

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHER CHRISTIANS AND THEIR WORK
PART 1: MAINTAINING THE ONENESS WITH FELLOW BELIEVERS

This three-part article will address the relationship between those who meet in the local churches and fellow believers, the denominations and free groups to which they may belong, and their work. If we are not clear in these matters, we may be influenced by accusations that those in the recovery divide themselves from other Christians. Any sectarian attitude, and the divisiveness that it entails, is absolutely against both the truth and the ministry that we have received. These three articles will review the teaching of the ministry in the Lord's recovery concerning how those in the local churches practice the oneness of the Body of Christ with all believers while avoiding confusion and division. In this article we will consider our relationship with fellow believers.

Our Understanding of the Term *Lord's Recovery*

A proper understanding of the term *Lord's recovery* is needed to understand our relationship with our fellow believers who do not meet in the local churches. The Lord's recovery is not our name, nor does it describe an elite and exclusive fellowship of believers on the earth today. It does not refer to any kind of organization. The ministry presents the Lord's recovery as being the work initiated by God Himself for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose:

God is a God with an eternal purpose. He is a purposeful God, and once He has made up His mind to do something, nothing can change His mind, and nothing can stop Him. Apparently, some things may frustrate Him a little, but nothing can stop Him. So after Satan's destruction, God came in to redo the things that He had done before. This redoing is His recovery. This is to bring back whatever has been lost and destroyed by His enemy, Satan. (*Concerning the Lord's Recovery*, 8)

In the Old Testament God's people became degraded and were carried away into captivity and scattered among the nations. God did a recovery work to bring about the return of the children of Israel to the land of Canaan to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem and prepare the way for His coming through incarnation to initiate His New Testament economy. Similarly, in the New Testament age, the church has deviated from God's intention and has become divided. For this reason, there is the need of the recovery of the church back to its original standing and condition. In speaking of the recovery of the church, Witness Lee clarified:

The word "recover" means to obtain again something that has been lost, or to return something to a normal condition. "Recovery" means the restoration or return to a normal condition after a damage or a loss has been incurred. When we speak of the recovery of the church, we mean that something was there originally, that it became lost or damaged, and that now there is the need to bring that thing back to its original state. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament, Messages 221-239, 2447*)

It is a fact of church history that many precious truths in the Bible were lost and that the church fell from a normal condition, particularly from the biblical oneness, into division. These are the result of Satan's destructive work and have resulted in the church becoming misshapen and abnormal (Matt. 13:24-28, 31-33 with notes; cf., Eph. 4:14 with notes). It is from this abnormality that the Lord desires to recover His people. Particularly since the Reformation, when Martin Luther was used to recover the truth of justification by faith, God has been working to recover the major truths of the Bible one after another in a cumulative way. The ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee defines the Lord's recovery as advancing from the Reformation through the subsequent periods of church history and involving many faithful servants of the Lord, each used by Him to recover something of the truth that had been lost or neglected. To be in the Lord's recovery today is actually to practice the church life according to all the previously recovered truths as they are set forth in the New Testament, taking the building up of the Body of Christ, which will consummate as the New Jerusalem, as the unique and ultimate goal (Eph. 4:11-16). One foundational, all-encompassing truth recovered initially through the Brethren in the nineteenth century and then strengthened through the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee is the practical oneness of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12).

"That There Be No Divisions among You"

The recovery of the church life must be according to the teaching of the apostles and the pattern in the New Testament. There we can find no scriptural basis for Christians to divide themselves from fellow believers over nonessential doctrines, practices, or any kind of personal preference. Division of any kind annuls the oneness of the

Body of Christ and is unambiguously condemned in the New Testament (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:25a; Titus 3:10). Witness Lee emphasized:

In 1 Corinthians 1:13 Paul points out that Christ is not divided. The unique and undivided Christ, taken as the unique center among all the believers, should be the termination of all divisions. Christ has not been divided, and neither should the believers be divided (vv. 10-12). (*Five Emphases in the Lord's Recovery*, 14)

Since the New Testament was written, Christians have been divided and denominated over innumerable matters. The divisions that exist among the members of Christ's Body are certainly one of the main things from which the Lord desires to recover His people:

The Lord's recovery is mainly a recovery of the oneness. If we are still a division or have divisions among us, we are no longer in the Lord's recovery. As long as we are involved in division, we cannot be in the Lord's recovery. Rather, we are part of the repetition of the history of Christianity. (*The Spirit and the Body*, 214)

According to the truth, every kind of divisiveness is wrong. All causes of division have been terminated by Christ's death on the cross. His resurrection issued in His enlargement, the Body of Christ, in which the greatest division of all, that between the Jews and the Gentiles, has been totally annulled in Christ, to say nothing of all the customs and ways of worship that have divided believers throughout the centuries (Rom. 10:12; Eph. 2:13-16). According to the New Testament, locality is the only factor that should separate believers. All the believers in the city of Thessalonica were considered a distinct group from the believers in Cenchrea (1 Thes. 1:1; Rom. 16:1). The believers in Colossae were distinct from those in Laodicea, and so forth (Col. 4:16). Yet, all these believers in their respective localities were in the one common fellowship of the one undivided Body of Christ on the earth (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 1:3, 7).

If those in the local churches are clear on this point, they will never regard themselves as different, superior, or divided from other genuine believers (Rom. 3:22). Any among us who have such a sectarian attitude do not properly represent the ministry in the Lord's recovery on this matter. Those who accuse this ministry of encouraging or issuing in more division deny or overlook the clear and pervading emphasis of the ministry on the need for the oneness for which the Lord Jesus earnestly prayed in John 17 to be practically realized on the earth. Those who attack the recovered truth of the oneness of the Body of Christ practically expressed as local churches do so to excuse and justify the divisive situation in Christianity today. In so doing, they reduce the biblical oneness to something ethereal, theoretical, and impractical. Yet the Lord prayed in John 17 for a visible oneness that would testify to those in the world that they might know and believe (John 17:21, 23).

The ministry in the Lord's recovery uniquely stresses the Lord's desire that all believers forsake divisive attitudes and practices and simply meet together with other believers in their locality in oneness as the church in that locality. These local churches receive and practice fellowship with all genuine believers, and they remain in continual fellowship with one another for the maintenance and strengthening of the testimony of the universal oneness of the Body of Christ on the earth. For a more thorough presentation of this matter, please see the recently published booklet: *Fellowship Concerning Keeping the Oneness with Fellow Believers*.