

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHER CHRISTIANS AND THEIR WORK
PART 3: NOT ENTANGLING THE WORK OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY WITH OTHERS' WORK

In addition to our attitude toward other Christians and toward the denominations (parts 1 and 2 of this series), we need to consider our attitude toward others' work, and more specifically, toward the work that is being carried out today by the denominations, free groups, and parachurch organizations of Christianity. Christians all over the earth are carrying out some kind of labor. Each kind of labor is undertaken under a certain view or vision of how that labor should proceed and what it should accomplish. If we see clearly the vision of the Lord's recovery, we will realize that it is contrary to the system of Christianity, and we will avoid mixing or entangling the work of the recovery with that of others. Furthermore, though we must point out the deviations in Christendom, as we do when deviations arise among the local churches, we should not interfere with other Christian works but instead recognize that all Christian work is under the Lord's sovereignty and uniquely subject to His evaluation.

The Problem of Differing Visions

In any kind of labor, all parties must concur on both the goal of that labor and the way to carry it out. This goal and this way issue from the vision that governs that labor. If the parties' visions differ, serious problems will inevitably arise. The goal of the Lord's recovery is the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:16), consummating in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). According to the vision of the Lord's recovery, the way to accomplish this is to recover the experience of Christ, the functioning of all the members of His Body, and the practical testimony of the oneness of the Body of Christ in local churches. This goal and way direct, govern, and restrict all of our work. If we would co-labor with others who do not share this same vision, our joint labor, regardless of how positive it may seem, will cease to be the work of the Lord's recovery. As we saw in part 2 of this series, Christianity, with its substitutes for Christ, clergy-laity system, and denominations and divisions, is contrary to the vision that we have seen and according to which we must labor. Since this is the case, any work that we engage in with those who are laboring under another vision will ultimately damage both our work and theirs.

The work of the Lord's recovery is a specific and focused work; it is not a common work. Even our preaching of the gospel and edifying believers is with a view toward God's goal of building up the Body of Christ:

Our work today is not a scattered work. The question is not whether or not we can cooperate with others or help others. The question is whether or not we know what we are doing. A person who does a scattered work is one who does not know what kind of ground he stands on or what work he is doing. (*Messages Given During the Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry, Volume 1, 195*)

The work of the recovery is exceedingly focused on the goal of God's economy—to build up the Body of Christ, which is expressed in time and space as local churches. Brother Nee wrote of the impossibility of collaborating with those who through their work seek to spread their denominations:

We can only cooperate with those who are building up the Body of Christ as expressed in local churches, and not with those who are building up something else. Denominational connection does not hinder us from fellowship in the Lord, but denominational extension does hinder us from cooperation in the work of God. (*The Normal Christian Church Life, 160*)

Because the work in the recovery is carried out under the vision of God's goal and way, we cannot be faithful to the work that the Lord has entrusted to us if we neglect, set aside, or compromise the work of raising up and building up local churches as local expressions of the Body of Christ.

The Problem of Differing Ground

One insurmountable obstacle that prevents the work in the Lord's recovery from cooperating with the work carried out in Christianity is the matter of the ground of the church. In the New Testament the unique, supreme

work of Christ is the work of building up the church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 14:12) upon Christ Himself as the foundation and with Christ as the building material (3:11-12; Col. 3:10-11). As Christ's Body, the church should never be divided (Eph. 1:22-23; Romans 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:10-13). Why then in Christianity are believers in the same city divided into many different "churches"? The reason is that the work of Christianity fails to take care of the proper ground of the church. Drawing upon the God-ordained site for the building of the temple in the Old Testament as an illustration, Witness Lee explained:

In typology, the temple of God could only be built in Jerusalem. If you were to build the same temple in Babylon, that would be wrong. Therefore, we need the proper ground, the proper site for the building of the church. We know that the proper ground is not in the Catholic Church, the denominations, or the free groups. Then where is the proper ground? Again we must come back to the pure Word of the Lord. The pure Word tells us that the church is one. How many bodies does Christ have? Universally speaking, the Body of Christ is one. And this one Body comprises all the saints. But we know that all the saints are not in the same place at the same time. Some are scattered in this city, and some are scattered in another city. But wherever we are, we must come together to be one and to be built up with the saints in the city where we live. This is the local church, the church that, according to the pure Word, is built upon the ground of oneness in the locality where we live. (*The Wonderful Christ in the Canons of the New Testament*, 173)

In light of both the Old Testament type of the temple in Jerusalem and the New Testament pattern of one church in one city (Rev. 1:11), we hold that the proper site, the ground for the building up of the church, is the ground of oneness in a locality. Any work that takes another ground for the building up of the church invariably leads to more division and confusion. The same is true of a work that does not issue in local churches but instead leaves the matter of where to meet up to the believers' preference. The work of recovering the proper testimony of oneness among God's people is fundamentally incompatible with such endeavors.

Not Interfering with the Work of Others

On one hand, we must never involve or mix the work of the recovery with the work of others who labor under a different vision or on a different ground. On the other hand, we must also be very clear concerning this point: Though we may critique the system of Christianity for its deviations from God's Word, all work undertaken by Christians, in addition to being totally dependent on God's blessing, is entirely under God's sovereignty. He is the unique evaluator and judge of every person's work (Matt. 7:21-23; 1 Cor. 3:12-13; 4:5). Furthermore, the Lord taught His disciples to be tolerant of others who were working in His name (Luke 9:49-50). Knowing this, we should faithfully attend to our own work and never try to interfere with the work of others. Regarding this, Witness Lee wrote:

Under His sovereignty He can use many saints who have a ground that is different from ours to do a good work for Him. We acknowledge that the Lord uses many, even those in the Catholic Church. This fact is clearly proven by history, and no one can deny it. Even though we strongly criticize the Catholic Church, we do not deny what history has proven. The Lord is so great that even Nebuchadnezzar, a king of Babylon who greatly opposed Him, was His servant and was used by Him...

We can only humble ourselves willingly and walk before the Lord according to the calling and the commission that we have received in regard to the testimony that we feel the Lord wants us to bear. We do not want to interfere with others or intervene in their work; likewise, we hope that others will not interfere with us or intervene in our work. (*The Ground of the Church and the Service of the Body*, 24, 27)

Anyone who desires to participate in the present work of the Lord's recovery must labor under the vision of the recovery, taking as their goal the building up of the Body of Christ, which is expressed in local churches on the ground of oneness. May we faithfully carry out the specific work that the Lord has entrusted to us, avoiding any entanglement with others' work.