

QUESTIONS VERSUS QUESTIONINGS

Some have claimed that questions are not allowed in the local churches. On the one hand, this should not be true in any local church. On the other hand, all the saints must discern between proper and improper questions and between questions and questionings. A proper question takes as its goal receiving an answer that enables one to grasp the truth, advance in the Christian life, or resolve a problem or concern. The latter may include seeking help for how to deal with issues that arise in human life that impede the progress of either the asker or a person the asker is shepherding.

Both Watchman Nee and Witness Lee often set aside time for questions in less formal gatherings. Brother Lee also strongly encouraged mutual asking and answering of questions in group meetings. For instance, in a fellowship with the Full-time Training in Anaheim in 1990, he said, "In our study and experimentation we have found that the best way to teach is to raise questions in the group meetings. By asking the proper questions and answering the questions of others, we spontaneously teach, instruct, and perfect others" (*The Practice of the Group Meetings*, 13).

Some questions might put others in a bad light. Such questions should be raised according to a principle Watchman Nee wrote in a note to a brother in 1933: "Do the right thing in the right way with the right spirit" (quoted in *The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ to be the Organism of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God*, 80). The first consideration is whether asking such a question is the right thing to do. What purpose does it serve? Will it facilitate the ministry of life? Will it protect others from damage? The second issue is how to ask the question in the right way. Will it potentially damage others' reputations or some of those who are present? Such questions should be asked privately and only of someone with the maturity in life to render help without being adversely affected. The third consideration is having the right spirit. This relates to the asker's motive. Is the intent to receive help or to be enabled to render help or is it to impugn others or spread gossip?

These considerations are very much related to the difference between questions and questionings. Questions seek an answer; questionings do not. The Gospels show that many questions can be insincere. For example, the religious leaders among the Jews posed questions to the Lord Jesus in their efforts to ensnare Him (Matt. 22:15-40; Mark 11:27-33). Such questions were improper, and the Lord would not answer His questioners on their own terms.

When the apostles preached the gospel in Berea, Acts tells us, "Now these people were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (17:11). The Bereans were more noble because they took what the apostles said and compared it with Scripture to receive answers to their questions. Brother Lee turned to two noted scholars to get the meaning of *more noble*:

[W. E.] Vine says that the Greek word rendered "more noble" indicates that the Bereans were more noble minded. F. F. Bruce says that the word means to be liberal, free from prejudice. I believe that these Bereans were not stubborn, but were quite wise. Whenever we are stubborn we cannot be noble. (*Life-study of Acts*, 397)

Brother Lee appealed to believers to examine the teaching of the ministry in the Lord's recovery concerning the kingdom of the heavens in the same principle:

We hope that all God's children would seriously investigate this matter according to His Word and be like the Bereans (Acts 17:11). If this is God's truth, we hope that our brothers will receive it; if it is shown to be a human speaking, we will gladly set it aside. We are willing to receive correction from our brothers concerning any truth. (*Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, Volume 5*, 971)

A noble-minded person who is free of prejudice asks questions to seek answers. However, the Bible shows us that questions often have a different motive. On several occasions religious people came to the Lord Jesus seeking to ensnare Him by questions so that they could accuse Him (Matt. 12:10; 21:23-27; 22:15-40; John 8:5-6). These were not sincere questions but questionings that sought grounds to make accusations. In writing to Timothy, Paul paired questionings with contentions (2 Tim. 2:23). A person who is full of questionings is contentious and is not seeking answers. Paul even refers to some as “diseased with questionings and contentions of words,” out of which come, among other things, “evil suspicions” (1 Tim. 6:4). Such persons do “not consent to healthy words, being blinded with pride, understanding nothing” (v. 3). In other words, when a healthy word is spoken to them, they reject it, stubbornly holding on to their own biased view and preferring to feed on their own contentiousness.

To be diseased with questionings and contentions of words is to be consumed by them. The Greek word translated “diseased” bears the implication of being sick of a diseased appetite. Wuest describes it as having “a morbid fondness for something” (“The Exegesis of 1 Timothy,” *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 92). A person who is diseased with questionings has an appetite only for questionings and disputes, not for answers. After receiving an answer to a question, the person’s response is either to dismiss the answer or to raise another accusation. No answer can satisfy such a person. His questionings and contentions of words are endless.

In 1 Timothy 6:4-5 Paul speaks of questionings and contentions of words issuing in “envy, strife, slanders, evil suspicions, perpetual wranglings of men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth.” A widely respected New Testament Greek dictionary describes “evil suspicions” as indicating “wicked intrigues and common insinuations” used by “those with a pathological penchant” for disputations “against their opponents in an attempt to discredit them in every possible way and to magnify themselves” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume IV*, Gerhard Kittel, ed., trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 1019). These are not just suspicions held privately by an individual but are self-justifying insinuations actively promoted to damage the reputation of a faultfinder’s target. Such insinuations without facts characterize the accusations advanced by the most strident among those diseased with questionings and contentions of words.

It is striking that some of those who have been most active over the years in sowing questionings are ones who have been reprovved or were placed under some form of discipline by a church, either for divisive activities or for improper behaviors. Rather than repent of the actions that led to such discipline, they have become self-appointed “experts” who twist others’ words and produce revisionist histories and in so doing recast themselves as heroes or victims or both.

Paul’s instruction to Timothy regarding questionings is direct and unambiguous: “But foolish questionings and those arising from an untrained mind refuse, knowing that they beget contentions” (2 Tim. 2:23). Similarly, Paul told Titus, “But avoid foolish questionings” (Titus 3:9a). Being diseased with questionings in 1 Timothy 6:4 is in contrast to consenting to healthy words in verse 3. In Titus 1:9 Paul makes it clear that these healthy words are the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42), which he then contrasts with the speaking of “unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers...whose mouths must be stopped” (Titus 1:10-11). Paul then instructs Titus, “But you, speak the things which are fitting to the healthy teaching” (2:1). If we desire to be healthy in the Christian life, this healthy teaching should be our diet. It should also be the content of what we speak to one another.

May the Lord fill His recovery with proper, seeking questions and deliver us from the questionings that seek to undermine the accomplishment of God’s economy.