

July 5, 2019

To the leading brothers in North America:

We have become aware of a recent letter that has become the subject of social media postings and emails being circulated to the saints. This letter purports to expose wrongdoings, including abuses and cover-ups, among the churches in the Lord's recovery. We surely condemn any form of misconduct and will continue to respond to situations that may arise on occasion, as they did in New Testament times, but we know that many of the accusations in the letter are factually in error, while others are hearsay. Moreover, the letter greatly misrepresents the person and the ministry of Brother Lee. We are deeply concerned by the aggressive public circulation of these accusations and misrepresentations, which some have uncritically accepted.

We are taking this matter very seriously and are carefully looking into both the severe accusations and the breadth of their dissemination. The co-workers do not condone any abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, or any other forms), financial malfeasance, or other criminal activity. If there is reason to suspect such activity, the leading brothers must take necessary measures to ensure that the matter is referred to the proper authority and to take what actions are needed to protect any person who may be at risk. Under no condition should we put the Lord's testimony at stake by failing to deal properly and lawfully when a reasonable suspicion of abuse is brought to our attention. All the churches should pay special attention to the safety of our children and young people and take protective measures both to deter any form of abuse from taking place and to instruct those who serve children and young people in how to recognize evidence of abuse.

We are writing to you, the leading and responsible brothers among the churches, to alert you to these accusations as you carry out your responsibilities to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2). We are also writing to suggest ways to respond to those saints who inquire about the issues that have been raised. How we should respond to such inquiries involves two main questions: Is the matter involved criminal or not? Is the inquirer's knowledge direct or indirect? In every case our obligation before the Lord is to shepherd the saints' souls by ministering life to them and seeking to restore a proper condition of fellowship with the Lord and with other members of the Body.

When a saint brings a matter of concern for fellowship, the responsible brothers should first be clear whether it involves allegations of a criminal nature. Matters that do not involve crimes fall under the administration of the church and should be handled by the leading ones with much prayer and fellowship. Accusations related to criminal matters should be referred to law enforcement professionals and/or child protection agencies. These officials do not generally want non-professionals to investigate such accusations. When there is a reasonable suspicion of abuse of a minor, the person who is aware or becomes aware of a reason for concern should report it to the proper authority. All the leading brothers should be aware of laws in their respective jurisdictions that may govern the reporting of suspected abuse.

The leading ones should help the saints to realize that any accusation brought to them that falls within the church's administration must be dealt with cautiously and judiciously based on verifiable facts. Though this may tax the saints' patience, it is necessary to deal fairly with all parties. The saints should understand that the goal of dealing with offending parties is to restore fellowship and that the Lord Himself laid out the process by which offenses should be addressed and the spirit in which that process should be carried out (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1). The saints should know that if a matter has been referred to the elders, they should not talk about it among themselves lest they sin by damaging others' reputations, compromise the elders' ability to effectively address the situation, and inflame fleshly reactions among the saints. Furthermore, repeating slanders about others opens the possibility of legal action from the aggrieved party.

In the present case, these principles have been trampled. The letter is full of secondhand accusations, that is, accusations from those who have no direct knowledge of what is alleged. The accusations are also unattributed, thus making them unverifiable. Moreover, the websites that the letter references for so-called historical information and the sources those sites quote are known to be biased and unreliable.

Allegations made without specificity or clearly presented factual bases are in the category of rumors, which the apostle Paul referred to as evil reports (2 Cor. 6:8). We are concerned that such rumors may shake or stumble some saints; therefore, we should exhort the saints not to read any social media posts, emails, websites, etc., that attack the Lord's recovery or to search for such writings out of curiosity. In particular, these writings indicate a determined intent to turn the middle-aged and younger saints in the churches against the leadership in the churches and in the Lord's work and ministry.

We should not give ground to rumors and hearsay but should properly care for the truth in the Bible and the facts of each situation. Moreover, we should help the saints to be preserved in the simplicity and purity toward Christ in their thoughts (2 Cor. 11:3), not exchanging a glorious future of experiencing and enjoying Christ in the Lord's recovery for rumors and innuendos that distract and dishearten. The use of rumors to attack the Lord's interests is not a new tactic of the enemy. It is a tactic he used against the Lord Jesus, the apostles, and many faithful servants of the Lord throughout the centuries, including Brother Nee and Brother Lee (John 15:18-21; 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 6:8; 1 Thes. 3:2-4).

On the one hand, the saints should have the full freedom to open their hearts to the responsible brothers without fear. Brother Nee said, "The responsible brothers, the brothers with authority, should have the ability to sit and listen to all the opposing words" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 51: Church Affairs*, 146). If we can listen to opposing words, surely we can listen to the dear saints' concerns and exercise to shepherd them, not according to our disposition, but according to God (1 Pet. 5:2). In our care for the saints, if we realize they have no direct knowledge of something, it is best, if possible, not to get into the details with them but simply to assure them of our genuine concern and that we take seriously such matters and our responsibility to deal with them.

