

## **LEADERSHIP IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY, PART 1: THE LORD'S CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP VERSUS MAN'S CONCEPT**

In this three-part series we will examine the matter of leadership among the local churches in the Lord's recovery and how it conforms to the pattern revealed in the Bible. Without some kind of leadership, it is impossible for any group of people to work in a coordinated way and avoid falling into confusion. God, who has the highest purpose with the highest goal, has entrusted His people with the highest and most noble work. Moreover, He is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Therefore, the Bible shows clearly that with God's people, there is always leadership. God, the supreme authority in the universe, has exalted Christ to be the unique Leader (Rom. 9:21-22; Acts 5:31). Yet, the Bible records that God also raises up some to express and represent His authority in taking the lead among His people under His continual direction (Eph. 1:1; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 24). Because the Lord's recovery is for the recovery of truth and practice, including in the matter of leadership, it is vital that we discern God's arrangement for the leadership of His people. This discernment begins with the recognition that the Lord's concept of leadership is very different from man's fallen concept.

### **The Lord's Concept of Leadership**

In both the Old and New Testaments we see that God is the unconditional, absolute Leader of His people and that His intention is that He would govern them directly (Judg. 8:23; 1 Sam. 8:7; 12:12). For this reason, the New Testament indicates that all authority, which is needed for leadership, has been given to Christ, and any who genuinely express and represent that authority do so in oneness with Him (Matt. 28:18; 2 Cor. 2:17). He is the unique source of authority, and apart from Him there exists no proper expression of authority. In the July 2019 semiannual training Ron Kangas gave a message in which he emphasized this truth:

God's authority is actually God Himself; authority issues out from God's own being (Rev. 22:1). The Greek word for *authority* is *exousia*. The noun *ousia* means "being," and *ek* or *ex* means "out from." Authority issues out from God's own being. No angel or human being has such authority. This is why no one who has been enlightened would ever dare to even think that he or she has any authority. Authority is God Himself. (*The Ministry of the Word* 23:7 (July 2019), "Authority, Rebellion, the Vindication of Delegated Authority, and a Proper Representative of God," 222)

Besides God, no one has authority in and of himself. No one can claim to have authority in and of himself or to be the leader among God's people. Yet the Bible clearly shows that God designates some as delegated or deputy authorities both in human society and in the church. He has established these authorities to maintain society in general and to administrate His people in particular (Rom. 13:1-7; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). To teach that because individual believers are under Christ as the Head they need not submit to those whom the Holy Spirit has sovereignly placed to take the lead among God's people is unbalanced and contradicts the teaching of the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). Without question, if someone is not in submission to these indirect authorities, neither are they in submission to God's direct authority.

### **What Leadership Is Not**

Having seen something of the divine concept concerning leadership revealed in the Bible, we may now examine what the leadership in the church is not, and we may thereby expose the fallen human concept.

*Not an officially designated person or group of people:* Because Christ alone is the Leader (Acts 5:31), no person can rightfully claim any kind of official leadership among God's people. All proper leadership is organic, that is, in life and according to the Spirit, not by way of an official, permanent position as in an organization. For example, Peter took the lead at the beginning of Acts (Acts 1:15-22). However, later James exercised leadership (15:13, 19). When Barnabas and Saul set out from Antioch, Barnabas took the lead (13:2). However, when confronted with opposition, Paul, as one "filled with the Holy Spirit," began to take the lead in speaking for the Lord because he had the greater spiritual capacity (v. 9). These examples indicate that leadership among God's people is not official but organic according to the spiritual condition of each servant of the Lord and the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Neither Watchman Nee nor Witness Lee ever claimed to be the official leaders in the recovery, nor do any of the co-workers today. Rather, the

ministry in the Lord's recovery strongly teaches that the leadership in the churches is actually through the apostles' teaching and those who bring this teaching, as we will see in Part 2 of this series.

Moreover, among the local churches there is no "head church." In church history elevating one church above others opened the door for the development of the Roman Catholic Church with its manifold evils. God's intention is that all the local churches would be on the same level and be kept thus by blending in the unique teaching and fellowship of the apostles (Acts 2:42). It is against the truth for larger or more established local churches to direct smaller, less established churches or for a certain local church to direct the other churches in the surrounding region. Rather, each church is committed by the Spirit to the administration of its local elders (14:23; 20:28) and is kept in the unique fellowship of the Body of Christ by blending.

Similarly, there can be no central organization that directs all the local churches on the earth. After surveying the chaotic and divisive situation among the denominations in Europe, North America, and China, Brother Nee spoke strongly against this degraded practice. The Lord showed him that to have any kind of headquarters among the churches, the ministry, and the work was to subvert Christ as the Head and propagate division among God's people. According to man's fallen concept, an umbrella organization is necessary to unite, direct, and control all the churches on the earth, but God disagrees. There is no hint in the New Testament of an organization directing the churches, the ministry, or the work.

*Not any kind of man-made governmental system:* With God's people there is neither democracy nor autocracy. These systems are of the world and have absolutely no place in the church of God. With God's people there is only theocracy. The Lord does not relinquish His headship to any person or group. For this reason, the churches do not vote concerning what way the recovery should take, nor is there a person or group that makes decisions on behalf of all the churches or the saints. The presence of such practices is a sign of degradation (Rev. 2:6, footnote 1; 3:14, footnote 1; 3 John 9-10).<sup>1</sup> The New Testament indicates that those who take the lead do so neither democratically nor autocratically but according to the Spirit's leading, by seeking the Lord's will in prayer (Acts 1:24-25, 13:2, 15:27-29).

*Not the exercising of lordship but the service of slaves:* The New Testament also makes abundantly clear that those who take the lead among God's people must do so not as lords but as slaves (Luke 22:25-26; 1 Peter 5:2-3; 2 Cor. 4:5). In man's fallen concept, leaders are considered great and are exalted above others, but this is completely contrary to God's thought. Leadership in God's eyes is a humble service, even a slavery (Matt. 20:25-28; Acts 13:36). Furthermore, to lead is not to command others but to set an example for them to follow (Acts 20:34-35; 2 Cor. 4:11-16). Witness Lee faithfully taught this New Testament principle:

In the church no one should exercise lordship. Matthew 20:25-28; 23:8-11; and 1 Peter 5:1-3, 5 reveal that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over the people, but in the church there is no exercise of lordship. We have the lordship, but it is the lordship of the Lord Himself. No one in the church, regardless of how much responsibility he bears, how much life he ministers to the saints, or how much he has been afforded the Lord's grace for the building up of the local churches, should ever exercise any lordship over others. We all are brothers (Matt. 23:8). (*The Speciality, Generality, and Practicality of the Church Life*, 64)

In the world the leaders have authority over others and rule over others. In the churches the elders are the leading ones, but they are not rulers. They should be examples, taking the lead to serve and care for the church so that the believers may follow in the same way. (*The History of the Church and the Local Churches*, 17)

Man's concept of leadership is organizational, worldly, hierarchical, and even satanic. In the Lord's recovery we should utterly reject this fallen concept. In the following articles we will see more concerning the biblical pattern of leadership and how that recovered truth is practically applied in the Lord's recovery today.

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<sup>1</sup>To comply with civil laws (Rom. 13:1) a church may form a corporation to secure legal protections and hold its assets. The common practice among the churches is that the board of directors for such a corporation be chosen from among the appointed elders, because the administration of a church's practical affairs is among the eldership's responsibilities (Acts 11:29-30).