

The family occupies a special place in the Bible. God's selection has to do with a nation, and eternal life has to do with individuals, but salvation has to do with the household.

The first household mentioned in the Bible is Noah's household. Although Adam had children, the Bible does not mention his household, because after Adam sinned in Genesis 3, he lost his position in his family. God had appointed Adam to be the head of his family, yet he lost his headship, and the first family was damaged. The brothers are the head of their households. It is not enough to be a husband and father; he has to be the head. In Genesis 3 Adam lost his place as a husband and a head. If there was a family there at all, it was Eve and her family, because Eve became the head there. Of course, this was not according to God's arrangement.

**ON EXERCISING
HEADSHIP IN THE
FAMILY**

Then God mentioned Noah's household. Those in his household were not particularly better than Adam...The question is not whether Noah's sons were good. The question is where Noah stood. With respect to the flood, God only dealt with Noah; He did not mention his wife, sons, or daughters-in-law. Noah represented his whole family. God said that Noah was just and perfect (Gen. 6:9) because he was able to assume the headship. When he was saved, his whole household was saved....

It is an interesting thing that God divides the world into families. Today man has damaged God's arrangement—the family has been damaged. What is the situation today? Families are filled with rebellion—sons rebel against the father's authority, the wife rebels against the husband's authority, and servants rebel against the master's authority. The family is broken and the oneness is gone. Once the head does not stand firm as the head, the institution of the family is destroyed. In order for a family to please the Lord, the head must stand firm in his position as the head. If a family does not have a head, God can only deal with each individual in the family. Noah's household was the first family that God dealt with as a whole.

God dealt with Noah's household in a different way than other households because Noah was able to assume the headship. What his wife and daughters-in-law did was an entirely different issue. Noah was able to assume the headship; he did not break down the institution of the family.

I dare not say that the other seven had not sinned, but I can say that his family was not damaged. Everyone was under the authority of the head. This is why the whole household was saved even though God only called Noah. If we do not understand this, we cannot understand the meaning of Acts 16:31, which says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." When we read this verse, individual faith and individual salvation come to our mind. Very often we change the unit and the numbers when our theology clashes with the Word of God. We consider something to be a heresy when it is actually God's Word. However, God's Word is very clear here. God grants salvation household by household. Of course, there must be a proper head to receive this salvation. Without a proper head, there cannot be household salvation. When a proper head is absent, the institution of the family is destroyed. If the wife, children, and daughters-in-law submit to the authority of the head of the house, the house will be saved.

...The question is whether or not a family has a proper head who is assuming the proper headship. Whether or not the children are going along is a secondary concern. As long as the children are living in the house, and as long as you are the head of the house, you have made the choice for them already when you believe in the Lord. This is because the house is yours and not theirs. You are responsible for the house; they are not responsible for it. When you take such a stand, others will follow; they will follow you to serve the Lord. This is a wonderful thing, and we can find many examples of it. When the head becomes a proper head, the whole household receives grace and is saved....

**The Head Of The House Bearing The Responsibility
Of All The Members Of The House**

Some may ask, "Does this mean that after the head of a household has believed in the Lord, his whole household will be saved regardless of what each member does?" No. The head has to bear the responsibility of every member of his household. Many have often remarked that there is no middle ground between salvation and perdition. But actually there is some middle ground. The Gentiles are in an absolute position—the position of perdition, and Christians are also in an absolute position—the position of salvation. In a Christian family, even though strictly speaking one cannot say that there is some middle ground, there do exist some neutral positions.

This is because the children of Christian parents do have a closer standing than the Gentiles as far as receiving eternal life is concerned. I am not necessarily alluding to the family of pastors or those in the denominations, and I am not referring to those who are not assuming a genuine headship. I am referring to the children of those who are assuming genuine headship in the family. These children are standing on the ground of grace, and they are more apt to receive eternal life.

Paul said that the children can be sanctified because of the faith of the parents (1 Cor. 7:14). Why are we saved today? We are saved because Christ has become our head. When we submit under Him, we are saved. In the same principle we must be the head to our children. The real issue is whether or not we are the head of our household. If we are the head, God will hold us responsible for our family. God has not demanded

It is a sin to be disobedient in the church, and it is a sin to relinquish the place of headship in the family. One must thoroughly deal with the Lord concerning such a sin and confess his sin.

that we bear the responsibility of our brothers, but He demands that we bear the responsibility of our children. When we stand before the judgment seat, those without a family will only be judged for their own lives. Similarly, the sisters will only be judged for their own lives. But those who have a family and children will not be judged merely for their own lives, but for their household as well. Whether or not we have actually assumed the headship, God still considers us as the head of our family. This is the difference between the male and female in the family. The male bears the responsibility of his wife as well as the whole family.

...In my observation, the brothers who are the proper head in their family always find their whole family saved. The only difference is in the timing; some in the family believe earlier while others believe later. But none in the family remains an unbeliever forever. It is always a household salvation; the whole family is saved eventually. All the brothers who are the head in their family should stand firm in this matter. First bring the whole family into a saved standing, and then every member will be saved one after another....

