

## OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD ECUMENISM

One defining characteristic of the ministry in the Lord's recovery is an absoluteness for the truth. If we are faithful to the Lord, we cannot compromise the truth. For that reason we can accept only what matches God's intention as expressed in the Bible; we cannot accept manmade imitations or compromises. This is why we cannot accept or participate in the kind of organizational unity advocated and practiced by those in the ecumenical movement, which seeks a form of unity among separate denominations while retaining their divisions. The oneness that is described in the Bible is not an ecumenical oneness. It is the oneness of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3). It is the oneness of the Body (1 Cor. 12:13). It is a oneness rooted in the very being of the Triune God (Eph. 4:4-6). It is the enlargement of the coinhering oneness among the three of the Divine Trinity (John 17:21, 23). It is a oneness among members of an organic Body, the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5). This oneness is realized and expressed in fellowship among members, not in cooperation among organizations.

The biblical revelation is clear. There is one universal Body encompassing all believers regardless of time and space (Eph. 1:22-23), and this one Body is expressed as many local churches (Acts 8:1; 13:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11). Each local church manifests the oneness of the Body of Christ in time and space by including all genuine believers at a given time in a given locality and by participating in the one common fellowship of the Body of Christ with all other genuine local churches. In the time of Brother Watchman Nee's ministry and work in China to raise up and build up local churches, there was a concurrent ecumenical movement in which various denominations joined together under an umbrella organization, yet remained separate. Brother Nee described ecumenism as a checkerboard in which each denomination minds its own business within its own segregated square. He said, "This is organized unity, not unity itself; it is an affiliation of oneness, not oneness itself" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50: Messages for Building Up New Believers (3)*, 829-830).

Brother Nee pointed out that according to the Bible the only subordinate units within the Body of Christ are the individual believers as its members (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12):

The Bible says that the Body is made up of members. Therefore, the members are the basic units of the Body. Today ecumenical workers see the Body of Christ, but they are not willing to pay the price to take the fellowship of the Body. They emphasize the Body of Christ, yet the Body which they speak of does not have the members as its unit but organizations as its unit. The basic unit of Christian fellowship should be Christians. It is Christians who are joined together to form the Body. (830)

First Corinthians 1:9 says that all believers have been called into the fellowship of God's Son. 1 John 1:3 tells us that through the apostles' report, the believers have been brought into fellowship with the apostles and with the Father and the Son. The Bible consistently tells us that in the Body there is one common fellowship among believers (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16; 1 John 1:3, 7; 2 Cor. 13:14; Acts 2:42), not a fellowship among organizations.

The fellowship in the Bible takes individual Christians as its basic unit. I am a believer, and you are a believer. The two of us spontaneously have fellowship. Another person is a believer, and as a believer, you will have fellowship with him as well. The fellowship is always carried out on an individual basis. Today ecumenical workers lump believers together into organizations and then unite the many organizations. Something more has been added to the fellowship of the Body. (830)

At its root ecumenism attempts to accommodate the denominational system yet salve the conscience of believers with the language of unity:

Human beings are prone to division. Everyone likes to separate himself from other brothers and sisters according to his own will. Today many people like to keep denominations on the one hand and try to arrive at some form of unity on the other. This is self-contradictory! They think that denominationalism

can remain, and they try to preserve it. But then they join themselves to ecumenical affiliations because their conscience is bothered. This is to divide the Body first and then to try to unite it later. (831)

The Body of Christ is one, and men have no right to divide it or to create an artificial oneness.

It is foolish to cut the Body of Christ into hundreds of denominations and then to unite them again! That is not the Body. That is just a union of organizations. I hope you will see before God the error of dividing the Body of Christ into many denominations. When the members are together, it is the Body, and when they are apart, they are the members. This is all we know. Other than these two things—the Body and the members—there is no intermediate organization. (831-832)

Lest some misinterpret, the local churches are not something other than the Body of Christ; that is, they are not an intermediate organization. Rather, they are simply the Body of Christ in a certain place at a certain time (1 Cor. 12:27), and they in no way restrict the fellowship among the members of the Body. The Lord raised up His recovery to testify that the oneness of the Body of Christ can be realized practically. If we see this, we will be bound by conscience to practice it absolutely without compromise. Doing so is not only a testimony for the Lord but affords other believers a way to enter into the genuine oneness of the Body. Engaging in ecumenical activities with the manmade unity of ecumenism compromises the testimony of the genuine oneness. We have seen this from our own history. On occasion here and there a few brothers have tried to practice the principles of ecumenism. This has consistently led to confusion and damage to the Lord's testimony among us.

We must see how important the oneness of the Body is to the Lord. It was the last thing He prayed for in John 17. The oneness He prayed for was not ecumenical but a oneness in the Triune God Himself.

John 17 says that God desires that we may be one as the Father and the Son are one (vv. 11, 22). God does not care for a unity that is outward, superficial, political, or of human maneuvering and arrangement. Hence, we do not acknowledge the "oneness" of the ecumenical movement as the genuine oneness. (*The Vision, Living, and Work of the Lord's Serving Ones*, 103)

This oneness of the believers in the Triune God is the goal for which Christ died. He accomplished redemption in order to reconcile us in one Body to God and create in Himself one new man (Eph. 2:14-16). In this new man Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:10-11), and there is no room for any other persons with their opinions, which are the source of today's divided situation among Christians.

We all have Christ, and Christ is our oneness. What we have is not a unity or an ecumenical movement. What we have is simply Christ. This does not mean that you tolerate me and I tolerate you but that you have Christ and I have Christ. I love Him and you love Him; you live by Him and I live by Him. We all have Christ, so we are one in the unique Christ. If we do not have Christ and live Christ, we are through with the new man. The Lord's recovery is not a movement. It is altogether the life of Christ, Christ as our life and our person. We all have to see this in a crystal clear way. (*The One New Man*, 36)

We have the immense privilege of testifying to the reality and practicality of the one Body and of the one new man. Based on the truth in the Word, those in the local churches should practice universal fellowship with all believers as fellow members of the Body, but we should not participate in organizations or activities that are ecumenical in nature, lest we compromise the work of the Lord's recovery in so doing. May we all have a spirit of absoluteness to uphold the truth without compromise.