

RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

Message Four

Sanctifying Ourselves For the Sake of the Children

Scripture Reading: John 17:19; 4:6-7, 27; Eph. 5:26-27; Num. 6:3-4; 1 Thes. 5:23;
1 Thes. 4:4; Judg. 13:12-14

I. Although the Son is absolutely holy in Himself, He still sanctified Himself in His way of living while He was on earth in order to set an example of sanctification for His disciples—John 17:19; Eph. 5:26-27:

- A. There were many things that He could have done which were not contrary to His own holiness; nevertheless, He refrained from doing them because of weakness in the disciples—John 17:19.
- B. In many matters the disciples' weakness directed the Lord and restricted His freedom; the Lord could do many things, but He did not do them because He did not want the disciples to misunderstand or be stumbled—4:6-7, 27.
- C. In order for us to be holy, we first need to be separated unto God positionally—Matt. 23:17:
 - 1. With respect to our family, neighbors, colleagues, and friends, we need to be separated; many Christians, however, are saved, but not separated—Titus 2:14; cf. Neh. 13:23-24, 30.
 - 2. Once a person is saved, he should also be separated; this is the reason a believer is called a saint; to be holy is to be separated unto God—Rom. 1:2, footnote 3.

II. Those who have children should sanctify themselves for the sake of their children; this means that we should refrain from doing many things which we could do, for the sake of our children—John 17:17, 19; Num. 6:1-12:

- A. Many strong believers would be raised up in our second generation if all the parents of this generation would be good parents; the future of the church depends on the parents—cf. 2 Thes. 3:9; Phil. 3:17.
- B. A Nazarite had to abstain from wine and anything related to its source, signifying that we must abstain from all kinds of earthly enjoyment and pleasure, which lead to lustful conduct and a lustful intention—Num. 6:3; cf. Judg. 13:2-20; Psa. 104:15; Eccl. 10:19; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:1-5.
- C. We must see that God has committed the children to us; so we must set a standard for ourselves in morality, in conduct, and in all moral judgments regarding right and wrong; we must set a high standard for what is ideal, and we must also set a standard for ourselves in spiritual matters—1 Thes. 5:23:
 - 1. A child may remember or forget what you say, but what he sees surely will remain in him forever; he develops his sense of judgment from you, and he also develops his system of values from you—1 Cor. 9:27.
 - 2. Every parent must remember that his actions will be repeated in his children; his actions will not stop with him; the whole life of Christian children depends on the behavior of their parents—cf. 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15.

3. You must sanctify your words; when your children speak, they should also sanctify their words and be accurate with them; when you say something wrong, you must make a point to admit your mistake; in this manner you will train your children to sanctify their words—1 Tim. 4:12.
- D. We must realize that parents need to 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—1 Cor. 9:25; Gal. 5:22-23.
- E. We must see that in order for us to bring the children to the Lord in a genuine way, we need to be a person who walks with God; we cannot send our children to the Lord merely by pointing our fingers to heaven; we have to walk in front of them—1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 2:21:
 1. After Enoch begat Methuselah, the Bible says that he walked with God; when the burden of the family was upon him, he felt that his responsibility was too great and that he could not manage it by himself; so he began to walk with God—Gen. 5:21-22.
 2. When Samson was in the bosom of his mother, he was sanctified to be a Nazarite; Samson was a Nazarite from his mother’s womb for the full course of his life—Judg. 13:7.
 3. Hannah prayed desperately not mainly for herself but for God; she promised God that if He gave her a male child, she would return the child to Him by the vow of a Nazarite—1 Sam. 1:11, 22, 28.
 4. Lot’s children were corrupted by living in the wicked city—Gen. 19:15.
- F. We must keep, preserve, safeguard, our vessel clean in sanctification before God; it must be holy, separated, and saturated with God and also kept in honor before man—1 Thes. 4:4; Rom. 13:14.