Confessing the Sin of Neglecting to Be the Head

What should a man do if he has given up the headship to a woman? First, before the Lord, he must know the reason that he has allowed her to become the head. He has to confess his sin of neglecting to be the head. It is a sin to instigate rebellion in a nation. It is a sin to be disobedient in the church, and it is a sin to relinquish the place of headship in the family. One must thoroughly deal with the Lord concerning such a sin and confess his sin.

Being Firm in Attitude, Acting in Wisdom, and Earning Respect from the Wife

...A person must pray much and ask God to give him strength. Paul told the Corinthians that women should not speak in the meetings, and that they should ask their husbands at home if they wanted to learn anything (1 Cor. 14:34-35). The husband refers to those who can assume headship. If your wife asks you something at home, are you able to answer her? Today many sisters are better than their husbands. If Paul were to write again today, I am afraid that he may have to tell the husbands to go home to ask their wives! If you are not proper before the Lord, you will not be able to act as a head in a proper way. One cannot force his way to be a head; one is a head spontaneously. You have to reclaim your lost position. You cannot say that you are not smart and therefore cannot be the head. You may not be as smart as your wife, but do you believe in James's promise? James said, "But if any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and does not reproach, and it will be given to him" (1:5). I fully believe that you will receive, but you have to ask of God. It is useless to put on an air of authority at home. You have to be firm in your attitude, meek in spirit, and act in wisdom so that you can earn your wife's respect.

Choosing God for the Children, and Not Provoking Them to Anger

In a family, in addition to the wife, there is another group of people who are hard to deal with—the children. How should we deal with our children? First we have to choose God for them. Freedom of religion can be practiced only after they have moved away from home. As long as they are at home, we have to choose their faith for them. We have to be firm in our attitude on the one hand and gentle on the other hand. The mistake that fathers often make toward their children is provoking them to anger. Ephesians 6:4 says that the fathers should not provoke their children to anger. As the head we have the authority, but

we must not provoke our children to anger. Except for Colossians 3, this is the only place in the Bible that teaches how to be a father. It is easy to be a father foolishly, but exercising authority and firmly dealing with children is not that easy; the children can easily rebel. This is why we must learn.

Being a Pattern, Nurturing Up the Children

Ephesians 6:4 also mentions nurturing. This means bringing up someone....The Bible says that we should "bring up" our children with the Lord's Word. This means that the fathers have to take the lead in the teachings and the Word of God. Many fathers do not bring up their children; they hope that their children will not do certain things, yet they do the same things themselves. This is sending up; this is not bringing up. Asking your children to follow your teachings while not practicing them yourself will not work. You have to bring them up until they are grown up. You have to be their pattern. Whatever you want them to be, you must first be yourself. This is the way to deal with children. (Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Set Two, Volume 42, pp. 262-274)

APPLICATION

God has ordained the headship of a family to be of central importance in obtaining the blessing of salvation to that family. God has placed the husband as the head of his own household. If a man does not learn to exercise his proper position in the family, the family will suffer greatly.

Suggestions for our consideration:

1. How can a husband properly exercise his position as head in relation to his wife?
2. How can a father properly exercise his position as head in relation to his children?

PARENTHOOD is a free paper published monthly to strengthen the function of parents according to the vision in the Lord's recovery. We primarily use the writings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. All excerpts from materials published by the Living Stream Ministry are used by permission. Direct all inquiries and requests to:

Gary Kaiser
P.O. Box 1684,
Orangevale, CA 95662

PARENTHOOD

a divine stewardship

Volume 3 Issue 5

May, 1998

On Exercising Headship in the Family

In this issue of PARENTHOOD, we continue with the third article in our series relating to the impact which the marriage relationship has upon child rearing. The relationship between the father and mother is the single most influential factor in the growth of their children. In that relationship, the husband must accept the responsibility of being the head of his wife and of his household, and the wife must do her best to support her husband in carrying out his responsibility.

Brother Watchman Nee writes of the husbands, "God wants them to bear the responsibility of their house. We must not only be a good Christian, but must also be a good head. Those who do not have a family should first have the qualifications for being the head. Otherwise, they are not qualified to be a husband. Every father and husband must know how to deal with his own family. Once the male becomes loose in a family, the female will assume the headship. Our nation has a president and a vice-president. If the president does not do a proper job, the vice-president will have to take his place. Hence, husbands and fathers must learn to assume the headship in the family. They cannot be too lazy or allow their wives to seize any opportunity to become the head.

"Every male must learn to be a strong head. They should not be cruel, heartless, or severe. But if God has charged them to be the head, they should be proper heads. It is good for husbands to love their wives. But if they love them so much that they allow them to become the head, they have gone beyond God's boundary. A question that may arise is what a husband should do when the wife does not abide in her place. The real issue is that the husband must assume the headship. If he does not assume the headship, the woman will naturally become the head. A woman becomes the head because the man has given her the ground. Is the ground in your family vacant or occupied?"

May the Lord grant us a clear understanding of His divine economy for the raising up of children under the care of couples who live according to His arrangement and ordination with the proper headship family by family.