

A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD



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The title of this book has become a popular theme and has been discussed many times in churches today, especially in light of the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Some churches make this topic their monthly theme, some regard it as their annual theme, but there are quite a number of those who consider it as an important theme to be delivered at this end of time since its principal discussion includes the development of various aspects in the life of God's people whose efforts are to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The writer is certain that we, as parents, without doubt love our family,

especially our children. In the process of raising children, we would regularly pay attention and closely observe the development and growth of our children in various aspects, such as the social, emotional, academic, and religious aspects of their lives from childhood to adulthood. We will explore them one by one.

Social Aspect

When our child was a baby, we would watch him to find out whether he was able to articulate certain sounds or utter words, and then when he was able to articulate sounds like "ngeh, neh, erth, huh and uh," we were happy, especially when he could call us, "Daddy!

Mommy!" Wow, how delighted we were!

As the child grows older, we would want to know whether he is able to make friends, socialize, chat, joke, collaborate and play

with his friends. Likewise, when he meets someone older, we would also observe his behavior and probably instruct him, "Come on, greet the older person by shaking his hand," and when the child is able to do so, we will be pleased and even feel proud of our child. We conclude that the social aspect of our children has developed well.

Emotional Aspect

Aside from the social aspect, we pay attention to the emotional aspect of our children. That is why we often tease babies so that they would laugh. When our child laughs, we feel happy. A child's laughter is a pleasant thing to enjoy, from which we could also observe the emotional aspect of the child.

On one hand, we consider a child's tendency to cry as a good thing because it

shows that the child is developing emotionally. On the other hand, several parents worry if their child cries too often. Of course, what would be more worrying is when our child never cries or never laughs. We would consider this situation as a bigger concern than a child who often cries.

Likewise, if the child seemed to be a bit fearful, we still deem that as a good emotional development, although of course we will teach and explain to him that he does not need to be afraid whenever he faces a situation or problem and that he can tell us what frightens him. These are emotional aspects that we consider as good.

Academic Aspect

Following the emotional aspect, we also note the academic aspect of our child. We would

like to know if our child is doing well in school, we observe his level of intelligence and pay attention to the grades he gets—whether good or poor. Sometimes we also have to scold and reprimand our child, if he becomes negligent in performing his academic duties and activities. The important moment arrives when our children finishes college education and graduates. We as parents would as much as possible attend the Graduation Day. The inauguration of our son or daughter is often regarded as a sign and a proof that we as parents have managed to educate and raise our child well.

Religious Aspect

Beside these three aspects, there is another aspect which actually is not less important. This aspect has to do with our

belief. Do we give time and pay attention to the religious aspect of our children? We should be more focused on this matter because the religious aspect is very important in the development and growth of our children's spiritual life as a Christian family.

Luke 1:13-17 NKJV describes one aspect relating to the religious aspect of our children:

Luk 1:13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

1:14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

1:15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

1:16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

1:17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

Indeed, if we read at a glance, the verses above relate to the birth of John the Baptist, but if we read verse 17, we find that the word of God states **"make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** And making ready a people prepared for the Lord is especially closely related to the process of religious education in the family by parents to their children.

The complete wording of *Luke 1:17* states: *He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'*

The First Coming of the Lord Jesus

If we take a close look at the verse, we will find two important things:

The first is to make ready a people prepared for the Lord with regard to the first coming of the Lord Jesus. This passage explained that John the Baptist was to be born earlier than the Lord Jesus, and one of the tasks assigned to him was to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The second is to make ready a people prepared for the Lord with regard to fathers, where it stated that John the Baptist would make the hearts of fathers turn to their children. What does this mean? In other words, this task must start from the family as the smallest part of the community and that fathers should play a role in observing the behavior and developing the spirituality of their children. Why was the

phrase, *"to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children"* stated or mentioned here?

The Failure of the People of Israel

The above phrase actually has to do with preparing the spirituality of children as commanded by the Lord, but unfortunately the people of Israel failed to do so. If we observe in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, it clearly says that God commanded the Israelites to teach their children so that they become His people.