III. According to both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the first thing we must eliminate for the sake of God’s dwelling place is our idols—Gen. 35:1-2; Acts 19:19-20:

- A. Jacob also charged everyone to purify themselves; we must not only put away the foreign gods, but also purify our whole being; our whole being, manner of life, and expression must be changed—Gen. 35:2; 2 Cor. 7:1.
- B. In addition to putting away the foreign gods and purifying themselves, Jacob’s household changed their garments; to change garments means to change our manner of life—Gen. 35:2; Rev. 22:14a.
- C. The material used in making the golden calf in Exodus 32 was the gold of the earrings belonging to the children of Israel; the record in this chapter makes clear that self-beautification leads to idolatry—vv. 1-3.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE SON SANCTIFYING HIMSELF

John 17:19 says, “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.” Although the Son is absolutely holy in Himself, He still sanctified Himself in His way of living while He was on earth in order to set an example of sanctification for His disciples.

Consider the way He contacted the Samaritan woman (4:5-7). The Lord did not meet her at night in a private home but during the day in the open air. As far as the Lord Himself was concerned, He could have met with the Samaritan woman, who was an immoral person, at any place and at any time. But as a man a little over thirty years of age, it would not have been a good example for His disciples if He had contacted her privately in her home at night. If He had done that, the disciples might have been confused. But, in order to set a good example for His disciples, He behaved in a sanctified way. This one example was a great help to His disciples in the future. It is not right for any young preacher to contact a woman privately at night because there is too much temptation there. To do such a thing is not holy; it is worldly. Look at the example of the Lord Jesus: He talked with Nicodemus, an elderly gentleman, late at night in a private home (3:1-2), but He talked with the immoral Samaritan woman during the daytime in the open air. In doing this the Lord sanctified Himself and set an example for His disciples to follow. (*Life-study of John*, pp. 483-484)

THE LORD SACTIFYING HIMSELF FOR THE SAKE OF HIS DISCIPLES

What does it mean to be sanctified before God? The Lord Jesus said, “For their sake I sanctify Myself” (John 17:19). This does not refer to being holy, but to whether or not one is sanctified. The Lord Jesus is holy and His nature is holy. But for the sake of the disciples, He sanctified Himself. There were many things that He could have done which were not contrary to His own holiness; nevertheless, He refrained from doing them because of weakness in the disciples. In many matters the disciples’ weakness directed the Lord and restricted His freedom. The Lord could do many things, but He did not do them because He did not want the disciples to misunderstand or be stumbled. As far as the Lord’s nature was concerned, He often could have acted a certain way. But He refrained from doing so for the sake of the disciples. (*Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 49, p. 520)

NOT WALKING IN A LOOSE WAY

Those who have children should sanctify themselves for the sake of their children. This means that we should refrain from doing many things which we could do for the sake of our children. There are many things which we could say, but for the sake of the children we do not say them. From the day we bring our children into our family, we should sanctify ourselves.

If you do not restrict yourself, you will not be able to restrict your children. The looseness of those who do not have children, at the most, results in trouble for themselves. But for those who have children, looseness results in damage to their children as well as to themselves. Once a Christian brings a child into the world, he must sanctify himself. Two eyes, sometimes four, are watching you all the time. They will follow you all your life. Even after you have left this world, they will not forget what they have seen in you; the things you do will remain inside of them.

ACTING ACCORDING TO STANDARDS

The day your son is born is the day you should consecrate yourself. You must set a standard for yourself in morality, in conduct at home, and in all moral judgments regarding right and wrong. You must set a high standard for what is ideal, and you must also set a standard for yourself in spiritual matters. You must act strictly according to these standards. Otherwise, you will have problems for yourself, and you will spoil your children. Many children are ruined by

their own parents, not by outsiders. If parents are lacking in ethical, moral, and spiritual standards, they will ruin their children.

A young person makes decisions and judgments in his future life according to the training he received during his early years with his parents. A child may remember or forget what you say, but what he sees surely will remain in him forever. He develops his sense of judgment from you, and he also develops his system of values from you.

Every parent must remember that his actions will be repeated in his children; his actions will not stop with him. When you do not have children, you can do whatever you like when you are happy and give up and forget about everything when you are unhappy. But once you have children, you have to restrict yourself. You have to act according to the highest standard of conduct whether you like it or not. The whole life of Christian children depends on the behavior of their parents.

