

How to Become a Denomination or The Danger of Insisting

The last part of Romans portrays the practical church life. Embedded in this section is a serious warning that, if not heeded, will lead us to denominationalism. This is the matter of how we receive one another.

Brother Lee was very concerned about this. He wrote, *“To practice the Body life... we must learn the practical lessons of receiving the believers... that the church life may be all-inclusive, able to include all kinds of genuine Christians. Such receiving requires the transformation... if we remain natural, we will be unable to receive those whose views are different from ours in doctrine or in practice”* (RcV. FN, Rom 14:1₂).

Note his concern that we receive those who differ from us in “doctrine or in practice.” He uses the same phrase in the following quote: *“Those whom God and Christ have received we must receive, regardless of how they differ from us in doctrine or practice. This will be to the glory of God.”* (RcV. FN, Rom 15:7₁)

In still another place he says, *“The basis on which we receive the believers is that God has received them... When a person receives God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as his Savior, God receives that person immediately... We should receive people in the same way and should not be more narrow than God. Regardless of how much they differ from us in doctrinal concepts or religious practices, we must receive them. When we receive people according to God and not according to doctrine or practice, we demonstrate and maintain the oneness of the Body of Christ.”* (RcV. FN, Rom 14:3₂)

Brother Lee stood with the Bible. We should not add tests for fellowship that would demand uniformity in either doctrine or practice. To do so would destroy “the oneness of the Body of Christ.” He says, *“If we are unclear about receiving the believers, we shall damage the church life and cut it into pieces... If we are not careful about receiving the saints, the church will be mutilated.”* (LS Romans #28, pp 329-330)

The Biblical Test

Romans 14:1, 3b says that we should receive everyone that God receives. *“Now him who is weak in faith receive, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his considerations... for God has received him.”*

Romans 15:7 says that we should receive everyone that Christ has received. *“Therefore receive one another, as Christ also received you to the glory of God.”*

Brother Lee summarized this Biblical test for fellowship when he said, *“We must receive him because God has received him (Rom. 14:3) and because Christ has received him (Rom. 15:7). We must receive every believer in Christ according to Christ (Rom. 15:5).”* (Elder's Training – Book 10, p. 123)

A Warning!

Paul here adds a solemn warning: add any other requirement and there is grave danger that your brother may be “wounded.” You may even “destroy...that man for whom Christ died.” (Rom 14:15) Instead of building your brother up, you may “break down the work of God” in him. (Rom 14:20)

Brother Lee says, *“In all saved persons there is a measure of God's work. If we cause any one of the believers to stumble because of our doctrinal concepts, we break down, destroy, God's work of grace in him.”* (RcV. FN, Rom 14:20₁)

He goes on to say, *"In all saved persons there is an amount of God's work. God has called and saved them. God has done at least this much divine work in them. If we cause any of the believers to stumble by our doctrinal concepts, we break down, destroy, God's work of grace in him. We should take care of God's work, not our doctrinal concepts. All of our religious practices must be cast aside for the sake of God's work of grace in others."* (LS Romans #29, p. 349)

Brother Lee also applies this warning corporately. He says, *"In Romans 14 we are given a warning. If we do not take heed to this warning, we shall use doctrine as a knife to cut in pieces the very Body revealed in chapter twelve."* (LS Romans #28, p 333) What could be more clear? The saints agree with this teaching; they say "Amen" to it. Yet is this practiced in the local churches today? In many cases the answer is "No!"

Lines in the Sand

Today there are many unnecessary issues among us affecting the saints' attitude toward one another. Lines have been drawn in the sand regarding such controversial items as "one publication," "one Minister of the Age," "one wise Master builder supervising God's building work on the entire globe," "one global company of co-workers," "attending the seven annual feasts," using only "The Holy Word for Morning Revival," among other things. Some among us agree with these new demands, others do not. What should we do? In some places, saints have been refused entry to the Lord's Table because they don't endorse "one publication!" Don't these saints know the truth? Haven't they read Brother Lee's exposition of Romans?

We must be as large as God is. Has He received those who disagree with us? If so, we have no right to refuse them. We cannot demand that they see things our way. To insist is to break down the work of God, to divide the body of Christ.

The Baptists insist on baptism by immersion, and this stand divides them from other believers who disagree on this point. This insistence makes them a denomination. The same can be said for the Presbyterians who insist on a church governed by local elders, and for Pentecostals who insist on a second blessing as evidenced by speaking in tongues. We would never allow anyone among us to insist on head covering as a test for fellowship, yet it along with baptism by immersion, local eldership, and speaking in tongues are all found in the New Testament. How much more would we denominate ourselves if we insist on items—like those listed above--which have scarcely any Biblical foundation whatever!

