

CARING FOR BOTH THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY

God's desire is to head up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). In His plan the church as the Body takes the lead to be headed up in Christ by its members holding Him as the Head and growing up into Him in all things (4:15). Upholding the headship of Christ is crucial for the building up of the Body. As Ephesians 4:15-16 shows, the Body issues from the Head: "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." On the one hand, we grow up into Christ. On the other hand, we function to supply life to one another out from the Head. Only that which is out from Christ is His Body. Whoever usurps the headship of Christ damages the Body. Brother Lee told us, "Among God's people today there should be no head other than Christ. Any head or subhead is an insult to the headship of Christ. God honors the headship of His Son to the uttermost, and He desires that we also honor the headship of Christ" (*CWWL, 1978, vol. 3, 62*).

Christ is the head of every man (1 Cor. 11:3), the head of each local church, and the Head of the Body (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). If the saints do not know Christ as their Head in their daily living, there will be no "out from whom," which means there will be no "growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Likewise, if the elders in a church do not hold the Head but administrate the church according to their natural disposition or opinion, they may take the lead in the church in name and outward form, but their administration of the church will not contribute to the building up the Body of Christ. Without the headship of Christ, our church life will be in vain and have nothing to do with the working out of God's economy to head up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10).

However, to say that there is "no head other than Christ" does not mean that there is no authority in the church other than from Christ directly. Rather, God has ordained that His authority be represented by the church and in the church by members who are one with His Son. If we claim to uphold the Lord's headship but cast aside others' fellowship, we risk falling into self-deception and obsessive self-vindication, believing that we alone know the mind of the Lord, have His leading, and honor His headship. Such is the case when fellowship or expressions of concern from other churches are condemned as "outside interference" that undermines the headship of Christ. The same is true when a brother asserts that there is an impenetrable boundary around a local church's administration and that those who function as apostles among us, who are outside of that local church's eldership, have no right to touch local matters. This insistence is hypocritical in cases where the brother who raises this objection has exerted influence over leading ones in neighboring local churches to adopt his opinions and particular courses of action.

Such accusations of "outside interference" are reminiscent of words uttered by John Ingalls in 1989. Ingalls, an elder in the church in Anaheim, was a leader in a rebellion that caused turmoil among the churches. He openly criticized Brother Lee in a church meeting, saying, "There has been much outside influence exercised upon the church which has made it very difficult to go on by getting our leading directly from the Lord." Brother Lee's response to this accusation is very enlightening and applicable today:

In the Lord's recovery we work and serve in the Body of Christ. So, in our work and service to the Lord, we are related both to the Lord as our Head and to the ones who work and serve together with us as fellow members of the Lord's Body. Hence, the New Testament teaches us to be subject not only to the Lord but also to one another in the fear of the Lord (Eph. 5:24a, 21). Thus, in the Lord's work and service, in the matter of "getting our leading directly from the Lord," we need to consider our relationship with the ones who work and serve together with us. It is hardly possible for us to receive a leading directly from the Lord without taking care of the ones with whom we work and serve. If we get our leading directly from the Lord without considering the fellow members of the Lord's Body who are laboring with us, we will surely jeopardize the oneness of the Body. We constantly need the cooperation and the coordination to keep us in a balanced situation in which we take care not only of the Lord's leading directly but also of the co-working ones' realization. On the other hand, when we take care of the co-working ones' realization, we should also seek the Lord's leading directly. This way of balance is the safe way and the proper way to save us from being

independent, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and to keep the oneness of the Body so that the Body can be built up without the suffering of any loss. (*CWWL, 1989, vol. 4, 417-418*)

We must keep two principles in balance—seeking the Lord as the Head and paying attention to the sense of those with whom we co-labor. By doing so we honor the Body, of which Christ is the Head. To trust only in one's own discernment of the mind of the Lord denies the very real possibility that one might be wrong. For a brother to decry what he considers "outside influence," to declare that he will no longer be a "man-pleaser," and to label those who disagree with him as "man-pleasers" is to despise the feeling of the Body. A brother who accepts the premise that no one outside his area, including the apostles, can touch any church in his area sets himself up as the ultimate arbiter to know the mind of the Lord. To think in this way is to not be sober-minded but to think more highly of oneself than one ought to think (Rom. 12:3). Brother Lee continued:

A local church is under the authority of Christ as the Head, represented by the elders. Hence, the saints in a local church should obey the elders (Heb. 13:17). The churches as the Body of Christ are under their Head, Christ, represented by the apostles. Hence, the churches should obey the apostles (2 Cor. 2:9; 7:15; 10:6). To obey the elders in a local church and to obey the apostles among the churches does not mean that the obeying one does not need to obey the Lord directly. When he is seeking the leading directly from the Lord, he should also take care of the elders in the local church, because he is living and working in the church as a part of the Body. When the churches are seeking the leading directly from the Lord, they should also take care of the apostles, because they are all living and working with the apostles in the churches as the Body of Christ. Whether in a local church or among all the churches, we should be Body-conscious, taking care not only of the Head but also of His Body. Since we are living and working in the Body, we have the Body with the Head. We cannot have the Head without the Body; neither can we have the Body without the Head. We should seek to obey the Head with a relationship to the Body, and we should also seek to obey the Body with a relationship to the Head. We all need to realize that in our natural life we are very independent. So, to take care of obeying both the Lord and the elders or the apostles at the same time is not an easy thing for us. (423)

Saying that one will obey the Head while ignoring the Body is a mask for independence and unaccountability. The issue of such an attitude is that a person is easily misled into subjectivity, mistaking his own feelings for the Lord's and, in effect, doing the very thing he accuses others of—usurping the headship of Christ. We need a balanced view of the headship of Christ. While it is true on a personal level as regards our daily living that Christ is the head of every man (1 Cor. 11:3), we should also realize that God gave Christ "to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body" (Eph. 1:22b-23a). As the Head, He placed some in the Body to bear responsibility as elders to shepherd and lead a local church and others to function as apostles to shepherd and lead the churches as the Body (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:7). The elders and the apostles are the Lord's provision to supply and lead the members of His Body (Eph. 4:11-12, 16; 1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). As believers who seek to live to the Lord under His headship for the building up of His Body, we should seek the Lord personally and should also be open to receive fellowship from one another, especially from the leading ones. As Brother Nee explained:

All leadings should pass the test of Body fellowship. Every leading of the Body comes to us through other members. Human subjectivity can become a great obstacle. As soon as a man becomes subjective, he will not be able to receive leadings from other members. We have to learn to submit to the church and to go along with others' opinions. Thinking that we are always right is extreme arrogance. The supply of the Body and the leading of the Body often are one and the same thing. (*CWWN, vol. 60, 263-264*)

Stubbornly refusing the fellowship of the Body inflates the self and renders one unfit to be properly built up with others. What the Lord needs today are those who renounce self-exaltation and any thought of being a victim; who give Christ the preeminence in every aspect of their lives, seeking to live Him and live to Him as the unique source, the Head of the Body; and who have a Body-consciousness such that they honor the Body, care for the Body, and avoid doing anything to damage the Body.