I remember a brother who said something when his son got into trouble. He said, "He is just a replica of me and I am just he." When a parent sees something in his children, he must realize that he is seeing himself. He must see that they are his very reflection. They are just reflecting him. Through them he can see himself.

This is why every couple should consecrate themselves anew to God as soon as they have a child. They should come to the Lord and consecrate themselves to Him again. From that time forward, the Lord has committed a human being, with his entire spirit, soul, life, and future, into their hands. From that day forward, they have to be faithful to the Lord's commitment. Some people are committed to a work for one or two years when they sign a contract. But this work lasts for their entire life; there is no limit to the term of this commitment.

THE SENSE OF BEING ENTRUSTED

Among believers in China, no failure is greater than the failure of parenting. I think this is due to the influence of paganism. Failure in one's career cannot be compared to failure in parenting. Even failure in being a husband or a wife cannot be compared to failure in parenting. A husband or a wife can protect himself or herself, because both are over twenty years of age. But when a child is placed in your hands, he cannot protect himself. The Lord has entrusted a child to you. You cannot go to Him and say, "You have entrusted five children to me, and I have lost three." You cannot say, "You have entrusted ten to me, and I have lost eight." 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.

THE NEED TO WALK WITH GOD

Parents must not only realize their responsibility and sanctify themselves for the sake of their children; they must also walk with God.

One sanctifies himself for the sake of his children. But this does not mean that he can be loose and careless when he is by himself. He should not exercise self-control merely for the sake of his children. The Lord Jesus was not short of holiness in Himself. He did not sanctify Himself just for the sake of His disciples. If the Lord Jesus sanctified Himself merely for the sake of His disciples, but was not holy in Himself, He would have been a total failure. In the same way, parents must sanctify themselves for their children, but they themselves must also walk with God.

No matter how much zeal you show in your children's presence, they can easily see through you if you are not genuinely zealous. They are very clear, but you may not be that clear. You may be a very loose person yet act carefully in their presence. In reality you are not the person you pretend to be. Please remember that your children can see through you easily. If you are a careless person and you try to act in a discreet way before your children, they will easily detect your carelessness and pretension. You must not only sanctify yourself before them for their sake, but you must also be genuinely holy in yourself, walking with God as Enoch did.

I would like to draw your attention to the example of Enoch. Genesis 5:21-22 says, "Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters." Before Enoch was sixty-five years old, we do not know his condition. After he begat Methuselah, we know that he walked with God three hundred years. Then he was taken up by God. This is a special case in the Old Testament. Before Enoch begat children, we do not know anything about his condition. But after Enoch begat Methuselah, the Bible says that he walked with God. When the burden of the family was upon him, he started to feel his weakness. He felt that his responsibility was too great and that he could not manage it by himself. So he began to walk with God. He did not walk with God just in the presence of his son; he walked with God even when he was by himself. He felt that if he did not walk with God, he would not know how to raise his children. Enoch begat not only Methuselah but also many other children; nevertheless, he walked with God for three hundred years. His responsibility as a parent did not hinder him from walking with God; rather, it caused him to walk with God. Eventually, he was raptured. Please remember that the first person who was raptured was a father. The first person to be raptured was one who had many children and yet who still walked with God. The way one bears his responsibility in a family is a reflection of his spiritual condition before God.

We must see that in order for us to bring our children to the Lord in a genuine way, we need to be a person who walks with God. We cannot send our children to heaven merely by pointing our fingers to heaven. We have to walk in front of them. Only then can we ask our children to follow us. Even though Christian parents want their children to be better than they are in the hope that their children will not love the world and will go on in a positive way, there are many bad families because the parents themselves draw back. If this is the case, they will never realize their goal no matter how hard they try. We must remember that the standard of the children cannot be higher than the standard of their parents. This does not mean that we should set a false standard. We should have a standard that is genuine and spiritual. If we have this, our children will come up to our standard.

Please remember that your children will learn to love what you love, and hate what you hate. They will learn to treasure what you treasure, and condemn what you condemn. You must set a moral standard for yourself and your children. Whatever your moral standard is, that will be their standard as well. Your standard of loving the Lord will be their standard of loving the Lord. There can be only one standard in a family, not two.

