

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIVING STREAM MINISTRY AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES

In the New Testament the word for *ministry* means "service." The unique New Testament ministry is a service in the form of a stewardship of grace that ministers Christ to people for the accomplishment of His purpose (2 Cor. 4:1, 12; 1 Tim. 1:12; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25; 2 Cor. 3:8, 3; Rom. 15:16; 1 Tim. 4:6). The New Testament tells us that to carry out this service the Lord gave gifts in the form of gifted members to His Body, the church (Eph. 4:11). These gifts, as those who richly supply life to the members of the Body, perfect the saints in their organic function to serve the Lord in carrying out the same work that they do (vv. 16, 12). The ones who take the lead in the New Testament ministry are those who have the greatest measure of revelation and growth in life and who are able to open up the truth of God's economy in the Bible (Matt. 16:16-18; Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Tim. 2:7; 1:4).

In the Old Testament the priests depended on the service of the Levites in many practical matters (Num. 3:6-9; 4:19 [and footnote 1], 27-28, 33). In the same way, those who take the lead in the ministry depend on others' support in practical matters. This support is also a ministry, a Levitical service, within the one New Testament ministry. Many biblical examples of the need for such service could be cited (such as Phil. 2:25, 30; 2 Cor. 12:18; 2 Tim. 4:11-13; Philem. 11-13). The most germane example to the topic here is found in Romans 16:22: "I, Tertius, who write this epistle, greet you in the Lord." In other words, Paul dictated the letter, but it was written down by Tertius. Without this practical service, we would not have the crucial New Testament book of Romans.

Consider also how the riches of the New Testament revelation reached God's people, including us. In the apostles' time, the apostles' teaching had to be written down, transported, and hand delivered. Some men began to faithfully and painstakingly make copies of the manuscripts that eventually formed the New Testament. Those who served in printing Bibles and tracts during the Reformation were instrumental in freeing men from the darkness of the Middle Ages. Since that time the understanding of the divine revelation in the Bible has progressed, and the gleanings from the Bible have also been recorded in books and more lately in all manner of other media. As a result of the labor of all who served in a practical way to capture and distribute such materials, we have both the Bible and a rich heritage of biblical teaching.

A Levitical Service

Brother Nee realized that to supply the ministry of the word to all of the churches, he needed some who would edit and print his spoken messages, so he established the Shanghai Gospel Book Room. Later, as it became evident that it might not be possible to circulate publications overseas from Shanghai, he made arrangements to set up the Hong Kong and Taiwan Gospel Book Rooms, both of which he put under Brother Lee's oversight. Brother Lee often told us that most of Brother Nee's messages were never published, and the records of many of his talks were lost in China's internal conflicts. Recognizing the great need to preserve the revelation the Lord had given to His recovery, Brother Lee determined that what Brother Nee had taught him and what he had also seen should be published. Still, while he was in the Far East, the publishing service was carried out in the Chinese language, which limited its circulation to that part of the world. When he came to the United States, he saw the need for English language publication, so he established The Stream Publishers, which later became Living Stream Ministry (LSM).

LSM was established as a Levitical service to publish the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. It provided practical support to the ministry in the Lord's recovery by facilitating the release of the word through the ministry, by capturing that word for the present need as well as posterity, and by propagating the word of the ministry. Today it still performs those same basic functions. Specifically, saints serving in LSM:

- arrange for venues for trainings and conferences;
- perform registration functions for trainings;

- translate spoken messages for live audiences and audio and video recordings;
- produce audio and video recordings of the messages given in the trainings and conferences;
- transcribe the spoken messages of Brother Lee and his co-workers;
- edit the spoken messages for publication in print;
- translate the printed messages into other languages for publication;
- perform typesetting and proofreading;
- coordinate printing and warehousing of publications;
- reproduce audio and video tapes;
- manage subscriptions and fill orders for churches and individuals;
- market publications to outside bookstores for the public;
- prepare radio broadcasts based on Brother Lee's messages;
- conduct web-based broadcasting of ministry messages;
- maintain archives of Brother Lee's messages and fellowship; and
- manage LSM's properties and financial records.

This list, though not exhaustive, represents LSM's principal activities. LSM does not oversee the churches or any of their affairs. Neither does LSM direct the service of the co-workers.

An Absurd Accusation

Some have persisted in accusing LSM of controlling the local churches. The accusation is absurd. Each local church answers directly to the Lord and is under the oversight of local brothers. It is up to these brothers whether and to what degree the church will use LSM materials or participate in LSM-sponsored gatherings. LSM has no organizational, administrative, or financial control over the churches. At most LSM asks the churches to follow its standards and procedures for such things as ordering printed materials and registering for and conducting its trainings. It does so as a means to facilitate its ongoing service to the churches. Accusations that LSM exercises authority over local churches or has orchestrated legal action against any former member or group of members of a local church are false.

LSM's role is not to exercise leadership in the ministry in the Lord's recovery; it is to cooperate with the ministering brothers to supply the churches with spiritual food and with resources to spread the work. The ministering brothers likewise do not exercise control over the churches. Brother Lee said that if his ministry exercised any form of "control," it was of the kind that a loving mother exercises over her children when she feeds them. If she prepares a tasty and nutritious meal and then calls her children to dinner, they will come not under compulsion but willingly (see *Life-study of Ephesians*, 86). The vast majority of saints in the Lord's recovery have developed a taste for the ministry of Watchman Nee, Witness Lee, and the co-workers in the publications of Living Stream Ministry, and they choose to receive that ministry not under compulsion but because they recognize in it "the stewardship of the grace of God" (Eph. 3:2).

Conclusion

Those who vilify LSM seek to sever the saints and the churches from the practical outlet of the supply, perfecting, and leadership provided through the ministry in the Lord's recovery (Eph. 4:11-12, 16). The saints should all realize that behind this kind of attack is Satan's subtlety, because Satan knows that the New Testament ministry is vital to the building up of the Body of Christ (v. 14, footnotes 4 and 5). Therefore, he seeks to drive a wedge between the Lord's servants and the churches in an attempt to frustrate the building up of the Body and damage the Lord's testimony (2 Tim. 1:15; Rev. 2:4-5; 2 Cor. 12:19). We should not be ignorant of his schemes but, putting on the whole armor of God, stand firmly in the Body and enjoy the Lord's provision for the building up of the Body (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11; 4:16).