Brother Lee asks, *"Do you know how to determine whether or not a particular Christian group is a sect? One way to determine this is to check whether or not that group receives all real believers in Christ. For example, suppose a brother in the Lord who is a Roman Catholic priest attends our Lord's table meeting. We certainly would receive him because he is our brother in Christ. However, any group that does not receive all true believers is a sect and is not practicing the fellowship of the apostles."* (Life Study of Acts, Message 12, p. 94)

The Blurred Distinction between "The Ministry" and "The local church"

Many of these damaging issues originated from "The Blended Co-workers." They are surely aware of the scriptural truth concerning receiving the believers. They have certainly read Brother Lee's warning, *"If we are unclear about receiving the believers, we shall damage the church life and cut it into pieces... If we are not careful about receiving the saints, the church will be mutilated."* (LS Romans #28, pp 329-330). Yet, in the name of "the ministry" it appears they wish to override the local church, trample underfoot the scriptural truth about receiving believers, and produce a denomination. Take as an example the "one publication" issue.

The “Blended Co-workers” charge that “all the saints and all the churches everywhere should...be restricted in one publication in the Lord’s recovery.” Yet, we are also told: *“One publication is not a matter of the common faith but something related to the one ministry in the Lord’s recovery. The ministry is the sounding of the trumpet among us in the Lord’s recovery, and there should be no uncertain sounding of this trumpet, as Brother Lee has mentioned on a number of occasions. However, the one publication should not become the basis of our accepting or rejecting any persons in the communion of faith or in the fellowship of the churches; it should not be insisted on as an item of the faith. If any are not inclined to be restricted in one publication, these ones are still our brothers; they are still in the genuine local churches.”* (*Publication Work in the Lord’s Recovery*, p. 8-9)

A fundamental problem here is the blurred distinction between “the ministry” and the “local church.”¹ Certainly all the saints are in the local church. Are they also in “the ministry”? The answer is “No.” Brother Nee clearly taught that “the ministry” is the sphere of the specially-gifted members; it is not the sphere of all the saints.² Based upon brother Nee’s teaching, we ask: Since the “Blended co-workers” acknowledge that *“One publication is...related to the one ministry,”* why is this issue being thrust upon all the saints? Brother Lee addressed this matter to the elders, not the saints.³

The resulting turmoil and confusion among the saints in the churches shows that they are not clear at all. Why? Because they are being forced by the “Blended co-workers” to decide questions which are beyond them. As saints in the local church, they shouldn’t be confronted with such issues. Yet, they are being asked to decide such questions as: Is “one publication” a matter of the ministry but not of the local church life? Does the “common faith” only apply in certain situations, while tests beyond that apply elsewhere? Are those not “restricted in one publication” of a lower class of believer, and those churches who use something other than *The Holy Word for Morning Revival* a lower class of church? Are such brothers and churches to be despised? Are they off the mark or “out of the flow?” Will fellowship with them “poison” me? Should I avoid them? Are they “merely in the local church,” yet “not in the Body?” The “Blended Co-workers” have blurred the distinction between “the ministry” and the “local churches,” and this has brought all these divisive issues into the church-life.

Unscriptural teachings such as “one publication,” one unique “Minister of the Age” and “Wise Master Builder who is the acting God,” one global band of co-workers, have been thrust upon the local church saints in the name of “the Ministry” and “the Body.”

Unscriptural teachings under the banner of “the Ministry” are being used to “trump” the direct Scriptural teachings concerning the local church’s receiving of all believers. This has resulted in confusion. Yet, *“the ministry...and the churches are quite different in function and sphere”* (W. Nee). The regular saints belong to the sphere of the local church and not the sphere of “the ministry.” Knowing this distinction, the saints should “just say ‘No!’” to all the issues that are being thrust upon them by the “Blended Coworkers.”

Practical Considerations

These are not theoretical questions. The answers affect our fellowship around both the Lord’s table and our dining tables. Many saints among us today have developed a judging attitude toward their fellow brothers and sisters in their own church and in neighboring churches. A brother or church that does not seem to “conform to the program” is seen as substandard. It is assumed that there is something wrong. Suspicion reigns. Fellowship is broken. Churches and families are divided.

In this same section of Romans, Paul writes, *“Who are you who judge another’s household servant? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will be made to stand,*

for the Lord is able to make him stand... But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God... Therefore let us judge one another no longer, but rather judge this: not to put a stumbling block or cause of falling before your brother.” (Romans 14:4, 10, 13)

Brother Lee would never have tolerated such an attitude. He said, *“When such people argue for their concepts, they think that they are fighting for the truth of God. Actually, they are frustrating God’s move in the building of the Body of Christ. No doctrinal concept should be our ground in receiving the believers. The only ground for us to receive the believers is God’s receiving.” (LS Romans #28, p. 334)* *“We need to receive the believers in the principle of love. ...If we receive the believers in love, we shall not judge others, not put stumbling blocks before them, not grieve the brothers, not destroy the man for whom Christ died, but rather walk according to love. We must receive in the principle of love all the believers for whom Christ died.” (LS Romans #29, p. 343)* *“When you are about to receive the saints, you must realize that the saints are not to be received according to your doctrinal concepts or religious practices...” (LS Romans #29, p. 347)*

