

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

Message 5

**Cooperating with God for His Move as Parents Entrusted
With Their Children to Cultivate and Nurture Them in the Lord**

Scripture Reading: Matt. 6:33; Eph. 6:4

- I. The fulfillment of God's economy requires our cooperation, and to cooperate with God means to be bound together with Christ and to have one living with Him by one life—John 14:19b; 6:57; Gal. 2:20:**
- A. God's heart is to carry out His economy; God's economy is not merely that we should be good, spiritual, holy, or victorious; He desires neither a good man nor a bad man but a God-man—Eph. 1:9-11; 1 John 3:2.
 - B. Instead of usurping God by praying for our prosperity, health, or family without any consideration of God's economy, we should pray, live, and be persons according to God's heart and for His economy—1 Sam. 4:3; Hag. 1:2-5; Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:9-11.
 - C. All things necessary for our human existence need to be under a divine limitation; anything that exceeds our need becomes worldly, and it frustrates us from the economy of God's purpose; in everything God's economy must be the deciding factor—cf. Matt. 24:38.
 - D. When God's economy is carried out among His people, they are blessed—1 Sam. 7:1-5:
 - 1. Our welfare, our well-being, is linked to the carrying out of God's economy, and we should not seek our well-being apart from God's economy—Matt. 6:33.
 - 2. We should not expect prosperity for ourselves; rather, we should expect that through us the Lord will do as much as possible to accomplish His economy.
- II. The church cannot go on if parents do not have a sense of being entrusted; God has committed a human body, along with his soul, into our hands; we do not want to see our children needing to be rescued back from the world—Gen. 48:9; Psa. 127:3; Isa. 8:18:**
- A. We are wrong if we do not take care of our children; please remember that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children turn out the right way—Psa. 127:3.
 - B. When the children are young they are in your hands and can do nothing much themselves; if you are loose with yourself, you will also be loose with them; we must realize that parents must exercise self-control, sacrificing their own freedom—cf. John 17:19.
 - C. After the church preaches the gospel and saves men, it has to deal with all kinds of family problems associated with these men; but if parents are responsible for the proper nurturing of their children, and if the children are brought up in the church, the church will be relieved of half of its burdens—2 Tim. 3:15; 1:5.
- III. We should nurture the children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord; we should tell them what a proper Christian is by teaching them the discipline of the Lord—Eph. 6:4:**
- A. Parents must help their children to have proper aspirations; how we live affects the aspirations of our child; parents must learn to channel the ambitions of their children in the proper direction—2 Cor. 5:9.
 - B. Many parents cultivate their children's pride and encourage them to go after vainglory by heaping praises upon them in front of other people; we do not need to hurt their self-esteem, but we must point out their pride to them—Prov. 16:18; Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:5.
 - C. A Christian needs to know how to appreciate others; it is easy to be victorious, but it is hard to accept defeat; when our children are defeated, we need to teach them to accept their defeat with grace—Phil. 2:3-4.

- D. From their youth, we should give our children a chance to make their own choices; we should not make every choice for them until they reach the age of eighteen or twenty or else it will be impossible for them to make any decisions when they grow up—cf. Deut. 30:19; Jer. 21:8.
- E. As Christians, we have to train our children to manage their things properly; we must give them the opportunity to take care of their personal belongings, to manage their own shoes, socks, and other affairs; let them know how things should be handled from their youth—Prov. 22:6.

IV. The way a child grows up depends on the atmosphere in the family; they must receive nurturing love as they grow up and must experience love in the family—cf. 1 Thes. 2:7-8:

- A. Half of the work of the church can be done by good parents; however, this work falls upon our shoulders today because there are few good parents—Psa. 127:3.
- B. A family must be filled with an atmosphere of love and tenderness; there must be genuine love—1 Thes. 2:7-8.
- C. Parents must learn to be friends to their children; never allow your children to distance themselves from you; never make yourself unapproachable; remember that friendship is built upon communication; it does not come by birth—Matt. 19:14.
- D. The most helpful thing to children is for their parents to spend time with them; the more time the parents spend with them, the better:
 - 1. Sometimes we need to have free talks with them about wide-ranging subjects.
 - 2. We should allow them to join in our daily activities, and we should join them in their activities.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

God's heart is to carry out His economy. His heart is not that we always please Him and make Him happy, nor that we should be good, spiritual, holy, or victorious. He desires neither a good man nor a bad man but a God-man. God created us according to His image and wanted us to take His life, signified by the tree of life. Because we became fallen, God became a man to save us, to redeem us. He died an all-inclusive death for us, and He resurrected to beget us by imparting God's life and nature into us, making us God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead.

