

ASSAILING THE GROUND OF ONENESS (5): GOD'S CHOICE VERSUS DOING WHAT IS RIGHT IN OUR OWN EYES

The story of Cain and Abel, the first two sons of Adam and Eve, establishes an important principle that the worship of God should not be according to man's thought but according to God's revelation (Gen. 4:3-8). Abel offered a lamb according to God's revelation, but Cain offered the fruit of the work of his own hands. Since that time men have time and again supplanted God's ordained way of worship with their own thoughts and intentions. In Deuteronomy 12 God extended this principle to the place in which He desired to receive worship. He charged Israel to bring their offerings to Jerusalem and not to follow the nations in establishing worship centers according to their own convenience and preference. Today the New Testament pattern stands in stark contrast to the common practice of going to the "church of your choice." However, according to the Bible, God has exercised His own choice in establishing the place where He has put His name. And it is uniquely the place of God's choice that manifests and preserves the oneness of the Body of Christ.

Doing What Is Right in One's Own Eyes Versus Returning to the Unique Place of God's Choice

Both the Old and New Testaments bear witness that God has placed His name in the unique place of His choice. In Deuteronomy 12 Jehovah established a statute regarding the worship of the children of Israel when they entered the promised land: "But to the place which Jehovah your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name, to His habitation, shall you seek, and there shall you go" (v. 5). As Witness Lee said, "God's name denotes His person. For His name to be in a particular place means that His person dwells in that place. This indicates that the unique place of God's choice was God's dwelling place, God's habitation" (*The Genuine Ground of Oneness*, 42). Jehovah followed this statute with a warning, "Be careful that you do not offer up your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which Jehovah will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer up your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you" (v. 13-14). Repeatedly, in Deuteronomy 12—16 God speaks of the unique place of His choice, indicating its importance.

Before designating a unique place where He would put His name, God commanded the children of Israel to remove all the places of worship set up by the Canaanites. Jehovah declared, "You shall completely destroy all the places where the nations whom you will dispossess have served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every flourishing tree" (12:2). This verse speaks of the religious practice of establishing centers of worship according to the worshiper's own concept, preference, and choice, a matter of each man doing what was "right in his own eyes" (v. 8). Establishing centers of worship according to one's own preference and choice violates God's clear and direct command and damages God's testimony on the earth. Jehovah's condemnation of man exercising his own choice in the worship of God is clear: "You shall not do so to Jehovah your God" (v. 4).

Against this backdrop Jehovah revealed His own choice in establishing the unique place, Jerusalem, where He would cause His name to dwell (v. 5). It was to Jerusalem that all the tribes were required to bring their offerings to worship God. No other worship center was allowed by God, whether for the sake of convenience or preference. God's choice to establish Jerusalem as the unique place to put His name was the preserving factor of the children of Israel's oneness; however, Jeroboam's choice to establish worship center's at Dan and Bethel resulted in the division of the children of Israel and ultimately led to their captivity (1 Kings 12:26-33).

According to the New Testament, the place where God has put His name has two aspects—our human spirit (John 4:20-21, 23; Eph. 2:22) and the church (1 Tim. 3:15). We may be more familiar with the former, but the latter is equally critical. In the church age God has not left the place of the worship of God up to man's preference but still exercises His own choice in where to place His name. In 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul writes, "To the church *of God* which is in Corinth..." (1:2a). This wonderful verse indicates that the church not only belongs to God but also has God as its source and content. It is in the church *of God* that He has chosen to put His name, that is, to put His person. While the church, being *of God*, is universal according to its nature, it is also practical, having a local expression—"the church of God *which is in Corinth*." According to the pattern of the New Testament, the preservation of the oneness of God's people today is practiced on the ground of locality (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Rev. 1:11). Just as with Jerusalem, the church in a locality standing on the ground of oneness expresses the oneness of the Body of Christ in a particular place. Thus, to be in the spirit and standing on the proper ground preserves us in the oneness of the Body of Christ as a whole.

