

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHER CHRISTIANS AND THEIR WORK

PART 2: THE VISION OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY BEING CONTRARY TO TODAY'S CHRISTIANITY

In the first article of this series we saw the imperative of preserving the oneness of the Body of Christ and avoiding divisiveness on our part at all costs. Our attitude toward other believers, including those who do not meet with us in the local churches, should be one of acceptance and inclusion. For the sake of the oneness, we would not make an issue out of a great many differences in, for example, doctrine and practice, such as those mentioned by Paul in Romans 14:1-6.

However, we can never accept the divisive and unscriptural religious system of error that we see in today's Christianity (Eph. 4:14). To be in the Lord's present recovery, we must be faithful to the vision concerning Christ as life, the functioning of every believer as a member of the Body, and keeping the oneness by meeting as local churches. We can never compromise these matters in an attempt to bring ourselves into an outward unity with unscriptural divisions, as this would annul what the Lord desires to do in His recovery work today.

The Lord's Recovery Being a Matter of Vision

To realize why the Lord's recovery is incompatible with today's Christianity, we need a clear vision of the central truth in the New Testament. *Truth*, as used in the New Testament, denotes not merely doctrine but the reality conveyed by the doctrine (John 1:14; 8:32; 14:6; 17:17). Therefore, the Lord's recovery is not merely the recovery of the truth in the sense of proper doctrine but the recovery of the vision, the spiritual reality, conveyed by the truth. Because this vision governs what the Lord is working to accomplish today, we refer to this vision as the vision of the age, the vision that should direct and govern those who would fully cooperate with what God is doing in this current age. One concise description of the vision we in the recovery should have is as follows:

What is our vision? Our vision is that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for us to redeem us, the sinners, in order that we can have the life of Christ and be regenerated by Him to be God's children, enjoying the riches of the Triune God to become the Body of Christ. In practice, the Body is expressed as the local churches in various localities, practicing the Body life in a practical and proper way. This Body, the church of God, is the focus of God's economy. (Witness Lee, *The Vision of the Age*, 79)

Related to the fulfillment of this vision, three outstanding matters must be recovered among God's people: the experience of Christ as life, the functioning of all the members of Christ's Body, and the practical testimony of the oneness of the Body of Christ. Why is such a recovery necessary? Although these matters are clearly set forth in the New Testament, they are severely lacking among Christians today in both teaching and experience. The religious systems of Christianity with their traditions, including in doctrine and practice, have displaced or veiled the Scriptures to millions of believers. The Lord's recovery today is to recover these three matters for the building up of the Body of Christ as Christ's bride to consummate God's work in this age.

The Religious Systems of Christianity Being Against the Vision We Have Seen

Because we have seen the central vision in the New Testament, we stand apart from the religious systems of Christianity today. Our standing is not against our dear fellow believers who are held back by these systems. That would be divisive. Rather, we reject the denominational system itself because it is against the truth, the vision, that has been shown to us in the Word and through the ministry, including the three main items mentioned above.

The Religious Systems of Christianity Frustrating the Experience of Christ as Life

The New Testament clearly indicates the wonderful truth that Christ has come to be the believers' very life (John 10:10, 14:6; Col. 3:4). In order to do this, He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) to enter into and indwell His chosen and redeemed people (John 20:22; Rom. 8:10-11) so that they would no longer live by their natural, fallen life but by Him as their life (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21). This life, by its growth and spread in the believers, carries out in them what we refer to as the organic aspect of Christ's salvation (Rom. 5:10b; 1 Pet. 2:2; Col. 2:19). Generally, the truth of God's organic salvation is not taught or stressed in Christianity today. As a result, many believers have

no realization that the wonderful, all-inclusive Christ now indwells them to be their life and everything. They realize that Christ is their Redeemer but not that Christ today is the Spirit and as such dwells within them. Some so-called teachers of the Bible even oppose this teaching, despite clear verses in the Scripture (such as 2 Cor. 3:17, 1 Cor. 15:45b, Rom. 8:10, and 2 Cor. 13:5). As a result, most Christians' experience of Christ as life is severely limited. Rather, they continue to live by their natural, fallen life, often using biblical and ethical teachings in an attempt to emulate the standard of Jesus' living in the Gospels. Moreover, because the experience and enjoyment of Christ is lacking, numerous substitutes for Christ have seeped in, such as entertainment, social and political activism, and self-cultivation.

The Religious Systems of Christianity Frustrating the Functioning of All the Members of the Body of Christ

Christianity is inseparably wed to the clergy-laity system. Denominational systems train a special class to be priests or pastors to occupy positions of leadership and to carry out most or all of the spiritual functions in the church while the rest of God's people remain passive. God hates such a two-tiered hierarchical system (Rev. 2:6 and note 1). According to the Bible, all of God's people should function as priests and as prophets (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 14:26). Every believer should function according to his or her gift, be perfected by the gifted ones, and engage in the work of the ministry for the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:7, 11-16). There is one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). Therefore, it is against the truth to have an intermediary or special class of professional priests and teachers among God's people (Matt. 23:8). To have such a class kills the organic functioning of Christ's members, thus annulling the corporate priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), which is essential to the growth and building up of the Body (Eph. 4:16).

The Religious Systems of Christianity Frustrating the Practical Testimony of the Oneness of the Body of Christ

The New Testament portrays believers in every city simply meeting as the church in that city, kept in fellowship with all the other churches by remaining in and under the teaching and fellowship of the apostles brought to the churches by workers sent by Christ, the Head (Acts 2:42; 13:2). They minister Christ as the Spirit for the believers' growth in life and perfecting in function (2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 4:11-12). Such a simple arrangement enables the universal oneness of the Body of Christ, which oneness encompasses all regenerated believers, to be visible and practical on the earth. Christianity has fully abandoned this pattern. Instead of forming congregations city by city, Christians meet according to social, ethnic, and racial differences as well as differences in doctrine, practice, tradition, and innumerable other things. In doing so, they allow themselves to be denominated to differentiate themselves from other believers. This practice annihilates the practical testimony of the one Body of Christ on the earth. We are persuaded that the oneness the Lord prayed for in John 17 and Paul fought for in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 and 11:18-19 can be practically realized in only one way—for Christians to take the locality in which they live as the unique ground for their gathering. This is according to the New Testament pattern of one church in one city (Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:4, 11).

Being Free to Follow the Lord According to Our Conscience and Affording Others the Same Liberty

In applying this fellowship we, as saints in the Lord's recovery, need to stand for the truth while maintaining a proper attitude toward our fellow believers. We must stand absolutely and unequivocally for the truth in God's Word. Because Christianity with its systems is contrary to the truth, we can never compromise for the sake of so-called "ecumenism." In faithfulness to the Lord, we must point out how today's Christianity has deviated from the truth in the Word and how those deviations damage the Lord's testimony and His work to build up His Body. We ask those believers who disagree with our stand to afford us the freedom to follow the Lord according to our conscience. Similarly, we allow other Christians the freedom to do the same. We may, in a spirit of fellowship, share with others what we have seen and enjoyed. However, neither the truth nor the ministry in the recovery nor the Lord's life in us allow us the freedom to despise other believers. Nevertheless, if we have seen the vision of the Lord's present recovery, we will never accept any teaching or practice that is contrary to the truth. By such a standing and proper attitude we are faithful both to the Lord and to our fellow believers.