One Accord vs. Uniformity

Brother Lee writes, *“Can we be in one accord if we have differences? The answer to this question is ‘yes.’ We must be in one accord in spite of the differences. Both in the Gospels and in Acts, we are taught to be in one accord (Matt. 18:19; Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25; Rom. 15:6). Some would say that we must get rid of all the differences among the believers in order to be in one accord, but this is only to make everything uniform.” (The Practice of the Church Life According to the God-ordained Way, pp. 37)* *“In the New Testament churches, there were many differences. In Romans 14 Paul said that we must receive both those who regard a certain day and those who do not (vv. 1, 5-6a). Paul said that we must receive the believers who may differ from us in their doctrinal concepts or religious practices because God and Christ have received them (14:3; 15:7). Since both God and Christ have received them, how can we not receive them? Paul said that some ate only vegetables, while others ate all things (Rom. 14:2-3). We must receive both because God and Christ have received them. In receiving the believers, Paul was very broad and liberal. He was not narrow-minded.” (The Practice of the Church Life According to the God-ordained Way, pp. 37-38),*

The Danger of Sectarianism

Brother Lee asks a very important question: *“Do you know how to determine whether or not a particular Christian group is a sect? One way to determine this is to check whether or not that group receives all real believers in Christ. For example, suppose a brother in the Lord who is a Roman Catholic priest attends our Lord’s table meeting. We certainly would receive him because he is our brother in Christ. However, any group that does not receive all true believers is a sect and is not practicing the fellowship of the apostles.” (LS Acts #12, p. 94)* Brother Lee was even stronger when he said, *“...we must receive all kinds of genuine believers, not according to anything of ourselves but according to Christ. We must receive them because they have Christ; Christ is in them. If a church does not receive all kinds of genuine believers, it is divisive and becomes a sect.” (Elder’s Training – Book 10, p. 123)*

Brother Benson Phillips, in his Forward to Brother Lee’s classic work *The Speciality, Generality, and Practicality of the Church Life*, agreed when he wrote, *“When the Body of Christ is divided, it loses everything; yet it has been divided again and again, mainly due to the over-emphasis of certain beliefs other than those comprising the faith. Beliefs other than those comprising the faith have much disagreement and disputation. These*

beliefs may even become winds of teaching (Eph. 4:14) blowing us away from the oneness of the faith (Eph. 4:13). Concerning the faith we must be very specific and particular (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 6:12); however, concerning the other things we must follow Paul's example and be general, never insisting that others believe as we do (Rom. 14:1-8). To possess such a spirit of generality is the generality of the church life. If we are special and insist on anything other than the common faith, the oneness will surely be damaged, and divisions will occur."

Where Are We Today?

Today we must take special heed of Brother Lee's warning. Will we continue to insist on unbiblical practices outside the common faith? Will we continue to sow the seeds of suspicion and division among the saints? Will we foster an atmosphere of judging or of receiving? Will we build up or tear down? Will we continue to "destroy that man for whom Christ died," or create an atmosphere of receiving in love? Many true believers who might otherwise come the way of the church life will reject us if we fail to reconsider our practice in these matters. We are in grave danger of becoming, in Brother Lee's own words, "a sect" of Christianity, because we will have created issues that make us narrow in the matter of receiving the believers. In Brother Benson's words, "*If we are special and insist on anything other than the common faith, the oneness will surely be damaged, and divisions will occur.*" May the Lord have mercy.

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NOTES:

1. While W. Nee emphasized that the ministry, the work and the local churches are not separate (since all are one Body), he also emphasized **the need to distinguish between them**. "So, the ministry, the work and the churches are **quite different in function and sphere**, but they are really coordinated and interrelated....They are really one; so while **it is necessary to distinguish between them**....we cannot really separate them." [W. Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, p. 186] (see also fn. 3 below)
2. God "*has chosen a number of men for a special ministry—the ministry of the Word for the building up of the Body of Christ....we refer to it as "the ministry."* This ministry is entrusted to a group of people of whom the apostles are chief. It is neither a one-man ministry, nor an "all-men" ministry....**Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are our Lord's gifts to His Church to serve in the ministry.**" [W. Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, p. 8] "**The prophets and teachers (and shepherds and evangelists)...plus the apostles...constitute the ministry.**" [W. Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, p. 184]
3. Brother Lee **addressed the elders**, saying, "*..this message does not say "no uncertain sounding in the Lord's recovery," but in the Lord's ministry."* I am not talking about something in the Lord's recovery, but **I am talking about the ministry.**" [W. Lee, *One Accord for the Lord's Move*, Elders' Training Book 7, p. 80] He said, further, "*I am not talking about the churches, I am talking about the ministry. The ministry is one thing, and the churches are another thing. These two things can be differentiated in the Epistles written by Paul.*" [W. Lee, *One Accord for the Lord's Move*, Elders' Training Book 7, p. 82] The "Blended Co-workers" writing, "Publication Work..." was **not** addressed to the elders (who could make the distinction between ministry & churches), it was addressed and distributed to the saints in the local churches.