Deut 6:6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

6:7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

6:8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

6:9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

These commands were delivered by Moses before he passed away, and we know that the Israelites failed to carry out this commandment of the Lord. The Israelites did not only fail during the days of Jesus, but also much earlier, in the Old Testament times. After the death of Joshua, these commands were never performed anymore because--as described in the book of Judges--the Israelites began to worship idols.

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus

If the passage above relates to the first coming of the Lord Jesus, why is it that preparing a people for the Lord is an important theme in connection with the second coming of

the Lord Jesus? It turned out that the verse in Luke 1:17 is also found in Malachi 4:5-6.

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

:6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

The writer believes that Malachi 4:5-6 relates to the second coming of Jesus. The statement written in Luke 1:17 relates to the first coming of the Lord Jesus, but the statement written in Malachi 4:5-6 relates to the second coming of Jesus. Why is that?

First, in Malachi 4:5 it is said, "*the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.*" These words are not related to the first coming of the Lord Jesus.

Let us compare this with verses relating to the first coming of the Lord Jesus:

*Mat 1:23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name **Immanuel,**” which is translated, “**God with us.**”*

*Luke 2:10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of **great joy which will be to all people.***

The first coming of the Lord Jesus was described as a joyful occasion, while his second coming was portrayed as something terrible and awful.

*Matthew 24:27 For as **the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west,** so also will **the coming of the Son of Man be.***

28 For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

29 *“Immediately after **the tribulation** of those days **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.***

30 *Then **the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with **power and great glory.*****

31 *And He will send His angels with **a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.***

Second, if in Luke it is only said, *“to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children”*, in Malachi 4:6 two things are mentioned on a reciprocal basis, namely: *“to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”*

Nowadays the task of performing the commands of God, proclaiming the truth, continuing the tradition, guiding, nurturing, and protecting children, relatives and parents

in the family are not only done by parents towards children, but can also be done by children towards their parents.

If we observe at the Old Testament, all tasks related to salvation were usually performed by the older generation, by parents to children. For example, the circumcision of a child at the age of 8 days was the duty of his parents. So it was with God's commands in Deuteronomy 6:6-9. But in this paragraph, we read about the efforts done by a younger generation to an older generation.

Such a relationship is recorded in the New Testament, among others, in Acts 16:19-40, a passage that described about Paul and Silas being arrested and then shackled in strong stocks. At midnight while they prayed and praised God, there was a great earthquake that opened all the prison doors. Supposing all the

prisoners had fled, the keeper of the prison drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

But Paul called, *"Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!"* Later, the keeper of the prison said to Paul and Silas, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* And they answered, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."* The words *"you and your household"* refer to the keeper of the prison and his entire family.

In 1 Corinthians 7:16 the apostle Paul affirmed,

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?

Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Two Cases in the Family of the Writer

Such cases were experienced by the writer twice. **The first case** had to do with the writer's father. The writer's biological father had been baptized when he was young, but later

on he did not want to go to church. However, Papa still allowed us—his children—to go to church, even though sometimes he did not allow us to be too active. But unfortunately Papa forbade Mama to go to church.

So we, his children, kept on praying that Papa would be willing to go to church and also allow Mama to go to church. And it turned out that God opened a way. Papa got ill and two or three months before he passed away, Papa was willing to go to church again and even allowed Mama to go to church so that they could worship together.

The second case was the writer's father-in-law, who had never wanted to go to church and never had the will to accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior. We, as his children, often persuaded and sometimes even invited him to go to church and so forth. He would sometimes be

willing to go to church, but he stated that he went to church just because his children wanted him to. His heart devotion was towards his gods whom he worshipped, because he was a follower of another religion. At last, when Father-in-law was taken care in the hospital, the writer's sister-in-law tried to remind him again of salvation through our Lord Jesus, but Papa did not accept that, instead he got very mad and scolded sister-in-law fiercely. We who were all present were very surprised to find him greatly angered even though his body was sick.

However, we continued to pray, and amazingly about one week before Papa died, he was willing to accept the Lord Jesus. The incident occurred when he was going to be attached to a ventilator (breathing aid

engine). The writer's wife told the writer, "Come on, evangelize him once again."

