

RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

Special Fellowship (3)

One Vital Factor, Two Lines, Three Principles, and the Four Functions of the Children's Work in the Lord's Recovery

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:5; John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-2; Gal. 6:7-8; Matt. 13:37-38; Prov. 22:6; Rom. 9:21, 23; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Eph. 1:7; Gal. 3:19, 23-24; 2 Tim. 2:21; Acts 16:31

I. The one vital factor—the person, living and responsibility of the parents:

- A. God pays more attention to what we are than to what we do or to what we can do; He cares for the kind of person we are and for the kind of life we live—1 Thes. 1:5.
- B. We need to see that we are God-men, born of God and belonging to God's species; this is the beginning of the God-man living—John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-2.
- C. 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.

II. The two lines—having the increase of the church also through the children and building up the children in their humanity to be proper human beings—Matt. 13:37-38; 1 Pet. 1:1 (note 4); Prov. 22:6; Rom. 9:21, 23:

- A. Many years ago, we did not realize that the children are a big gospel work; we only cared to preach the gospel, while neglecting the fact that the children also are the fruit of the gospel—Acts 2:38-39; Matt. 28:19-20:
 - 1. We may be doing our best to preach the gospel, but if we pay proper attention to the children's work, in time many more brothers and sisters will be properly brought up in the church.
 - 2. Suppose these children begin to be cultivated in the children's meeting at the age of six and are saved, and they continue to be cultivated through three years of junior high school, three years of high school, and four years of college; in all, they will receive a total of sixteen years of spiritual education and cultivation.
 - 3. We should not do a work merely among the children in the church; our work must include the children outside the church; this is the children's gospel work—cf. Rom. 9:24.
 - 4. If we continue the children's work, we will be unable to estimate the long-term results; if we labor on the children, our numbers will continually grow—Acts 2:47.
 - 5. We must realize that the children's work is a crucial burden; every locality must be aggressive in the children's work, because there is a greater future in the children's work than in the campus work.
- B. Today, many young people have been damaged with respect to their character; it is because of this that we have a children's work for the children; we need to build up their character—1 Tim. 3:7; Acts 6:3; Prov. 28:20a:
 - 1. Character has very much to do with the Lord's service; consider those persons in the Bible whom God used; they were used by God because they possessed a character that was fit for His use—Rom. 12:1; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 2:21; 4:11.

2. To build up a proper humanity is the way to prepare the children to be the best material to receive God's grace—Rom. 9:21, 23; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:5; Matt. 16:18:

III. The three principles of the children's work—it is a work that is “before Christ” (B.C.), it is carried out in the principle of the law, and it is a work of preparation—1 Pet. 1:18-19; Eph. 1:7; Gal. 3:19, 23-24; 2 Tim. 2:21:

- A. We need to see the children's need of redemption:
 1. A great part of God's economy is His redemption; redemption indicates that something is wrong, requiring a rescue and a remedy—Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14:
 - a. Redemption is needed because after God created man for the fulfillment of His economy, the subtle one, Satan, came in to seduce man from the line of God's economy to sin—1 Pet. 1:18-19.
 - b. Man fell into sin, and sin as the sinful nature of Satan was injected by Satan into man's nature; as a result, the God-created man became sin, poisoned by Satan—Rom. 7:8, 11, 17, 20.
- B. Due to man's fall and his not knowing himself, God was forced to insert, to add, the law; it was added later in order to expose man's real condition and true nature and thus show man the true picture of himself—Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19:
 1. As the testimony of God, the law is a portrait or photograph of God, thus, the first function of the law is to reveal God; in decreeing the law, God's intention was to reveal to His chosen and redeemed people what kind of God He is—Exo. 19:3-6.
 2. The second function of God's law is to cause His people to realize that they are fallen and far away from God; as a sinful and corrupt people, it is not possible for them to please God—Rom. 7:7-8, 11; Gal. 3:19.
 3. A third function of the law is the function of subduing us; when we are exposed and subdued, we shall become humble before God; if we did not have the law, we would never realize how sinful we are, and we would never be subdued—Rom. 3:19; cf. Matt. 19:16-26.
 4. The law of God has a positive function in God's hand; the law has become the custodian and child-conductor of God's chosen people to bring them to Christ—grace—Gal. 3:23-24.
- C. When God bestows grace on the church, He needs vessels; there is the need for more Timothys to be raised up—2 Kings 4:1-6; 2 Tim. 2:2, 3:17:
 1. These four items together would make Timothy a vessel unto honor according to a certain standard—2 Tim. 2:21:
 - a. The word *honor* is related to our nature.
 - b. The word *sanctified* indicates our position.
 - c. The word *useful* implies the matter of our function.
 - d. The word *prepared* reveals the matter of our training.
 2. 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—2 Tim. 3:15a.
 3. We have to expect the second generation, men like Timothy, to come from our own families—1:5.

IV. The four functions of the children's work—Acts 16:31:

- A. At the beginning, children's meeting was mainly to care for the saints who brought their children to the meeting; it was simply a child-care service; gradually, the matter of preparing teachers came in, and we compiled material:
 - 1. From our experience we feel that the children's work is very important; the children's work should not simply be babysitting in order for the saints to come to the meetings.
 - 2. However, the children's work has another function, that is, to cultivate and nurture our next generation; this is worthy of our careful consideration and examination.
- B. The children's work has an additional function, which is to gain the families of the children—Acts 16:31; cf. Exo. 12:3-4; Gen. 7:1:
 - 1. Children like to make friends; it is particularly easy for children between the ages of six and twelve to make friends, and they listen to their friends:
 - 2. Our purpose, however, is not focused only on the children, but even more, through the children, we want to reach their parents and siblings.
- C. From this we can see the importance of the children's work; the children's work is greatly related to the growth of the church.