We should not regard the Bible as a book that teaches us to be a good man or a spiritual man. The Bible reveals that God wants us to be a "Christ-man." To be a Christian is to be a Christ-man, a man of Christ.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the fulfillment of God's economy requires our cooperation. To cooperate with God means to be bound together with God. We may use a three-legged race as an illustration. The runners in such a race must run in pairs, with each partner having one leg bound to one of his partner's legs. In order for the partners to run, they must cooperate with each other and not move independently. This is a picture of the proper Christian life. To be a Christian is to be bound together with Christ and to have one living with Him by one life.

The birth of Samuel involved Hannah's cooperation with God. The old priesthood had become stale and waning, and God wanted to have another beginning. For Samuel's birth, God initiated things behind the scenes. On the one hand, He shut up Hannah's womb; on the other hand, He prepared a provoker (1 Sam. 1:5-7). This forced Hannah to pray that the Lord would give her a male child. In her prayer she made a vow and said, "O Jehovah of hosts, if You will indeed look upon the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me and not forget Your maidservant, but give to Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to Jehovah for all the days of his life, and no razor will come upon his head" (v. 11). This prayer was initiated not by Hannah but by God. God chose Hannah because she was willing to cooperate with Him. God answered her prayer and opened her womb, and

Hannah conceived and bore a son (v. 20). Then according to her vow, she offered her son to God, placing him in the custody of Eli. From this we see that Hannah, Samuel's mother, was one who cooperated very much with God. Her case shows us the kind of persons God expects to have today. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 5, 6)

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The ark was a type of Christ as the embodiment of God. It also signified Christ as the presence of the Triune God to be with His people for the carrying out of His economy to establish His kingdom on earth. To bring out the ark was just to bring out the presence of God. When the children of Israel began to move with the ark from Mount Sinai, Moses offered a prayer to God, saying, "Rise up, O Jehovah, and let Your enemies be scattered" (Num. 10:35). The ark took the lead to travel onward. The move of the ark was a picture of God's move on the earth.

In 1 Samuel 4 the elders of Israel were actually usurping God. At that time, God did not intend to move. The children of Israel had no thought of or concern for God's economy, and their bringing out the ark indicated that they were usurping God for their safety, peace, rest, and profit. They were usurping God, even forcing Him, to go out with them.

Today many Christians usurp God by praying for their prosperity, health, or family without any consideration of God's economy. When we ask God for His healing, we must be fully related to His economy. If you are ill, you should not pray for healing in the way of usurping God. On the contrary, from the depths of your spirit you should say, "Lord, I am not here on earth for my health, my prosperity, my children, or my work. I am here for Your economy. Do You still want me to live on earth for Your economy? I have seen Your economy, I realize that You need Nazarites, and I have a heart to be a Nazarite for You. As one who has been born of God and who has the life and nature of God, I ask You what is on Your heart concerning me." If God intends that you continue living on earth for His economy, you will be healed, either through a physician or through some other way. The point here is that, instead of usurping God, we must pray, live, and be persons according to God's heart and for His economy. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 22-23)

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For us to live for Christ, we need to exist. Without our human existence we cannot live Christ. But today those in the fallen world care for nothing but their existence; they do not care for the purpose of their existence. To exist is one thing, but to exist for the divine purpose is another thing. The purpose ordained by God for our existence is to live Christ, to live God out, and to have God's testimony. But the people of this world have only their existence; they have no purpose. Eventually they make their existence itself the purpose of their existence. They know nothing but existence. Satan picks up the existence of human beings or of human living and uses this existence to usurp people so that today the whole world cares only for existence, not for God's purpose in existence.

All things necessary for our human existence need to be under a divine limitation. Anything that exceeds our need becomes worldly, "Egyptian," something of Pharaoh, and it frustrates us from the economy of God's purpose. In everything God's economy must be the deciding factor. Our living should not be like that of the "Egyptians," the worldly people. We need a place to live, and we need to keep our house clean. But if we continue with our cleaning when it is time to go to the meeting, our cleaning becomes "Egyptian," something apart from the economy of God's purpose. We are on earth not for cleaning but for a feast unto the Lord. Even how much time we spend with our children should be decided by God's economy. Other Christians may act like the people of the world, but we have to be a holy people, a separated people.