Frankly the writer himself was a bit reluctant because not long before that sister-in-law was scolded in great anger, but the writer's wife said that that may be the last chance, as many patients who were attached to a ventilator, never woke up anymore.

Finally, the writer came to him, the writer held his hand, "Pa, Papa must believe in the Lord Jesus." And the writer's father-in-law who was not able to speak anymore nodded several times. The writer was surprised and could not believe the response he got. Because the writer was still unsure, the writer continued, "Papa should be willing to be baptized" and he nodded again. The writer was still not sure whether he really believed Jesus and wanted to be baptized, therefore the writer repeated once

again and the answer remained the same. But, the writer was worried whether or not he really understood what had been communicated to him so eventually the writer contacted and requested a servant of God who can speak Mandarin to talk directly with him. And it turned out that he really understood and was willing to accept the Lord Jesus and then was baptized.

That was why our family finally agreed to quote the verse *“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household”* both on the newspaper and on the tombstone of the deceased.

So what is the conclusion?

The writer believes that what had been done by all the writer's father and father-in-law's children were implementations of Malachi 4:6, *“he will turn the hearts of the children to their fathers.”*

What About Our Preparation?

Back to Malachi 4:5. This verse relates to the Lord Jesus' second coming. That is why we need to prepare ourselves for His return. In what ways and how can we prepare ourselves?

We can study and discuss the commands of God to the people of Israel as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

4 *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!*

5 *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

6 *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.*

7 *You shall **teach them diligently** to your children, and shall **talk of them** when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:7 says that we must teach God's commands to our children repeatedly, and then talk about them when we are sitting at home, when we are lying down, when we are awake. We do not only have to proclaim them over and over, we have to declare them at every opportunity. We discuss God's commands not only during family worship, but every time we find a chance to do that. We even have to talk about God's commands while we are in our journey.

The writer had done this when the writer took his children on a vacation. At that time, our family were in one car and indeed the writer preferred to teach children while in a

car. At that time the writer has agreed with his wife that in that holiday, we would discuss more spiritual matters, which were related to two things. **The first** was whether they understood that salvation is only in the Lord Jesus. **Second,** the writer must be sure that they had already received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

So during the holidays, the writer discussed those topics. There were questions and answers and the writer was happy to learn that they had not only gone to Sunday school since they were very small, but the writer was sure that they had also accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Discussing the Sermon After the Service

Reading, listening, and practicing the word of God is a package that cannot be

separated, especially while attending a worship service on Sunday. But often times, after the service is over, we do not contemplate on nor discuss it that in the end we forget it like a passing wind.

In the writer's family, we have and practice a different habit. When the writer's second child was still unmarried, we usually went to church together as a family. So, the writer, the wife of the writer, the writer's eldest daughter with her husband, then the writer's son with his future wife, and if by chance the writer's youngest daughter was also around, we would always go to the same church at the same time.

Why do we have to go together?

Because usually after the service, on the way home, we discuss the content of the sermon delivered, whether it is in accordance to the

Bible or not. This does not mean that we are dubious, but according to the writer, we should study and discuss every sermon, and that is what we always do. The writer would also like to hear the family members' comments to find out whether they understand the sermon or not.

Verse 8 stated, *"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."* So the Israelites literally wrap around their arms and put on their foreheads such signs.



There are those who interpreted that the Israelites made loops around their arms and hands because at that time not many people have

a copy of God's word. There were not many printed materials, so they made copies of it on a piece of leather that they can always carry around, and this served as a sign to remind them. But after the writer tried to study these verses, the writer believed that the signs wrapped around their arms and hands and the frontlets between the eyes did not only have a literal meaning, they had deeper meaning in them.

First, the words *"bind them as a sign on your hand"* do not just have a literal meaning. They have a broader meaning, in that they symbolize the work of our hands or our **livelihood**. This verse explains that our work to earn a living or what we earn through our hands should be in accordance with the word of God. So our income **must be from the type of business or employment**

in accordance with the word of God and done also in accordance with the word of God.