I hope we can see that God has committed our children to us. There can be only one standard in the family. Whatever we forbid our children to do, we should not do. There must never be two standards in a family, one for the children and another for us. We must keep the same standard for our children's sake. We must sanctify ourselves to maintain a standard. Once the standard is set, we must maintain it. I hope we will all take good care of our children. They are constantly watching us. Whether or not they behave well depends on whether we behave well. They are not merely listening to us; they are watching us as well. They seem to know everything. They know if we are pushing them around, and they know if we are acting in front of them. We should not think that we can deceive our children. No! They cannot be deceived. They know how we feel, and they are clear about the true picture. Whatever we demand of our children, we must take the same position in that matter.

BEING ACCURATE WITH OUR WORDS

Parents' words are very important to children. You must not only be a pattern to your children but also realize that your words are very important to them.

Not Making Empty Promises

Please remember that parents should not say anything to their children that they cannot carry out. You must not make empty promises to your children. Do not promise them something if you do not have the ability to fulfill your promise. Do not make a promise to them if you cannot fulfill it. If your children want you to buy something, you have to consider your financial ability. If you can do it, do it. If not, you must say, "I will do my best. I will do what I can do. But I cannot do what is beyond my ability." Every word of yours must be reliable. You should not think that this is a small matter.

You must not allow your children to doubt your words. Not only must they not doubt your words, but they also must have the assurance that your words are accurate. If the children find their parents' words to be unreliable, they will grow up acting carelessly. They will think that since one can be careless with his words, he can be careless with anything. Some expressions can be used only in politics; they are not factual. Parents should not use such expressions. Many parents are apparently too kind to their children. They promise whatever their children ask, but nine out of ten times they cannot fulfill their promises. Such wonderful promises produce only one result in the children—disappointment. You must promise only things that you can do. If you cannot do a certain thing, do not promise it. If you are not sure whether you can do it, tell them so. Your words must be accurate.

Orders Needing to Be Carried Out

Sometimes you are not making a promise, but giving an order. If you open your mouth to ask your children to do something, you must make sure that it is done. You have to make them realize that you mean what you say. Many times you give a proper order, but you forget about it. This is wrong. You should not tell your children that it is all right if they do not carry out your order this time, just as long as they do it the next time. If you excuse them, you are not doing

them a favor. You should show your children that once you say something, they must carry it out whether or not you remember it. If you say it once, you can say it a hundred times. If your word counts for one thing, your word should count for a hundred things. You should not nullify your own words. Show them from their youth that words are hallowed, whether they are a promise or an order. For example, if you tell your child to sweep his room every morning, you must first consider whether or not it is within his ability to do it. If he does not do it today, you must make sure that he does it the next day. If he does not do it the next day, you must make sure that he does it the third day. You must uphold your order this year, and you must uphold it next year. You have to show your children that your words are not uttered lightly and that once they are uttered, they have to be carried out. If they find that your words do not count, your words will become ineffective. Hence, every word out of your mouth must be practical and principled.

Correcting Exaggerated Words

Sometimes you exaggerate your words. You must find an opportunity to tell your children that you exaggerated your words on that particular occasion. Your words must be accurate. Sometimes you see only two cows but you say that there are three, or you see five birds but say that there are eight. You must correct yourself immediately. In speaking to your children, you must learn to always correct yourself. You should learn to say, "What I just said was not that accurate. There are two cows, not three." You must show them that words should be sanctified. Everything that happens in the family should be for the building up of Christian character. You must sanctify your words. When your children speak, they should also sanctify their words and be accurate with them. When you say something wrong, you must make a point to admit your mistake. In this manner you will train your children to sanctify their words. Many parents say five when they mean three or three when they mean two. They speak loosely and do not set up good patterns at home. As a result, their children never realize that words are sacred.

All these problems occur because there is a lack of discipline from the Lord. We should experience the Lord's discipline and lead our children to the Lord's discipline. At least we should show them that words are sacred. Every promise should be realized and every order should be carried out. Every word has to be accurate. If we do this, our children will receive proper training.