Our living and our existence depend on the provision from the heavenly source, not on the supply from the world. For this we need the vision, and we need the exercise of our faith. Moses was a man of great faith to lead two million people out of Egypt into the wilderness, where there was no earthly supply for their human existence. (*Life-study of Exodus*, p. 156)

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The picture portrayed in these verses (1 Sam. 7:1-5) is very beautiful. Here we have a people returning to God and a man—Samuel—who was one with God on earth. We may say that Samuel was the acting God on earth. At least we may say that Samuel was the representative of the very God in heaven to rule over His people on earth. As such a person, Samuel began to minister.

Samuel was faithful to God to do according to what was in God's heart and mind. His whole being and person, not just his doing, living, and work, were according to God. Samuel's being and God's heart were one. For this reason it is not too much to say that Samuel, a man according to God, was the acting God on earth. God's mind was Samuel's consideration. He had no other thought, consideration, or thinking. His living and working were for the carrying out of whatever was in God's heart. As a consequence, Samuel was one who turned the age.

In this replacing priesthood, Samuel anointed Saul and David to be kings (10:1; 16:1, 13) as God ordained that he should go before His anointed continually (2:35b) to supervise the king, observing what the king was doing. This indicates that Samuel, the acting God on earth, was greater than the king. Samuel could be qualified to such an extent because for many years God had been perfecting him for His economy, not for anything else.

When God's economy is carried out among His people, they are blessed. This means that our welfare, our well-being, is altogether linked to the carrying out of God's economy. We should not seek our well-being apart from God's economy. Because this has been neglected and even lost, it needs to be recovered. I wish to say, especially to the young saints, that we should not expect to have prosperity for ourselves. Rather, as saints in the Lord's recovery, we should expect that through us the Lord will do as much as possible to accomplish His economy. Then we will be blessed. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 27-30)

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The church cannot go on if parents do not have a sense of being entrusted. We do not want to see our children being rescued back from the world. Suppose we beget children, lose them to the world, and then try to rescue them back. If we allow this to happen, the gospel will never be preached to the uttermost part of the earth. Our children have been taught many teachings, and we have been taking care of them for years. At least these children should be brought to the Lord. We are wrong if we do not take care of our children. Please remember that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children turn out the right way.

Please give me the liberty to say this word. Throughout church history, the greatest failure among Christians is the failure in parenting. This is something no one cares much about. The children are young; they are in your hands and can do nothing much themselves. If you are loose with yourself, you will also be loose with them. We must realize that parents must exercise self-control, sacrificing their own freedom. God has committed a human body, along with his soul, into our hands. If we do not exercise self-control and give up our freedom, we will have a difficult time answering to our God in the future.

NURTURING CHILDREN IN THE DISCIPLINE AND ADMONITION OF THE LORD

You must nurture your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). The discipline of the Lord is telling a person how he should behave himself. You must consider your children as Christians, not Gentiles. The Lord's discipline tells a person how he should behave as a Christian. The Lord intends that all of our children become Christians. He has no intention that any of them be a Gentile or an unsaved person. You should plan on all of them becoming not just Christians, but good Christians. You should tell them what a proper Christian is by teaching them the discipline of the Lord. Here we must briefly cover a number of points.

Helping Children to Have Proper Aspirations

The biggest thing about a child is his aspirations. Every child has an aspiration when he is young. If the government allowed every child to print his business card, I think many children would print “President,” “Chairman,” or “Queen.” Parents must help their children to have proper aspirations. If you love the world, your children will probably want to be the president, a millionaire, or a great academic. How you live affects the aspirations of your child. Parents must learn to channel the ambitions of their children in the proper direction. They should aspire to be a lover of the Lord. They should not aspire to love the world. You should cultivate such an ambition within them while they are young. Show them that it is an honorable thing to die for the Lord, that it is a precious thing to be a martyr for the Lord. You have to be an example to them, and you have to tell them your ambitions. Tell them what you want to be if you are given the opportunity. Tell them what kind of Christian you want to be. In this way, you will channel their ambitions in the proper direction. Their goals will change, and they will know what is noble and what is precious.

Not Encouraging the Pride of Children

Children have another problem: They are not only ambitious and aspiring but also proud of themselves. They may boast about their own cleverness, skill, or eloquence. A child can find many things to boast about. He may think that he is a very special person. Parents should not discourage them, but neither should they cultivate their pride. Many parents cultivate their children’s pride and encourage them to go after vainglory by heaping praises upon them in front of other people. We should tell them, “There are many children who are like you in this world.” Do not try to encourage their pride. We should enlighten children according to the discipline and admonition of the Lord. They should be able to think, to speak, and to learn all the skills. But you have to tell them that there are many who are like them in this world. Do not destroy their self-esteem, but do not allow them to become proud. You do not need to hurt their self-esteem, but you must point out their pride to them. Many young people leave home only to find out that they have to spend ten or twenty years in the world in order to learn how to do things properly. By then it is too late. Many young people have a wild temper at home. They are so proud that they cannot work properly. We do not want our children to become disheartened, but neither do we want them to be proud or to think that they are somebody.