Second, the "*frontlets between your eyes*" is about **our thoughts,** and that should also be in accordance with the word of God. What is in our mind is usually manifested through our words. **So, what is in our mind, what we say, all must be in accordance with God's word.**

Then, **the third** is "*you shall write them on the doorposts of your house.*" Some Christian families love to decorate their house with ornaments or verse placards and there is nothing wrong with that. But "*the doorposts of your house*" refers to our household, what is going on inside our house, that is **our family life,** and this should also be a family life conducted according to the word of God. Our family should be run according to biblical principles. Our Christianity is not just something that is performed or practiced

in church only, or in Christian groups, but especially within the family so that outsiders and insiders can feel that this is a true Christian family, a family that is based on the Word.

The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:2 and 3 said, *"You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart."*

And **the fourth** is *"on your gates."* We know that in ancient Israel the gate was a community gathering place. So this phrase refers to the law that when we socialize with our community, we have to present and demonstrate our Christian lifestyle and thoughts to them. Therewith people can identify through our behavior, our speech and our actions, that we are Christians.

Christianity should be practiced openly in the presence of others or in the community so that people can see it clearly. Basically, Deuteronomy 6:7-9 is composed of two parts. Deuteronomy 6:7 is associated with **what we say** ("*teach*" , "*talk*"), while Deuteronomy 6:8-9 relates to **what we do** ("*bind*" , "*write*"). It means that we have to educate our children **not just with words, but also through our deeds**. As a child of God we do not just understand the word of God, but the main thing is that we are also **doers of the Word**.

Responsibilities of Father and Mother

In 2 Timothy 1:5, the apostle Paul expressed something related to Timothy, "*I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.*"

This means that Timothy had the same sincere faith that his mother and grandmother had. And that showed that Timothy was educated by his mother, as well as by his grandmother. Thus, this verse explains that faith education or spirituality of children is not solely the task of a father; a mother also carries the same responsibility.

If our children have participated in Sunday school, we must realize that we should never assume that the task of educating children spiritually has been given over to or has been done by a Sunday School teacher that we need not to be responsible on that matter. No, it is also still our main task and thus later we will be held accountable in regard to this obligation.

God Was About To Kill Moses

Moses' negligence in educating and preparing his children had a fatal impact against Moses. Moses was almost killed by the Lord, because he was negligent over the circumcision of his sons.

We know that after Moses killed an Egyptian, he fled to Midian. One day while tending sheep in Horeb, Moses saw a bush burning, but not scorched. It was God revealing Himself to Moses, and assigning him to bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. This was recorded in Exodus 3:10 where the Lord said, *"Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."*

Then Moses took his family, his wife and children, left the land of Midian to go to Egypt, but Exodus 4:24-26 said,

24 And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him.

25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!" 26 So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!"—because of the circumcision.

In verse 24, God was about to kill Moses because he neglected to circumcise his son. Why was it considered a big mistake that God sought to kill him?

We know that in the Old Testament time, circumcision is the epitome of someone being God's people so that when the child has not been circumcised, then the child was not considered as God's people, and God considered this as a great mistake that God was about to kill Moses.

Therefore, as parents, we must pay attention or convince ourselves by checking

repeatedly whether our children have become the people of God or not. We can not make the busy work or service as a reason for neglecting this important matter. In the case of Moses, when was God about to kill Moses? Was before or after God commissioned Moses? The incident occurred after the Lord had commissioned him. So these verses explain that we should never neglect what has become our duties and obligations as parents.

If we love our children, then making sure that our children have received the Lord Jesus as their Savior is the most obvious manifestation of our greatest love as parents for our children. So if we truly love our children, then we have to bring them to God and make sure they are truly children of God.

Not Just Preparing Children

Making ready a people prepared for the Lord is not solely focused on our children, but includes improving our own spiritual life. Beside preparing our children, we must prepare ourselves, because we ourselves must be a people prepared for the Lord. We do not merely speak or understand the Word, we must be doers of the Word, because in James 2:26 it is stated,

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

This means that if we do not study the Word and become doers of the Word, if we do not do the written Word, then our faith is actually dead and if our faith is dead, then we would not become a people prepared for the Lord.