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. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 2, pp. 520-522, 523-524, 525, 526, 534-536, 549)

TO BE SEPARATED UNTO GOD POSITIONALLY

In order for us to be holy, we first need to be separated unto God positionally. With respect to our family, neighbors, colleagues, and friends, we need to be separated. Many Christians, however, are saved, but not separated. Normally, once a person is saved, he should also be separated. This is the reason a believer is called a saint. Consider the majority of Christians today. They are virtually the same as the worldly people. With them, there is no separation. Many of their relatives and friends do not even know that they are Christians. But to be holy is to be separated unto God. This, of course, is a matter of position. (*Life-study of Ephesians*, p. 28)

* * *

As parents, we must do our duty with respect to our children. This means that we should not only teach them, but also set up an example for them to follow. Just as the Lord Jesus sanctified Himself for the sake of His disciples (John 17:19), so parents should sanctify themselves for the sake of their children. Those who do not have children may be free to do certain things, such as sleep late in the morning. But those with children do not have the liberty to do these things. For the sake of their children, they must be restricted. Children always imitate their parents. Therefore, it is the parents' responsibility to set up a high standard and a proper pattern and example for their children to follow. (*Life-study of Ephesians*, p. 521)

ABSTAINING FROM WINE AND FROM ANYTHING RELATED TO ITS SOURCE

“He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink, and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is made from the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins” (vv. 3-4). Here we see that a Nazarite had to abstain from wine and anything related to its source. This signifies abstaining from the earthly enjoyment and pleasure (cf. Psa. 104:15; Eccl. 10:19). To abstain from all kinds of wine is to abstain from all kinds of earthly enjoyment and pleasure.

We should be careful of anything earthly that makes us happy. Earthly pleasure leads to lustful conduct and to a lustful intention. Earthly enjoyment and pleasure would defile a Nazarite.

A Nazarite had to abstain from vinegar made from wine, from the juice of grapes, and from grapes fresh or dried. This signifies abstaining from anything that issues in earthly enjoyment or pleasure. Vinegar is classified with wine because the source is the same. Wine, vinegar, and grape juice are all prohibited. From this we see that the one who is absolute for God is altogether separated from anything of earthly pleasures. This shows the absoluteness of the Nazarite. (*Life-study of Numbers*, pp. 57-58)

* * *

The Nazarite's separation was of seven days, signifying a full course of time. Samson was a Nazarite from his mother's womb for the full course of his life (Judg. 16:17). (*Life-study of Numbers*, p. 76)

* * *

[Samson's] birth was a miracle initiated by the appearing of the Angel of Jehovah. When Samson was in the bosom of his mother, he was sanctified to be a Nazarite. As he grew up, he was clean and pure according to God's ordination, and he was empowered by the Spirit of God.

Shortly after I decided to give up my job and serve the Lord I went to Shanghai to see Brother Nee. He told me that in serving the Lord the brothers must learn the principle of not contacting a female, especially a young one, in private. I was deeply impressed by this, and from that time I have practiced Brother Nee's instructions and have also passed them on to the saints. (*Life-study of Judges*, p. 45, 46)

* * *

Samuel came out of God's economy. God had His eternal economy, but the carrying out of God's economy had come into question. God had ordained that Aaron's descendants would be

the priests for the carrying out of His economy, but that priesthood became stale and waning. God's heart's desire was to gain someone to replace that priesthood.

In order to gain such a person, God brought together in marriage Elkanah and Hannah. Elkanah had two wives. According to God's sovereign arrangement, the second wife, Peninnah, had children, but Hannah had no children. Furthermore, "her rival provoked her bitterly to irritate her, because Jehovah had shut up her womb" (v. 6). This forced Hannah to pray desperately not mainly for herself but for God. She promised God that if He gave her a male child, she would return the child to Him by the vow of a Nazarite. God was pleased with Hannah's prayer and her promise and He opened her womb. Hannah conceived, bore a child, and named him Samuel. From this we see that actually no human being was the origin of Samuel. God was the real origin, who motivated His people sovereignly and secretly.

SAMUEL'S GOD-WORSHIPPING PARENTS

Humanly speaking, Samuel's origin was his God-worshipping parents (vv. 1-8).