Teaching Children to Accept Defeat and to Learn Humility

A Christian needs to know how to appreciate others. It is easy to be victorious, but it is hard to accept defeat. We can find champions who are humble, but it is rare to find losers who are not bitter. This is not a Christian attitude. Those who are good in some areas should learn to be humble and not boastful. At the same time, when a person is defeated he should learn to accept his defeat. Children are very competitive. It is all right for them to be competitive; they want to win at ball games, track meets, and in their school work. You have to show them that it is right for them to study well at school, but they have to learn to be humble. Encourage them to be humble. Tell them that there are many other students who may be better than they are. When they are defeated, you need to teach them to accept their defeat with grace. A child’s problem often has to do with these attitudes. After a game the winner is proud, while the loser will complain that the judge was not fair or that he made the wrong judgment because the sun was glaring in his face. You should help them to develop a humble character. They should be under Christian admonition and should develop Christian character. They can win, and when they lose they can also appreciate others. Admitting defeat is a virtue. The Chinese are greatly lacking in this virtue. Most Chinese blame others when they are defeated instead of conceding with grace. You must nurture your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

Many children say that their teacher plays favorites when others do well on tests. When they do not do well themselves, they say their teacher does not like them. Here we see the need for humility. Christians must have the virtue of accepting defeat. If others are good, we have to say promptly that

they are good. We also have to accept defeat and concede that others are smarter, more hard working, or better than us. It is a Christian virtue to accept defeat. When we win, we should not look down upon everyone else. This attitude is unworthy of a Christian. When others are better than us, we have to appreciate them. Others may jump higher or be stronger than us. We should train our children to acknowledge achievement in others, while they are still living at home with us. This training will help them understand themselves when they grow up as Christians. We should know ourselves and appreciate those who are better than us. If our children are this way, it will be easy for them to experience spiritual things.

Teaching Children to Choose

I hope that we will pay attention to this matter. In many aspects we have to teach our children according to the discipline of the Lord. From their youth, we should give them a chance to make their own choices. We should not make every choice for them until they reach the age of eighteen or twenty. If we do, it will be impossible for them to make any decisions when they grow up. We have to always give them the opportunity to make decisions. Give them the chance to choose what they like and what they do not like. We have to show them whether their choices are right. Give them the chance to choose and then show them the right choice. Let them see it for themselves. Some like to wear short dresses. Some prefer one kind of color, while others prefer another kind of color. Let them make the choices by themselves.

Some people do not give their children the opportunity to make choices. As a result, when their children reach their twenties and marry someone, they do not know how to be the head. You can tell them that the husband is the head of the wife, but they will not know how to be the head. You must not allow them to wait until they are married to find out that they do not know how to be the head. If at all possible, give your children plenty of opportunity to make decisions. When they grow up, they will then know what to do. They will know what is wrong and what is right. Give a child opportunities to make choices from the time he is young. I will say a word to all those who have children: "Give them a chance to choose." Otherwise, many Chinese children will be damaged when they grow up. The damage is often manifested when the children are between the ages of eighteen and twenty. They act in irresponsible ways at this age because they have never been called upon to make any choices. We must teach our children according to the discipline of the Lord. We must teach our children to make choices rather than making all the choices for them. We have to let our children know whether they have made the right choices.

Teaching Children to Manage Things

We must also teach our children to manage things. We must give them the opportunity to take care of their personal belongings, to manage their own shoes, socks, and other affairs. Give them a little instruction and then let them try to manage things by themselves. Let them know how things should be handled from their youth. Some children have a bad start because their fathers love them blindly and do not know how to train them. As Christians, we have to train our children to manage their things properly.

I believe if the Lord is gracious to us, we will gain half of our increase from among our own children and the other half from the "sea" (i.e., the world). If all the increase is from the sea and none is from among our own children, we will not have a strong church. Paul's generation could be saved directly from the world, but the generation after Paul, men like Timothy, came in through their families. We cannot expect our increase to always come from the world. We have to expect the second generation, men like Timothy, to come from our own families. God's gospel does save men from the world, but we also need to bring in men like Timothy. Before the church will be rich, there must be grandmothers like Lois and mothers like Eunice who raise, edify, and nurture their children in the discipline of the Lord. If there are no such people, the church will never be rich. We must give our children the opportunity to manage things from their youth. We must give them the chance to learn to arrange things by themselves. Hold family meetings frequently and allow the children to make decisions. If we have to rearrange the

furniture, involve them in its rearrangement. If we have to rearrange the cupboard, involve them in its rearrangement. Teach them to manage things. Whether we have daughters or sons, we have to teach them to manage things. Then they will become a good husband or a good wife in the future.

