in the small room. He was making petition for our souls. Even though I am so old now, I can still remember his sighing. I thank God for giving me such a father. I cannot sin, because when I sin, I transgress against my heavenly Father as well as my earthly father." It is difficult to find a father like Paton's father, and it is difficult to find a son as great as Paton.

I cannot tell you how many strong believers would be raised up in our second generation if all the parents of this generation would be good parents. I have always wanted to say this: The future of the church depends on the parents. When God bestows grace on the church, He needs vessels. There is the need for more Timothys to be raised up. It is true that we can save men from the world, but there is a greater need for raising up people from among Christian families. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 49, p. 549)