Elkanah and Hannah remained in this line of life not merely for God's eternal salvation but for His eternal purpose. God's salvation is mainly for our benefit, whereas God's purpose is related to the fulfilling of God's desire.

ESPECIALLY HIS GOD-SEEKING MOTHER WITH HER PRAYER

The origin of Samuel was especially his God-seeking mother with her prayer (vv. 9-18). Her prayer was an echo of the heart's desire of God. Her prayer was a human cooperation with the divine move for the carrying out of God's eternal economy.

God wanted a Samuel, yet He needed Hannah's cooperation to pray to Him, saying, "Lord, I need a son." This prayer was very human, yet it was a cooperation with the divine move for God's economy. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 9-10, 11)

LOT'S CHILDREN BEING CORRUPTED

Lot's children were corrupted by living in the wicked city. The word of the angels in [Gen.] 19:12 indicates that Lot might have had sons as well as daughters. In chapter 18 Abraham might have considered that there were at least ten people in Lot's family...Lot had to tell his sons-in-law and his children that God was about to judge that city. But when Lot preached the gospel to them, some would not believe the word from the Lord, thinking that he was joking. Verse 14 says, "And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, Rise up; go forth from this place, for Jehovah will destroy this city. But it seemed to his sons-in-law as though he was joking."

Others of Lot's children had no sense of morality (19:30-35). Look at what his daughters did after they escaped from the city! After escaping from Sodom, Lot and his daughters still had wine with them (19:32). If they had not brought the wine with them, how else could they have had it in the cave where they were dwelling? How drugged they were by the sinful situation in Sodom! When I was visiting some saints in Las Vegas in 1963, they vindicated their living in that city, saying, "It is not wrong for us to stay in this gambling city, because we are here as a testimony for the Lord." I did not argue with them, but deep within myself I said, "If you stay here for some years, your children will have no sense about the wickedness of gambling." Many of the young people today have been drugged. Look at the way they dress: there is no sense of morality or feeling of shame. Many times when I am on the street I have to shut my eyes. For

young ladies to be without a sense of shame is to be without protection. Throughout the whole world the sense of shame and morality has been drugged. Because most of the young people were raised in a sinful atmosphere, their senses have been drugged. But if they would come in to the church life and remain in its pure atmosphere for a few months, they would never return to the sinful world. They would be unable to stand its smell.

We live in an evil age and need protection from it. Our family and our children must be protected. We all must escape Sodom and shut our doors to its evil atmosphere. If we do not, our descendants will be drugged. How could Lot and his children have conducted themselves in the way they did after Sodom was destroyed? Because their sense of morality had fallen so low. If we remain in the fresh air, we shall immediately sense the bad smell of immorality. But if we do not discern any bad smell, it means that our sense of morality has been drugged. (*Life-study of Genesis*, pp. 696-697)

* * *

At this point I would like to say a word to the young people. As Christians, we may need to read the newspapers to know the world situation. I read a newspaper nearly every day, but certain pages I would never read, for they are defiling. Once your mind has been defiled by looking at a certain picture, it will be very difficult for you to remove this defiling element. Furthermore, we should not listen to certain kinds of conversations or touch things that are unclean. But most important we should abstain from fornication. We must keep, preserve, safeguard, our vessel clean in sanctification before God. It must be holy, separated, and saturated with God and also kept in honor before man. (*Life-study of First Thessalonians*, p. 196)

PUTTING AWAY THEIR FOREIGN GODS—IDOLS

Jacob told his household and all that were with him to put away the foreign gods that were among them (35:2). When Jacob and his household were fleeing from Laban, Rachel took the household images (31:34-35). Prior to chapter thirty-five, Jacob never charged Rachel to put them away. But after God had told him to go up to Bethel, everyone had to abandon their foreign gods, their idols. This is a shadow, a type, that is developed throughout the Bible. According to both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the first thing we must eliminate for the sake of God's dwelling place is our idols.

PURIFYING THEMSELVES

Jacob also charged everyone to purify themselves (35:2). We must not only put away the foreign gods, but also purify our whole being. In other words, our whole being, manner of life, and expression must be changed. This is not merely regeneration or a little change in life. Rather, it is a full transformation. Here in Genesis 35, Jacob was transformed.