On the other hand, we should help the saints not to discuss such allegations with others or comment on online postings, as these activities are, or easily degrade into, gossip, which compromises our consecration to the Lord and spreads death. Engaging rumors in a public forum, even to rebut them, often gives rise to further speculation and reckless allegations. The leading brothers should instead shepherd the saints back to the enjoyment of the tree of life. As Brother Lee writes:

Gossiping has nothing to do with the tree of life, for gossiping never imparts life to the listeners. To gossip is to be involved with death; it is to spread death, which is of God's enemy, to others. To abstain from gossip is to abstain from death. If we would live a holy life, a life that abstains from anything related to death, we must stay away from the source of death; that is, we must stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (*Life-study of Leviticus*, 324)

We should encourage the saints to bring concerns to the elders and, in the case of criminal matters, also report them directly to the proper authorities. According to the pattern in the New Testament, there is a proper way to deal with problems. Engaging in public disputes, in which others' reputations may be ruined, is not that way. There is no record that the household of Chloe entered into a public debate when the church in Corinth was faced with disorder that the local brothers did not address. Instead, they appealed to the apostle Paul for assistance (1 Cor. 1:11). This led to a restoration of the situation in Corinth.

We must help the saints to be wise. Satan, the accuser of the brothers (Rev. 12:10), will use public airing of grievances or issues, whether true or false, as openings to stir controversy, disturb the saints' peace, arouse fear, and undermine the faith of vulnerable saints, all to attack the Lord's interest and hinder His move. We should not be ignorant of the enemy's devices but rather should strengthen the saints to be vigilant to stand and not be shaken or threatened (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 4:14; 6:11-14; 1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 1:28). Brother Nee cautioned:

We must learn to listen to healthy words. We should not be led away by those who spread rumors and improper words. We must say, "I do not want to listen to these things." Many sins will cease and many brothers will be edified if you do this. There is a lust among us for unhealthy words. This is why these words multiply. People find these words tasteful. We must be delivered from these things...

If we keep on listening, hoping to learn a little more and to probe a little more, we are fanning the flame, not extinguishing it. Many idle, evil, and deceptive words are prompted by the interest of the listeners. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50: Lessons for New Believers* (3), 599-600)

A Nazarite was required not to touch death even when a member of his immediate family or someone close to him died (Num. 6:7, 9). Thus, Brother Lee said, "In some cases, to avoid the contagion of death, we need to overcome our personal affection, especially for those with whom we are well acquainted" (*The Intrinsic Problem in the Lord's Recovery Today and Its Scriptural*

*Remedy*, 85). Saints may be troubled when they hear a rumor from someone close to them. In such cases Brother Lee advised us:

When you see a storm, do not listen to rumors and do not be affected by those who have changed. Do not ask why. When a man is changed, he is changed, and that is all. We have to look to the Lord's mercy today to keep us unchanged and to preserve us all the way to the end. (*The Glorious Vision and the Way of the Cross*, 48)

We must help the saints to be watchful and to pray personally and corporately. We must help them to exercise to eat the tree of life so that their spirit is strengthened to avoid the temptations of curiosity. Moreover, we ourselves must go to the Lord, appealing to the throne, to counter the effort of the evil forces by our strong and persevering prayer (Eph. 6:12). We should also “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psa. 122:6).

In speaking about dealing with rumors, Brother Lee said, “There is the need for real and prevailing corporate prayer. The church needs to come together to pray, not to deal with people. I have learned the lesson that whenever there is a rumor, we should not deal with it directly.” Rather, he advised the churches to pray, saying, “We should simply go to the Lord and appeal to the highest authority” (*Basic Principles for the Practice of the Church Life*, 73-74). We believe that the Lord is about to move in a fresh way in North America. We should, therefore, expect spiritual frustration from the air. In such a circumstance, we should pray strongly for the Lord’s interest and affirm His victory.

As those who bear responsibility for the Lord’s work and ministry among the churches, we can assure you that, as always, we will weigh the matters before us without prejudice or partiality, caring only for the Lord’s interest and testimony. Speaking of 1 Timothy 5:21, Brother Lee said, “Do not show prejudice in receiving an accusation, and do not show partiality in defending anyone against accusation.” We will not ignore real problems, but neither will we give heed to unfounded rumors. We believe that this is the right attitude and approach not only for us but for all those who bear responsibility to take the lead in the churches. May all the saints have the heart to take the Lord’s way in dealing with such things.

Please pray for the Lord’s recovery, the co-workers, the leading brothers, and all the local churches with all the saints.

Your brothers,

The co-workers in North America