Our Lust in Exercising Our Choice Needing to Be Subdued

God has established the unique place for His worship, and any other place chosen by man is condemned by God. However, within man there is a lust, a desire to pursue one's own gratification in exercising self-choice. To take God's

choice and to set aside our choice and preference is to fear God and to recognize His supreme right to establish the manner in which He is to be worshipped (Deut. 14:23). To exercise our choice and put aside God's choice is to give ground to our lust. Concerning this Witness Lee said, "The choice of the place of worship is altogether the Lord's; it is not a matter of our preference. If we act according to our preference, we indulge our lust, for we satisfy our own desire regarding the place of worship" (*The Genuine Ground of Oneness*, 45-46). To exercise one's own choice contrary to God's expressed choice is rebellion and indulges our lust.

Accepting the limitation of the Lord's choice terminates our self-choice. If we have a clear view of the ground of the church, we cannot go to a different place when offenses or disagreements arise between us and our fellow believers. When such problems arise, we are forced to deal with the differences to be one with our brothers and sisters in the Lord (Matt. 18:15-17; Phil. 4:2; 2:2-3; Col. 3:13). According to the spiritual principle in Psalm 133, any problem that existed between Israelites had to be resolved as they went up to the feasts in Jerusalem in order to gather together in oneness and enjoy the blessing of life with God's people corporately (v. 3). To deal with such problems, we must let the peace of Christ arbitrate in the church life (Col. 3:15).

Furthermore, by accepting God's choice, we will enjoy Christ as our top portion and be kept from abusing God's grace. God required that the offerings be made in the place of His choice (Deut. 12:17, 18). The children of Israel were free to enjoy the fruit of the harvest and of their livestock at any place and at any time during the year. However, the top portion of the livestock and the harvest was to be saved and enjoyed only when the children of Israel gathered together at the place of God's choice, Jerusalem. Today, Christ is the reality of all the offerings that constitute the worship of God. If we forsake our gathering together with fellow believers on the ground of oneness, we will miss the top portion of the enjoyment of Christ and abuse the grace given to us by God. We have no right to enjoy the top portion of the grace of God according to our preference and choice. If today we do not come to the meetings of the church, we have no right, no access, to the top portion of the enjoyment of Christ as God's grace to us. Concerning this Witness Lee said,

There is a divine regulation that prohibits us from abusing God's grace. According to this regulation, we must go to the house of God, the church, to enjoy the top portion of Christ. We are required to go to the place God has chosen; we are not allowed to act according to our own choice or preference. By accepting God's choice, we are subdued and are kept from abusing His grace. (*The Genuine Ground of Oneness*, 50)

The act of establishing alternate centers for the worship of God is an abuse of the grace of God.

Attempting to Create "Unity" through Activity

Recognizing that the Bible condemns division among believers, some Christians attempt to create "unity" through activities, movements, and campaigns, including those that address particular issues. However, once the activities and meetings are concluded, all return to their respective denominations and sects. Such efforts to create Christian unity imply a recognition that Christians are divided. The methods employed are man-made attempts to "shake hands" over the denominational fences (see *Further Talks on the Church Life*, 95-102) and ultimately betray an unwillingness to destroy the divisions, the "high places," themselves. Attempting "unity" through activity is merely a means of numbing the Christian conscience's recognition that division in the Body of Christ is wrong. These attempts at creating unity fail to address the underlying reason for division in the Body of Christ—refusing to accept God's unique choice and instead maintaining the "high places" of man's preference and choice. Ultimately, such efforts cannot succeed at realizing the oneness of the Body of Christ in practicality because the ground of the denominations and sects stand in opposition to God's choice, the genuine ground of oneness.

Despite ecumenical movements, inter-denominational campaigns, and unity activities, only the ground of oneness preserves the oneness among believers. Once the campaigns and activities are over, the participants return to their respective denominations and resume their sectarian fellowship. Addressing this failure in Christianity, Brother Lee said, "Apart from the local ground, any kind of 'oneness' that is based on the same opinion is actually a division. When we are united with a group of people based on a certain opinion, we are automatically divided from other believers. Only on the local ground can there be oneness without division" (*Lessons for New Believers*, 220-221). The Scriptural corrective to the present divided situation among Christians is to forsake doing what is right in one's own eyes and to return to the unique place of God's choice, the genuine ground of oneness. In so doing we will be kept from abusing God's grace and will be subdued in our lust for our preference and choice.