In the Bible, purifying ourselves means to be purified from every pollution. Our whole being must be cleansed from anything that is pollution in the eyes of God. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Paul's concept in 2 Corinthians 6 and 7 was the same as Jacob's in Genesis 35. Because the Corinthians were the temple of God, Paul told them to purify themselves. There can be no agreement between the temple of God and idols (2 Cor. 6:16). Idols are idols, and the temple of God is the temple of God. Which side do you take? If idols, then go to your idols. If the temple of God, then come to the temple without any idols.

CHANGING THEIR GARMENTS

In addition to putting away the foreign gods and purifying themselves, they changed their garments (35:2). According to the Bible, to change garments means to change your manner of life.

BURYING THEIR EARRINGS

Verse 4 says, "So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hand and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem" (Heb.). Not only were the idols buried, but also the earrings. Earrings are self-beautifying items. These were dealt with in the same way as the idols. Many people's earrings, ornaments, are equal to idols in the eyes of God. When those in Jacob's household were putting away the foreign gods, they also put away their earrings. This indicates that to their conscience their earrings were as abominable as their foreign gods. After touching the church, many sisters had the same conviction and put off this kind of abominable ornament. This is not something related to morality but to the house of God.

God did not charge Jacob to make such a clearance. Still less did He say, "Jacob, you must tell your household and everyone with you to make a clearance and to purify themselves." Why, then, did Jacob charge everyone in this way? Because the house of God is not an individual matter. It is not only Jacob. The house of God must be the house of Jacob becoming the house of Israel. Eventually, all the descendants of Jacob became the house of God, Bethel. The real Bethel was not the tabernacle; it was the children of Israel. Likewise, we must see that today we are the church. We must be purified not only because we are going to Bethel, but because we are to be Bethel. We must put away all foreign gods and abominable ornaments, purify ourselves, and change our garments. Putting away the foreign gods also means putting away all foreign trusts. We must be cleansed in our whole being, inwardly and outwardly, from every pollution, and we must change our manner of life. This is all for the church life. (*Life-study of Genesis*, pp. 1001-1002, 1003, 1005, 1006-1007)

SELF-BEAUTIFICATION LEADING TO IDOLATRY

Another principle implied in this portion of Exodus concerns what an idol is, or what is the principle of an idol. We see this principle in Exodus 32:1-4a: "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, Come, make gods for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And Aaron said to them, Tear off the gold rings, which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me. And all the people tore off the golden rings which were in their ears and brought *them* to Aaron. And he took *the gold* from their hand and fashioned it with an engraving tool and made it into a molten calf."

Here we see the kind of material that was used to make the idol. An idol, of course, must be made with something material. The material used in making the golden calf in Exodus 32 was the gold of the earrings belonging to the wives, sons, and daughters of the children of Israel. It may be that the only ones without golden earrings were the elderly men. The old men were an exception because they do not care for beautification. I can testify that, as an elderly man, I have no interest in beautifying myself. However, it is common for young men and women and also for

older women to beautify themselves. Therefore, in Exodus 32 the gold rings were taken from the ears of the wives, the sons, and the daughters and used to make the idol, the golden calf.

Self-beautification leads to idolatry. This is the reason the Lord in 33:5 and 6 gave the children of Israel a commandment related to ornaments: “Now Jehovah had said to Moses, Say to the children of Israel, You are a stiff-necked people; if I were go up in your midst for one moment, I would consume you. Now therefore put off your ornaments from you, and I will decide what to do to you. And the children of Israel were stripped of their ornaments from Mount Horeb *onward*.” The Lord issued this commandment concerning ornaments because, as the record of chapter thirty-two makes clear, self-beautification leads to idolatry.

Do you know what many Americans are worshipping today? They are worshipping the idols of self-beautification. For example, before a young woman goes to work, she may spend a great deal of time beautifying herself. She may even spend more money on items for self-beautification than she does for food. My concern here is to point out the fact that self-beautification leads to idolatry. First the children of Israel wore golden earrings for self-beautification. Then these golden earrings were fashioned by Aaron into the idol of the golden calf. (*Life-study of Exodus*, pp. 1837, 1838, 1839)