What is our situation today? Girls should be cared for by their mothers. But many mothers do not take care of them, and the burden is turned over to the church. Boys should be cared for by their fathers. But many fathers do not take care of them, and the burden is also passed on to the church. As a consequence, as men are saved and brought into the church, the business burden of the church doubles. This is because those who are parents do not live properly as Christian parents. After the church preaches the gospel and saves men, it has to deal with all kinds of family problems associated with these men. But if parents are responsible for the proper nurturing of their children, and if the children are brought up in the church, the church will be relieved of half of its burdens. In Shanghai I have often felt that the workers should not be handling the many affairs that they handle; those affairs should be handled by the parents. The parents do not teach their children well, and these children drift into the world. As a result, we have to rescue them back from the world and pick up the burden of teaching them ourselves. This creates much work for the church.

THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE FAMILY BEING ONE OF LOVE

The atmosphere in the family should be one of love. Some become psychologically abnormal or withdrawn because they do not have love at home

The way a child grows up depends on the atmosphere in his family. If a child does not receive any nurturing love as he grows up, he will become stubborn, individualistic, and rebellious. Many people cannot get along with others in their adult life because they did not experience love in the family as a child. They saw only quarrels, arguments, and fights in the family. Children from such families grow up abnormally. Those who come from such abnormal families surely grow up to be lonely people. They will be antagonistic toward others. Because they feel inferior in their heart, they try to boost their self-image by considering themselves better than others. All those who have an inferiority complex have a tendency to exalt themselves. This is their means of offsetting their own inferiority.

Many bad elements in society such as robbers and rebels come from families which are void of love. Their personality becomes warped, and they turn against their fellow man when they grow up. When they come to the church, they bring their problems with them. I feel that half of the work of the church can be done by good parents. But this work falls upon our shoulders today because there are few good parents. New believers should see that they should treat their children in a proper way. A family must be filled with an atmosphere of love and tenderness. There must be genuine love. Children who grow up from such families will become normal persons.

Parents must learn to be friends to their children. Never allow your children to distance themselves from you. Never make yourself unapproachable. Please remember that friendship is built upon communication; it does not come by birth. You must learn to approach your children. Be happy to help them so that they will tell you when they encounter problems and seek your counsel when they are weak. They should not go to others when they are weak. They should be able to tell you their successes as well as their failures. You should be their good friend, the approachable and helpful one to them. They should look to you when they are weak and fellowship with you when they are successful. We have to be friends to them. When they are weak, they should be able to come to us for help. We should not be a judge on the throne but a help to them. We should be there whenever they need help, and we should be able to sit down with them and discuss problems with them. They should be able to seek counsel from us as from friends. In a family the parents must earn so much trust from their children that they become their friends. If a parent will do this, he or she will have done the right thing.

You have to learn this lesson from the time the children are young. How dear and near your children are to you depends on how you treat them the first twenty years of their lives. If they are not near to you the first twenty years of their lives, they will not be near to you when they are thirty or forty years old. They will drift further and further away from you. Many children do not like to be near their parents. They are not friends to them and there is no sweet relationship between them.

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They go to their parents when they have problems in a way that resembles a criminal going before a judge. You must work to such an extent that your children will come and seek your advice first when they have problems. They must feel comfortable confiding in you. If you can achieve this, you will find few problems in your family. In fact, all problems will be solved. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 2, pp. 522-523, 536, 537-541, 544-546)

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Question: How can an elder who is a father care for his family and also be always available to help the saints?

Answer: To be an overseer is difficult. The most helpful thing for children is for their parents to spend time with them. To sit with them, observe what they are doing, and instruct them is the best encouragement to them and prevents them from being idle. Sometimes we need to have free talks with them about wide-ranging subjects. If we do, they will be happy. All children like to learn. The need with our children is endless. The more time we spend with them, the better. We should allow them to join in our daily activities, and we should join them in their activities. However, an elder also needs to be available to help the saints. In order to care for both these needs, we must learn to fellowship with the Lord and follow His leading. What I have shared concerning the eldership are principles. We need the Lord's leading for specific situations. (*Basic Principles Concerning the Eldership*, pp. 57-58)